

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 4:14

Student Notes

Paul has clarified what the promise to Abraham was – and that it came apart from the Mosaic Law. Three reasons Paul gives; History, Language, and Theology.

- **An Argument From History**

Verse 13: “It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”

Historically, it is impossible for justification to have been attained by Abraham through the Mosaic Law because ... the Law had not yet been established.

Abraham’s righteousness – his right standing with God could not have come through those laws, ceremonies, and traditions because they had not been established yet.

Galatians 3:14, 17-18

“He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. 18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”

Historical reality: The Mosaic Law – through which the Jews believed they were made righteous – did not arrive until some 430 years after Abraham believed God and was counted righteous.

A 2nd Point: If, as the Jews claimed, righteousness came through the mark of circumcision, then what happened to Abraham’s faith?

Galatians 3:17: “The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.”

You can either have Faith or Law as the grounds of justification -- but you can't have them simultaneously.

- **An Argument From Language**

Look at verses 14 & 15: “For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, 15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.”

This is an argument from language. Paul uses a number of words, including law, promise, faith, wrath, transgression and grace. All of these terms have their own meaning – but none are isolated from one another.

An unwavering statement about Law and Faith: “If those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless ...”

- **The Language of Inheritance**

Paul's use of the word “heirs”. An “heir”: One who stands to receive something upon someone's death. They are named in someone's will – so they are heirs.

The narrow sense of “heir”: You only have to either be a biological relative of the deceased ... or be adopted into the family.

Paul's point: God's promise to Abraham (and his “seed”) had nothing to do with works. It had everything to do with inheritance. If the inheritance God promised Abraham and his seed is based on obedience to the Mosaic Code – then the terms of inheritance have changed.

Emptied and Nullified

If Abrahams' righteousness came through obedience ... what's the role of faith? Paul says it is nullified or “emptied”. Same Greek word in Philippians 2:6-7: “...Being in very nature God ... but **made himself nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” - Philippians 2:6-7

An alternate reading of verse 14: “If those who live by Mosaic Code are Abraham's heirs, faith has been emptied and the original promise is destroyed – made ineffective”. (Galatians 3:18 parallel: “For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise...”)

Point: We cannot have righteousness and justification based upon both Faith and Law. We also cannot combine the two. (See James 2:10).

God did not say to Abraham, “Obey this law and I will bless you”. No, he said, “I will bless you; believe my promise”.