

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

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Romans 4:14-22

### Student Notes:

Recap: The Mosaic Law and its accompanying rituals of circumcision and sacrifice actually divided humanity. Under Moses' Law humans were separated into two camps ... God's chosen people and those outside of the covenant.

God's promise to Abraham came 430 years before the Law . . . so if those under the Mosaic code were the recipients of that promise – Abraham's faith means nothing. The promise then, is by works, not by faith.

- **Law and Wrath: v. 15**

".... The law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression."

Why the Mosaic Law and the Abrahamic promise exclude each other: The Law brings wrath.

When a person binds themselves to keep the Mosaic Law ... sooner or later they are going to fail. And when they fail ... the Mosaic Code requires consequences.

No less than nine Old Testament prohibitions could result in execution: Murder, Negligent homicide, Smiting a parent, Cursing a parent, A son who persists in disobeying his parents, Contempt of Court, Kidnapping, Witchcraft, & Bearing False witness to a capital crime.

Aside from capital offenses, the Mosaic Code literally imposed hundreds of laws on daily life. Inevitably the Law imposed penalties for failure to keep it.

Paul's Point: God's promise to Abraham did not come through the Law because the Law requires certain behaviors in order for promises to be fulfilled. However, if God's promises to Abraham were totally based upon God's fulfillment and Abraham's trust – no Law was involved.

### Categories of Language:

In verses 15 & 16, Paul put's the same type of words together to forward his argument. In verse 15 he says, ".... The law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression."

Now look at verse 16: “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”

In verse 15 we find “Law”, “Transgression”, and “Wrath”. In verse 16 we find “Grace” and “Faith”. “Grace” and “Faith” belong to the same category of language, just as “Law”, “Transgression”, and “Wrath”.

Paul's Point: God is gracious, and that salvation originates in his sheer grace alone. But in order for this to function, our only human part can be the response of faith. Grace gives and faith, trusting God, takes what is offered. (See: Romans 11:6)

Comparing language in verses 13-16 and the previous passage in verses 4-5: “Works” and “Wages” – as opposed to “Faith” and “Righteousness”. (See similar comparison in Galatians 3:18)

- **Summarizing what Paul has said in verses 14-16**

1. God's law makes demands which we transgress, and so we incur wrath. But .... God's grace makes promises which we believe, and so obtain blessings.
2. Law, obedience, transgression and wrath all belong to one category of thinking. Grace, promise, faith and blessing belong to another. This is Paul's argument from language and logic.

- **Paul's Argument from Theology** (The doctrine of Jewish-Gentile unity in the family of Abraham).

In a nutshell: The primary reason that justification is by grace through faith is so the promise may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring. (Both biological and adopted by faith)

Verses 16-17: “He is the father of us all, as it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.”

By itself, the Mosaic Law, with its cultural and ceremonial provisions, divides humanity. Only those born to the Jewish people could fully participate in Jewish life. No Gentile could do that.

On the other hand, only the gospel of grace and faith can unite, by opening the door to the Gentiles. More than this, grace and faith create a level opportunity for all who come to Christ's Cross.

As Galatians 3:29 puts it, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Paul's consistent theme throughout chapter 4: All believers belong to Abraham's seed and, therefore, inherit Abraham's promise:

- Verses 11-12: "He is the father of all who believe", whether circumcised or uncircumcised.

- Verse 16: "He is the father of us all."

- Verse 17: "He is our father in the sight of God."

- **The Character of verses 1-14:**

Much of verses 1-14 is written from the negative perspective. Paul found this necessary in order to demonstrate that Abraham was justified neither by works, circumcision, or the Mosaic Code.

- Works were negated since it is written that he believed God and was justified.
- Circumcision was ruled out because Abraham was justified first and circumcised later.
- The Mosaic was ruled out because the law was given centuries later.

Each case affirms the priority of Abraham's faith. His faith came first; works, circumcision and law all came later. It has been a process of systematic elimination.

- **Verses 17b-22 -- The Positive Conclusion:**

Using two phrases, Paul builds on what he has been saying:

- "God who gives life to the dead".
- "God who calls into being things that were not."

Paul moves from the priority of Abraham's faith to the reasonableness of his faith. Note: Faith and reason have often been pitted against one another.

Example: Bertrand Russell, the famous British philosopher said that faith was an irrationality that stood in opposition to obvious facts.

- **The Reasonableness of Faith**

Abraham's story: Faith is not the denial of obvious facts. In reality, his faith will have to move beyond reason – but it has a firmly rational basis.

Abraham's faith epitomizes believing or trusting a person who is considered reliable. -- "Faith must have an object".

John R.W. Stott: "It is always reasonable to trust the trustworthy. And there is nobody more trustworthy than God Abraham knew, and as we are privileged to know more confidently than Abraham because we live after the death and resurrection of Jesus through which God has fully disclosed himself and his dependability".

**Paul's focal point:**

- "God who gives life to the dead".
- "God who calls into being things that were not."

For Abraham to have been in a position to believe God's promises, he had to be sure of two things:

1. God's Power -- that he was able to keep His promises.
2. God's Faithfulness -- that he could be relied upon to keep them.

**1. God's Power:**

Two evidences where God, the object of Abraham's faith:

1. God who "gives life to the dead", -- referring to Isaac's resurrection, 2. God who "calls things that are not as though they were" – speaking of His creative power.

- **The Human Dilemma: Nothingness and Death**

Woody Allen: "It's not I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens." For humans, death and nothingness are insurmountable obstacles. But Abraham's experience teaches us that neither is a problem to God.

The Two Greatest Manifestations of God's Power: 1. God created the world out of nothingness. 2. God raised Christ out of what appeared to be the finality of death.