

Romans 4:13-25  
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The classic Sunday School song for little boys and girls, “Father Abraham, had many sons, and many sons had father Abraham, I am one of them, and so are you, so let’s just praise the Lord.”

What does that actually mean? How am I a son of Abraham? I’m not Jewish and have no Hebrew nationality in my family lineage.

However, I do know that Paul says in Galatians, “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”. Yes. So, even those of us born *outside* of the chosen people whom God gave the divine oracles, we too claim Abraham as father.

### **Romans 4:13-15**

*<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.*

God promised Abraham his offspring would have a divine claim to the earth, which God calls “heirs of the world”. But, this promise came 430 years *before* God even gave laws to anyone. So, what did Abraham do to show God he believed him and trusted that this thing would come to pass?

What could he have done to keep up his side of the contract? Certainly, if someone came to you with an amazing offer, your first reaction would be to ask them, “what’s the catch?” One would assume this was some type of contractual situation. *I promise you this, you follow through with xyz.* Following the rules of the contract and not violating them would show you’re keeping your side of the deal.

Look at 14: “if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is “empty”

This is not a contract. It’s a one-sided promise.

If it was a contract, there would be no need for faith. If it was a contract, you would feel that God owes you something and God will be indebted to no man, ever. No longer would His promise to us be received as a humble reception of God’s gracious gift; it would entwine the sinner in a relationship in which God is under obligation. But it is impossible to pay God anything.

As an insufficient illustration, because there are none to rightly explain such great grace, however, it would be likened to parents expecting an infant to repay them. The very parent who just brought a precious, helpless, infantile human into the world finds it utterly impossible to receive anything from their infant. The child has nothing to offer. Save for one thing, and this one thing the child offers is the one thing they are incapable of giving consciously – love.

The “payment” towards the parent is the joy of parenting. The only thing a parent could ever receive from their baby is the delight and closeness of holding their child, protecting the child, comforting that child and having their baby girl fall asleep in their arms. That is the happiness of parents.

Consider how God describes Himself as a “father”. These anthropomorphic terms are given to us in order to understand His nature. Because we understand parental love, we can catch a glimpse of His love towards us in these terms.

Are there rules for infants to follow? That may seem silly, but, no, it’s impossible.

So, when God chose Abraham, and said, “I’m setting my promise on you to bless you and make you the father of many nations” Abraham did the best and most logical thing to do at the time – he said, “OKAY!”

If he would have at that point begun to work to keep the promise God made, his simple “OKAY” would have turned into, “OKAY, but let me make sure you don’t leave”

There was nothing for Abraham to “do” for God, or even to “obey” in the sense of following God’s laws, this is why Paul says, in verse 15, “for the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.”

What was the law during Abrahams day? He didn’t have any laws to follow. Yes, the local rulers and cities with kings would have policy regarding how to treat one another and deal with property, etc. But God had at this point in time mandated only one law found in Genesis 9.

The law came 430 years after the promise. Abraham had no law to follow. He could not transgress against God because the only law given by God at that point in human history was to Noah. Gen 9:6 is where capital punishment is instituted. If a man takes the life of another man, his life is given as forfeit. That was the only divine law to mankind during Abrahams day. So, when I say Abraham could not “transgress”, I mean, *willingly* sin against God.

**Sin** is not just what you occasionally do, it’s what you are.

**Transgressing** is knowing the rules and consciously breaking them.

Think about it this way, all Abraham had to do to be perfect according to the law, was to never murder anyone. But God justified Abraham and attributed his righteousness to him although he had not transgressed. He still needed to be justified (made right with God in a legal sense) because even though he couldn’t transgress, because there was only one law to break, he still was sinful.

How was he sinful if he had never violated the law of God?

Romans 5:12-14

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men<sup>[e]</sup> because all sinned— <sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

## What's the big takeaway?

As was mentioned before, ceremonial religious activity does nothing to justify a person, in this section God wants us to know that following religious laws likewise does nothing to earn, gain, or keep salvation.

This is paramount to technical, law following, black-and-white, perfectionist type people. God transferred Abraham from darkness to light, from damned to saved when Abraham simply said, "okay, I believe you."

When it's written in verse 17 – "I've made you the father of many nations" he's not talking about blood line and family lineage. Father Abraham's many sons (and daughters) are comprised by all the nations. The myriad people groups of faith followers. Any person, Jewish, Arabian, German, Japanese, Irish, Russian, Scandinavian, etc.... any who believe God for His promise to justify them by faith through His son Jesus Christ.

Your Heavenly Father has even gone so far to illustrate this to us, and to all His church throughout the history of His people. He wanted us to know:

### **Abraham is the father of Rahab –**

Look at Joshua 2:8-13

*<sup>8</sup> Before the men<sup>[b]</sup> lay down, she came up to them on the roof<sup>9</sup> and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. <sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>11</sup> And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. <sup>12</sup> Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup> that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."*

Rahab believed God. She believed with her whole heart what was about to happen. She didn't place her trust in the army of Jericho, or the 40-foot-tall walls wrapped around the city. She believed Yahweh was the God of heaven and earth and in her reverence of him she submitted her heart – in faith.

### **Abraham is the father of Ruth –**

Look at Ruth 1: 15 – 18

*<sup>15</sup> And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." <sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

Naomi and Ruth were close to Ruth's home, and she likely had family left living there. She could have moved back to her father's household and looked for another husband or lived with a brother. But she took a shot and cast her lot with her elderly, widowed, childless mother-in-law and went to live with the people of God. She must have in her heart believed somehow divine favor would come to them, and for better or for worse, she was not abandoning Naomi. That is living by faith.

## ***Abraham is the father of the Ninevites –***

Look at Jonah 3:4-9

*<sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. <sup>6</sup>The word reached<sup>[G]</sup> the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup>And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, <sup>8</sup>but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. <sup>9</sup>Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."*

These strangers; complete foreigners to the laws of God, they believed God judges the wicked but shows mercy to the humble. It was in their faith they responded. Just as the book of James tells us, you say you have faith, show me by the works you do. First, we believe, then we respond.

In these ways, God was showing his people that salvation is for everyone and it comes separate from following the rules, whether you didn't know them and couldn't follow, or you did know them and chose to disobey.

His salvation is generous.

What is ironic, even humorous, is how we begin sizing each other up once we get into the kingdom.

*How long have you been saved?  
How many verses you have memorized?  
Are you serving?*

As a very young Christian, around age 22, about one year into my walk of faith, I remember reading through 1 John chapter 2 where he writes about "little children" "fathers" and "young men" and I desperately wanted to be likened to one of the young men John spoke about. Although I was very young in my faith, I didn't want to be thought of as a one of the "little children".

My more seasoned roommate laughed and said, "**to God, we're all a bunch of toddlers**"

We could enjoy ourselves a lot more if we realized that. Unfortunately, that truth usually only comes with age because the older you get in the faith the more we realize how much we *don't* know. Because God granted faith and favor to prostitutes like Rahab, and heinous sinners like the people of Nineveh it should bring loads of comfort to our souls. The obedience your Heavenly Father is looking for is the simple, "okay – I believe you". That's what Abraham said, and it's what all the other non-rule following people said as well.

Therefore verse 16 is amazing... *"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"*

And when Paul writes in verse 17, *"as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed..."* he is quoting from Genesis 17 where God speaks in the present tense, when Abraham was 99 years old, saying to him, "I have made you the father of many nations".

Technically, yes, at that time he had 13-year-old Ishmael, his son from Hagar, his wife's servant. However, the promise was given that in one year from that time, Sarah would have a son. That's a pretty amazing promise to a guy who is 99 and his wife is past menopause. It's physically, about impossible.

This is the faith Paul speaks of, the promise God gave to Abraham about his wife having a son, when he writes the rest of this section.

Read Romans 4:17 – 25

*<sup>17</sup> as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations" —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup> In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness<sup>[b]</sup> of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Paul links several thoughts together building on the faith of Abraham and God's ability to justify him on that faith alone. But the first things noteworthy are:

1. God "gives life to the dead"
2. God "calls into existence things that do not exist"

Like Ephesians 2 says, "you were dead in your trespasses... but even though you were dead in trespasses, God raised you up in life". God is the only Being with the power to take dead things and make them alive. Apart from faith, Abraham was dead. He was just as dead to the Spirit of God as I was prior to God granting divine faith to believe Him.

Also, the second part is where Paul references that mysterious and mind-bending concept about our planet and everything within being made "ex-nihilo" – literally, out of nothing. Because Abraham comprehended God is the One who could bring the dead back to life and can take what doesn't even exist and create the very atoms needed to make whatever He wants, this is why these three responses are mentioned:

1. In hope – he believed against hope (vs 18)
  - a. He had hope, even though the situation looked hopeless
2. Did not weaken in faith (vs 19)
  - a. "feel sick" "feeble"
3. Grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God (vs 20)
  - a. *Grew strong* – "empowered"
  - b. *As-he-gave* – "while granting" – through the process of offering
  - c. *Glory* – "doxa" – our word, doxology
    - i. *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below...*

Verse 19 emphasizes what could have happened, when Paul says, Abraham, “Did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body... or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.”

This word “considered” means to take note of, to contemplate, to look more closely. God looked into Abrahams heart and said, “**yes, I see you have faith in what I can do, and you see what you can’t do**”

How often do you look at the walls of Jericho in your life and say, no way?

How often do you take inventory of yourself or those around you and say, no way?

Let’s be reminded of Hebrews 11. Our author writes one of the most battle charging, inspirational chapters in all of Scriptures and he declares to us, “*Without faith it’s impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*”

- By faith Noah
- By faith Abraham
- By faith Moses
- By faith the people crossed the Red Sea
- By faith the walls of Jericho fell down
- By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish
- God’s people quenched the flames of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight... and on and on.

“Another life will soon be passed. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

“He is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

“... the man who will not act until he knows all will never act at all.”

- Jim Elliot

Too often, there is a disparity between what we *say* we believe, and what we do.

From the book, *Conformed to His Image*, by Kenneth Boa. One of the chapters is dedicated to the idea of trusting God. He expresses a few thoughts which are noteworthy.

**Our Presuppositions shape our perspective.** In essence, the things we truly assume are what shapes the way in which we see life.

Do we genuinely believe this book is a love letter written to the people God sent His son to redeem, and that it is a blueprint for how to live life with wisdom, purpose, faith, love and hope? Because if this is our foundational presupposition about life, then shouldn’t everything we do flow out of that foundation?

Next, we can say – **Our perspective in life begins to shape our priorities.**

If God’s promises seem vague and distant than we fail to “seek the city which is to come” but we will live for the earthly kingdom we have come to *falsely* believe has value. And if we have been duped to believe the earthly kingdom is most valuable, we find ourselves chasing shadows when God has offered us real substance.

Finally, if our presuppositions shape our perspective, and our perspective shapes our priorities, our **priorities will shape our practice.**

A minister named Mark Pett, while dying from terminal cancer said very simply to a friend of his, *“we have a clear sense of birth, but a theoretical sense of death. Understand that you have a certain number of days. There is no good time to die. You don’t retire from life and get ready for death. When you leave this planet, you will never again have the privilege of sharing the Gospel, serving the lost, feeding the poor... it’s not a guilt trip, but a reminder to enjoy the opportunity and privilege of representing Christ to the world”*

There is a great line from the new Broadway sensation, *Hamilton*. Alexander Hamilton, one of the framers of the American Republic and the most prolific political writer of his day, sings, *“I’m not throwing away my shot”*.

When you think of what Christ has done and his promises to us. With his eternal power and divine nature, men like Abraham, as our father and example, who didn’t get tripped up after looking at himself and his wife with what they didn’t have – but grew strong in his faith.

Why did God get annoyed with Moses at the burning bush? Because Moses kept making excuses for why he couldn’t get the job done. God had to rebuke him by saying, *“who made your mouth?”* When all the while Moses saw his own inability to speak eloquently, he doubted what God could do through him. He had a hard time simply saying, *“okay”*.

What has God put in your heart?

This is where the rubber meets the road. His promise to all of us is heaven once we depart from this planet, for those who humbly say, *“okay God, I’ll take you at your word”*. This eternal and heavenly perspective is linked with Paul’s thought in 23 and 24... *“But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,<sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord”*

So, faith alone saves apart from the law. If faith saves and heaven is home, consider again the question, what has God put in your heart? The promise of heaven being your eternal destiny with God as the greatest prize ever is an amazing promise, but Jesus also told us that while we are here on earth to *“go and reach all the nations”* and that His church, not even the gates of Hell will prevail against them.

Why would anything hold us back?