



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Way of Grace

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Romans 4:13-17

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¹³For 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. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶That 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, ¹⁷as 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.

(Pastor prays)

As the pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist Church, I have certain responsibilities to you and, more profoundly, to God. Biblical counsel, encourage, rebuke, exhort, comfort, discipleship, accountability, and give oversight and direction to the affairs of the church are just a few of the responsibilities. I’m called to shepherd the flock of God, and, as Paul said in Acts 20, to protect the church from wolves that infiltrate the church. And the way you do that most effectively is to keep the Bible in front of your people and get the Gospel of grace right!

We live in a day of political unrest, racial tension, and sexual confusion. Every one of these threatens to get us off task. It's why we must keep the cross of Jesus as the center-most definition of who we are. It's the Gospel of grace and it's what Paul is pointing us to time and again.

And we've got to get this right because there are so many false gospels floating around in our community and among our families. Nationalistic gospel equates being American with being a Christian. Social gospel stresses meeting needs to the neglect of pointing people to the cross. You ought to do both. The mainstream gospel is universalism where everybody is saved. The liberation gospel fights oppression to the neglect of the cross, and the transitional gospel says that you do your part and God will do His. The "be nice" gospel is to just try to be a good person and don't hurt anyone and God will smile on you. The assumed gospel is if you grew up in the church and were baptized, then you are saved. And then the newest and most insidious of them all is the prosperity gospel. It's so dangerous because it's a distortion of the real gospel. The crux of it is that God gives material wealth and healing to those who have enough faith. There is no doctrine of suffering or self-denial. There is no real exposition of scripture and no real help for when prayers aren't answered; for those who can't have a baby or those who have a child who is wayward even though you raised her to love Christ. The prosperity gospel is more about you and your excelling in life than the glorious excellencies of God's saving love found at the cross of Jesus.

In this passage, Paul is fighting against a works-based religion and pointing us to the glory of God found in the life, death and resurrection of Christ because...

If We Don't Get the Gospel Right, then We Miss the Whole Point

If we don't get the Gospel right, then righteousness is unattainable

Let's get to the text. Verse 13. So far in Chapter 4, Paul told us that when it comes to Abraham, works didn't justify him. Circumcision didn't justify him and the Law doesn't justify him. When Abraham was considered righteous, he had no law, he had no ceremony and he had no sign. All he had was faith. This is to show that faith doesn't depend on anything other than the pure unadulterated grace of God! And it breaks my heart to know that the Christian church is honeycombed with false believers who affirm the major truths about Jesus but also believe there is something you have to *do* to be saved. And that's law, not grace.

So many people think that the way you are accepted by God is to be good, and it's not. The way to be accepted by God is in Christ through faith. It is the perfect life, death and resurrection. That's why in verse 13 Paul calls it the righteousness of faith, to be right with God. God is holy, you are a sinner, Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life, took the penalty for

your sin on the cross and gave you His righteousness. That's the finished work of salvation. If you believe that, you will be saved. That is the Gospel. Faith comes up again in this second point.

If we don't get the Gospel right, faith becomes useless

If it is adherents of the law who are to be heirs (religion) then faith is null and void. What he is saying here is that grace and works are mutually exclusive. God's promises in salvation are not *quid pro quo*. The Gospel is not, "God helps those who help themselves." The Gospel is not "you make the first step and God will meet you." Paul is being very clear in verse 14, telling us that there cannot be two ways to inherit the promise.

Let's see if I can illustrate the difference between faith and law. Faith says: I can't do it myself. Law says: you need to try harder, and that brand of religion is exhausting. It's why we cling to the Gospel of grace found at the cross of Jesus. It's why we talk about the finished work of Christ. His obedience is better than ours. His death at the cross satisfies the wrath of God for all those who believe. By grace, you are saved through faith in Christ. This is why I hate the prosperity gospel. We need so much more than advice on how to raise children or how to handle money or advance a career. What we need is to understand how radically sinful we are and how that sin has totally affected us so that we are unable to live up to God's standards. Faith alone in the finished work of Jesus can and will save us. It's the Gospel and we must get it right.

If we don't get the Gospel right, our situation becomes hopeless

Look at the brevity and the punch in verse 15. ¹⁵ *For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.* Paul says, don't think you can be good enough to please God. Here is what the law is for: it brings wrath.

Before we get carried away, Paul is pointing to one of the primary uses of the Old Testament. The Torah and the 10 Commandments. The law of God can't save us, but it does have a necessary place in how God saves people. The law of God shows us our inadequacies and then makes us see our need for a savior. Paul goes on to say in verse 15, where there is no law, there is no transgression. Transgression is to overstep a line, a clearly defined boundary. Law tells us where the boundaries are and how we have overstepped them. The law shows us where the line is, where the boundaries are. The law shows us where we are but it doesn't save us. Its

powerless to save us. It points us to our need for the finished work of Jesus on the cross. His life death and resurrection.

The law is important and the Old Testament is God's word. The 10 commandments show us God's holiness and his expectations. But if all you have is the law, then it can really feel hopeless. The more God demands, the greater we fail. The greater we fail, the greater our guilt. The greater our guilt, the greater God's wrath. The Gospel does what the law can't do, so we look to Jesus. He perfectly kept the law, then took the punishment for sinners at the cross. He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. That's the Gospel. Turn and believe it.

If we don't get the Gospel right, God's kindness becomes meaningless

Verse 16 is a complex sentence packed with really important words. Let's read it slowly and I'll try to unfold it a bit. ¹⁶ *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,*

Paul is saying a few things in this verse. If we want to be saved, we must look outside ourselves to the work of another, Jesus Christ. Salvation rests on God giving grace and comes through faith in our believing. That's what the first part of verse 16 is saying. Faith confirms grace. See the word "guarantee," faith makes salvation certain. If salvation is by law and you are having to "do" and "try," then you can't ever really be sure that is good enough and you miss God's kindness.

Paul is doing something else here as well. From the middle to the end of verse 16, Paul is saying to the Jews, those gentiles who come by way of faith apart from the law are saved just as much as you are. All who are saved are saved by grace, and all who are saved are saved by faith. All who are saved are saved with a guarantee. That's how Abraham is the father of us all.

Manmade barriers are no problem for God. This is a reminder of God's great kindness to us. Let me give you one last consideration in verse 17 about getting the Gospel right.

If we don't get the Gospel right, our Christianity is powerless

On the front end of verse 17, Paul reaches into the Bible, into the Old Testament, Genesis 15. As it is written, to prove his point, Paul appeals to scripture and—at the back end of 17—Paul gives us two beautiful descriptions of God's power. At the end of verse 17, Paul says who gives life to the dead and who calls into existence the things that do not exist. From death and

nothingness. From the dead, God raised Jesus Christ. Out of nothing, He created the universe. Death and nothingness are no problem for God. They are insurmountable problems for us. We are dead in sin and, at the cross, He makes us live. We are nothing when it comes to righteousness. He created it for us at the cross of Jesus. That's where the Gospel is, and if we don't get the Gospel right, we missed the whole point. You have had it laid before you today, the Gospel of grace. Look to Jesus, believe and be saved.

(Pastor prays)