

Romans 4:16-17

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No one can live up to God's standard; we are saved by grace through faith. Every person, in every nation who believes is made a part of Abraham's family and therefore a part of Abraham's inheritance—because Abraham is the father of all who believe.

Since law is not operative to bring us righteousness, then faith must be the instrument. Otherwise there would be no righteousness, because we cannot be good enough rule keepers to be justified before God. As Paul said in verse 2, even Abraham, the friend of God, did not earn any justification before God. Abraham's deeds were amazing, perhaps better than any other, but that comparison means nothing to God; God has His own standard. What God has chosen to do is deem Jesus's work as meeting the standard on our behalf.

The word “grace” appears over twenty times in Romans, and is a key point the Apostle Paul hammers home. The competing Jewish “authorities” claim adherence to the law as a necessity for righteousness; Paul asserts this is not what the Bible teaches, that even the Jewish heroes Abraham and King David were made righteous before God by grace through faith, and that grace is available to all. It is available to law-keepers and to lawbreakers: *For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants* (v 16).

The wonderful thing is that none of us can nullify God's grace by our own faults, we cannot out-sin the grace of God (Romans 5:20). Jews who keep the religious laws, perhaps even these who are slandering Paul, are the faith-children of Abraham if they believe (Acts 15:5). The Gentiles, who do not keep the religious laws, are also made Abraham's children by faith: *Not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all* (v 16). Abraham is the *father of all* who believe, irrespective of the religious practices they do or don't do. To be *of the faith of Abraham* is to believe the promise of God (Romans 4:3). The specific promise of God is that if we have sufficient faith to look upon Jesus, hoping to be delivered from the poisonous venom of sin, then we will be saved (John 3:14-15).

It is interesting to reflect how irritated the religious authorities were at Jesus for not obeying their rules. Their rules came about by their interpretation of how to meticulously keep the law of Moses. However, Jesus said they had missed the point because God gave the law to be a blessing, but they had made it a burden (Matthew 2:27, 23:4, 23-24). The great irony is that the law is a reflection of Jesus, so in a way the religious leaders were mad at Jesus because He did not look like they expected Him to, from having studied Jesus's shadow.

Paul continues the thought that Abraham is the father of all who are of faith, of law-keepers as well as lawbreakers. And that means Abraham is the father of anyone God declares righteous because they have believed His promise: *(As it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”)* in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist (v 17). *Many nations* refers to those nations that are not a

part of Israel. Every person in every nation who believes is made a part of Abraham's family and therefore a part of Abraham's inheritance—because Abraham is the father of all who believe.

God *gives life to the dead* when He makes anyone who is dead in sin alive in Christ when they believe (Ephesians 2:5). God is the God of creation, who *calls into being that which does not exist*. He therefore has the power to create in us a new heart, and make us a new creation in Christ, through faith (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul is insistent that this emphasis on faith enhances rather than diminishes the importance of the nation of Israel. He has already been adamant on this point, and when we get to chapter 11, Paul will further emphasize that Gentiles are grafted into the promise of Israel, not the other way around. When Gentiles come to faith, they do not replace Israel, they expand Israel. There is therefore no basis for antagonism to the Jews; they are still the chosen people (Romans 11:26–29).

Biblical Text

16 For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.