

Heir of the World

Romans 4:13-17

Christian, the Gospel is not, “If you do this, you will live.” The Gospel is something that you receive by faith, as an inheritance that Jesus alone has earned. You are made an heir of the world through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is often hard to align with the fact that the experience of God’s blessing does correlate with your obedience. Insist on having your own way, doing what you want, and you will surely die. Submit your heart to Christ and follow after him, and you will discover that happiness and holiness go hand in hand.

But submitting your heart to Christ is easier said than done. And we all fall short in one way or another. Without help from God, our desire to obey, and our strength to obey, would shrivel up and die. The source of all true submission is Jesus Christ. He alone can melt the heart of stone. He alone can renew our zeal to love and serve. And Jesus always comes to us through faith. Life is in Jesus. And Jesus is not earned. He is received. And receiving Jesus Christ, you are made an heir of the world – every spiritual blessing is yours in Christ Jesus.

Last week: The relationship of the promise of blessing to the covenant sign.

This week: The relationship of the promise of blessing to the law.

Read Romans 4:13-17.

13 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.

God has promised you the world. Salvation comes by way of promise. God makes a promise to Abraham, and to his offspring. It is a good promise full of blessing. Indeed, it is a promise of so much blessing that Paul says that Abraham became “heir of the world.”

Heir of the world, generally speaking, means that he would inherit everything. That is a lot of blessing. “What is it that God has promised you?” “Everything.”

But THE question that every person who seriously hopes to receive his inheritance must ask is this: Is there anything that I must do, to receive the inheritance?

Paul answers this very question when he writes, “Abraham did not become “heir of the world” through the law – or through his obedience to God’s standard.” The Law here refers to the Mosaic Law. This would primarily involve the 10 Commandments, what we consider the Moral Law. But it would also include the Ceremonial laws of the Temple and the various Civil Laws or case laws.

The promise of blessing does not come to Abraham “if he obeys God’s law”.
The promise of blessing comes to Abraham through the righteousness of faith.

And this promise was not an isolated promise, given only to Abraham. It was also given to “Abraham’s offspring” or “seed”. Understanding “offspring” can be a challenge. Does it refer to Abraham’s physical descendants? Does it refer to Abraham’s spiritual descendants? (Meaning those who have the faith of Abraham) Or does it refer to someone else?

If you say it refers to Abraham’s physical descendants, then that would mean that Abraham’s biological children would all be saved. This option destroys the fact that the promise is always received by faith, and not by blood line. So, while physical children were given the covenant sign, faith is always the instrument by which we lay hold of the promises. The second option is certainly correct, meaning Abraham’s spiritual descendants, those having the faith of Abraham. All those who are believing in the promise are heirs of the world. That sounds simple enough. But the text does not say, “The promise was given to Abraham and his spiritual children, that they would become heirs of the world.” In fact, if you follow the grammar closely, something that does not come easy for me - grammar was never something that I liked – you will see that the nouns and the verbs are all in the singular.

Abraham is one man. Offspring is in the singular, (although in the English it could be either singular or plural.) Heir is also in the singular. If you add one plus one you get two, which normally would be considered plural. But we don’t see “heirs” of the world, just heir.

Add to this that offspring, even though it is singular, can be taken as a collective singular, meaning a group of people looked at as one whole. I am convinced that this is what Paul has in mind here in verse 13 because in verse 16 he uses the same singular word to refer to “all his offspring” meaning all of Abraham’s children, meaning all believers.

ESV **Romans 4:16** 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,

So, if you possess the faith of Abraham, then you belong to Abraham's offspring – looked at collectively – one body of Christ, not just a bunch of individuals.

Faith alone is the instrument by which you become a member. The question is never, "Have I sufficiently obeyed God's standard to be able to receive the blessing?" The question is always, "Am I believing the promise of God?" Do you want to be "heir of the world"? Believe God's promise. This is never a one and done issue.

Ryan and Meaghan – it is just as true for you today, as it was the first moment you believed. You must continue to receive Jesus, and the blessing, by faith. You don't begin by faith, and end by works.

Being good parents, and all that that entails, is difficult. It will push you to your limits. And you will rightly believe that your choices matter as you raise Eleanor. But you do not gain the promise, either for yourselves or for Eleanor, by what you do. The promise always comes through faith. Remember that in your failures. And remember that in your victories. Eleanor's salvation depends upon grace alone. Never forget this. Baptism is given as a reminder to you, and to Eleanor, of the reality of this. Righteousness is required to receive the promise of blessing. And righteousness can only be received by faith.

Parents, are you teaching this to your children? Do you explain to them that believing in Jesus Christ is necessary if they want to be "spiritual children of Abraham"? Or do you teach them that the blessing can only be earned through obedience – being good? And once they begin to believe, explain to them that their faith will be challenged and tested throughout their lives. It is to the one who perseveres to the end who will be saved. Many have started well and have fallen away. Teach them the importance of continuing in their belief to the end.

Now that you understand that offspring certainly refers to all who have the faith of Abraham, I want to muddy the waters, hopefully in a good way.

Turn over to Galatians 3:16.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

Paul here makes a point to take the singular case of the noun offspring and show how it must refer to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the true seed, the true heir of the world.

Abraham	Christ
offspring = Christ	Abraham

All who have Abe's faith

So, rather than Abraham being the one in whom we receive blessing, he is really one of us. It is Christ alone who has procured the blessing. Our faith is in Christ and his righteousness. So, offspring can refer to all who have faith. And, it can refer to Jesus Christ alone. Difficult grammatically. But wonderful.

Romans 4:14.

14 For if it is the adherents of the law
who are to be the heirs,
faith is null
and
the promise is void.

The Jews considered themselves to be "adherents of the law", as distinct from the Gentiles who were "without the law."

Paul says, "If the promise is only for the Jews, then faith is worthless."

It is important to note that Paul is not telling the Jew that he must quit being a follower of the law in every sense. Instead, he is saying that he cannot rely on the law as a means of gaining life. If that were true, then the promise would be canceled and worthless altogether.

NIV Romans 4:14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

CSB Romans 4:14 If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise is canceled.

Obedience matters. It has value. But not as the means of gaining life. To view obedience as the means of gaining life, faith becomes in one way or another irrelevant.

Void = No longer good.

Ineffective = cannot accomplish the desired goal.

Nullified = may have been important for a time, but not any longer.

Canceled = is no longer available.

Do you get the picture: You can kiss the promise goodbye.

If your receiving and possessing of the blessing of God's promise depended upon your obedience to the law, then you could never receive the promise. The promise would be lost to you. Why? Because the law requires perfect and perpetual obedience in all its parts.

ESV **James 2:10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

Galatians 3:10 ¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

If you think you can gain heaven by your obedience, realize that the law requires perfect and perpetual obedience in all its parts. The law is not graded on a curve. Some of you may be thinking: Mike, you have said this before. I get it already. Move on. Don't worry. We will move on. But as your pastor, and as a Christian of more than 35 years, I know how easy it is to slip back into thinking that I achieve the blessing of life through my obedience. And I know how hard it is to really believe that it is not my personal righteousness that matters but the obedience of Jesus Christ.

Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest thinkers that have ever been born in America, and a wonderful theologian and pastor during the First Great Awakening, was asked what were factors that led to the Great Awakening. Now, before I tell you how he answered, if you are not familiar with Mr. Edwards, you need to know that he was not afraid to challenge people to repent of their sin and to walk with God in holiness. His most famous sermon was "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Which I recommend to anyone who is interested.

But, Mr. Edwards first said that he did not do anything different when the Revival occurred. He simply went on preaching the Word of God. God in his sovereign grace did the work. That in itself is helpful. But, he did acknowledge that at the time of the outbreak of revival in his congregation, that he was preaching a series on Justification by Faith Alone. That has always stuck with me. Preaching repentance is absolutely necessary to a living faith. But in doing this, we must always be careful to not make obedience to the law the grounds of our receiving the promise of God. It is always faith alone in Christ alone.

In fact, this is maybe the biggest difference between the First Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening, which I do not consider to be so Great. Charles Finney was the most famous preacher at that time. Many things I do not like about Finney's message, but one biggie is that he preached a salvation by works rather than a salvation by faith alone.

There is only one way to enter into the promise of heavenly blessing: faith alone in Christ alone. Deviate from this for any reason and you will damn yourself, and any who follow you to an eternal hell. It is just that serious.

¹⁵ For the law brings wrath,
but
where there is no law

there is no transgression.

The Law is useful to show you where you have failed. The Law is useful to show you what is the standard. But the Law is useless as a means to achieve righteousness. It will only condemn you.

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,

That is why IT depends on faith. The experience of life depends on faith. So that the blessing may rest on grace alone. And only as it rests in God's powerful hand can there be any certainty.

"If salvation be in any form or to any degree dependent upon the merit, goodness, or the stability of man, it can never be sure, nay, it must be utterly unattainable. Unless we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all. To reject, therefore, a gratuitous salvation, is to reject the only method of salvation available for sinners." Hodge

Salvation rests on God's grace. It does not rest on your goodness. This is the only way that you could ever be at peace in the presence of a holy God.

17 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.

Abraham's faith was not simply in a promise. Abraham's faith was in the One who gave the promise – God himself. We are not saved by believing in the doctrine of justification. We are saved through faith in Jesus, the One who justifies us. And Jesus is able to do two very important things to save you:

One: Jesus is able to give life to the dead.

Two: Jesus is able to declare you righteous, when you are decidedly not righteous.

Jesus gives life to the dead. This is a reference to being dead in our sin, dead meaning unable to do that which is truly good. Dead meaning a slave to sin and dead to righteousness.

Ephesians 2:1-9 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body¹ and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Into this state of deadness, God graciously comes. Because Jesus is God he is able to give life to the dead. God does not give a boost to those who are already alive. He creates new life where there was only death before.

⁴ But¹ God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

When God saves a person, he is creating something new that was not previously there. This is why Paul writes, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation." God calls into existence what did not previously exist, out of his love alone. When the world did not exist, God spoke, and the world came into being.

The Christian is also the product of God speaking. God speaks to the dead soul, "Awake!" And within the heart of the stone is born a new heart, a heart of flesh. This new heart is righteous. It loves righteousness. It hungers and thirsts for righteousness. It grieves for and hates wickedness.

This new heart is not something you produced. It is freely given to you by God. And one of the first fruits of this new heart is faith. Faith is not some good work that comes out of your dead, stony heart. Faith is something that can only come out of the heart that has been created by God of grace alone.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Salvation is all of God. He creates life where there was only death. This life looks to the righteousness of Christ. And renounces all self-righteousness.

And the Christian begins to rest in the voice of Jesus, rather than his own heart.
Jesus calls into existence the things that do not exist.

What is it that God calls into existence that does not exist? It certainly can refer to the new heart? But I believe it also refers to the righteousness that is received by faith. You, Christian, are called righteous, even though you are not righteous. God declares you righteous, even though you possess no righteousness of your own.

The NIV translates this:
calls things that are not as though they were

Luther: Simul Justus et Peccator.

At the same time Righteous and Sinner.

Application:

1. Do not underestimate your prideful tendency to self-righteousness.
 - a. Do you think that your relative obedience to God makes you better than the person floundering in sin?
 - i. Any obedience that you have done is solely a product of the grace of God.
 - ii. How can you use it to puff yourself up?
 - b. Do you think that God can only love you when you have first obeyed?
 - i. This is pride.
 - ii. And it results in despair.
 - c. Of all the sins that Jesus will overcome, your pride may be the most difficult, and the most insidious.
 - i. God will often withhold grace to overcome some sin, because he is also working to destroy the sin of pride and self-righteousness.
2. Do not underestimate the difficulty of faith.
 - a. Faith may seem easy, until your life depends upon it.
 - b. Faith may sound good as you listen to a sermon, but will it really do the job when it counts?
 - i. Niagara Falls illustration. (More factual)
 - ii. Charles Blondin famous in the summer of 1859. He walked 160 feet above the falls several times back and forth between Canada and the United States as huge crowds on both sides looked on with shock and awe. Once he crossed in a sack,

once on stilts, another time on a bicycle, and once he even carried a stove and cooked an omelet!

The story as I have heard it previously.
Some question of the ending.

(Later in August of 1859, his manager, Harry Colcord, did ride on Blondin's back across the Falls.)

But perhaps the most memorable was when he crossed the gorge carrying his manager, Harry Colcord on his back. It would be the supreme test of Blondin's skill and stamina.

That day over 100,000 spectators jammed every available space along the gorge.

According to Colcord, the trip was a nightmare.

On several occasions Blondin had to hastily run for the guy rope to steady the two. On the very first occasion the guy rope broke, forcing Blondin to hastily run for the next. Upon reaching the second guy rope Blondin gasped for Colcord to dismount. The terrified manager slithered down Blondin's sweat-soaked back.

On August 17th, Colcord was strapped to Blondin's back, and the pair set off across the tightrope. As they reached the halfway point – the most dangerous section of the rope – Blondin said to his friend, "Harry, you are no longer Colcord; you are Blondin. Until I clear this place be a part of me – mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do we shall both go down to our death." Harry trusted his wiser, more experienced friend, and carefully the Great Blondin continued along until at long last the pair reached the other side, safe and sound. Are you trusting in Jesus? Are you still trusting in yourself? Only by resting in Christ's righteousness can you have peace with God and be an heir of the world. And only then will you ever have true peace in your soul. Jesus tells all who come to him: My peace I give to you.



