

Paul continues explaining why righteousness can only come through faith. Attempting to find righteousness in the law also puts us under its curse because of our inability to keep it perfectly. However, Christ became a curse for us in order to free us from the curse of the law. Paul then assures us that the law cannot supersede the covenant promises of righteousness through faith that God made to Abraham.

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse” – There is a curse upon those who do not keep the law of God, and those who seek to keep the law in order to earn salvation or to be righteous have placed themselves under that curse. They are under this curse because no human being is capable of keeping the law (Peter questioned why Gentile believers should be expected to obey the law, something that the Jews have never been successful at doing: **Acts 15:10** “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”).

“for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” – Paul quotes Deut. 27:26 to show that anyone who breaks the law comes under the condemnation of God. The fact that “all things” is specified indicates that sinless perfection is required, something that is humanly impossible (**Rom. 3:23** “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”). Thus, anyone who attempts to obtain righteousness through the law has instead placed themselves under God’s judgment because of their flawed obedience to the law.

11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. 12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

“But that no man is justified [made righteous] by the law in the sight of God, it is evident [clear; plain; obvious]” – It is an obvious fact in scripture that men cannot be made righteous by obeying the law. In v. 8, Paul quoted Gen. 15:6 to show that Abraham’s righteousness came through faith and Paul will point out other evidences in scripture.

“for, The just shall live by faith” – Paul offers further OT evidence that the law does not bring righteousness by quoting from **Hab. 2:4** “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith”). The context of the passage in Habakkuk says that while the proud are not upright in heart, it is those who have responded to God in faith that are considered just and will live. The fact that those with faith will live implies that the proud will die in their sins.

“And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” – The law is not based on faith but on human performance, as Paul’s next OT quotation indicates (**Lev. 18:5** “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD”). The quotation says that those who obey God’s law will live, with the implication that those who don’t will die. Thus even a single sin places us under the judgment of God and the penalty of death (**Rom. 6:23a** “For the wages of sin is death”). This is the curse Paul mentioned in v. 10.

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” – All who do not keep the law are under the curse of death, but Christ has redeemed us from that curse by dying to pay our sin debt (**Rom. 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”; **Rom. 8:3-4** “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”).

“being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” – Christ redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse Himself. Paul quotes from an OT passage concerning a criminal who was put to death by hanging (**Deut. 21:23** “His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance”). Jesus gave Himself to die the death of a cursed criminal for us in order to free us from the curse of death that our sin brought upon us.

“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” – Jesus died for us so that the blessing of righteousness through faith that Abraham enjoyed can also come to Gentiles who have faith in Christ.

“that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” – In addition to receiving righteousness through faith, we also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith. It is through the Holy Spirit that we obtain the new birth, as well as all the blessings we have as a result of His indwelling.

15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

“Brethren, I speak after the manner of men” – Paul will now use the way human agreements are handled to illustrate a spiritual point.

“Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed [ratified], no man disannulleth [cancels], or addeth thereto” – A covenant between men in Paul’s day was similar to a modern contract. Once it has been signed and become a legal document, it cannot be canceled or modified in any way. If a man’s contract is this binding, how much more binding are the covenants of God and the promises they contain?

16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made” – Paul points out that the covenant promises that God made to Abraham were made to both Abraham and his seed. Paul has already referred to the promise that the world would be blessed through Abraham (v. 8). God made other promises to Abraham and his seed, including the inheritance of the land of Canaan and the promise of eternal blessings. These promises are unconditional and will not go unfulfilled.

“He saith not, And to seeds, as of many” – Some of the promises God made to Abraham concerning his seed obviously refer to Abraham’s physical descendants, but others allow for Paul’s interpretation. Paul points out the fact that the word used for “seed” is not plural.

“but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” – Paul points out that the word used for “seed” is singular and that fact means that God’s promises to the seed of Abraham were to Christ Himself, Who, as a Jew, was a descendant of Abraham. Thus Christ is the recipient of those promises and we, through faith in Christ, benefit also from those promises. It is through faith in Christ that our salvation comes and He is the channel through which God’s promises will be fulfilled in us.

17 And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

Paul contrasts the covenant (God’s promises to Abraham) and the law. He describes the covenant as being “confirmed before of God in Christ.” The Greek word translated “that was confirmed before” means “to be ratified or established beforehand.” God’s covenant with Abraham was established/based on Jesus Christ long before Christ came and the law cannot alter or cancel God’s covenant with Abraham because it came 430 years after those promises were made (v. 15).

18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

“For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise” – Paul points out the mutual exclusiveness of law and promise (grace). If “the inheritance” (the blessings that Abraham’s children obtain through faith) comes through obedience to God’s law then it would make the promise of those things pointless and unnecessary (**Rom. 4:4** “*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt*”; **Rom. 4:14** “*For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect*”; **Rom. 11:6** “*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work*”).

“but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise” – Paul assures us that God gave these things to Abraham through His promise, and he has the Biblical record to back up that assertion (Gen. 15:6). God’s promises of righteousness through faith were made to Abraham and his seed (Christ) and it is through faith in Christ that we are able to obtain righteousness today without the law.