

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

¹³ It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. (NIV84)

Theme: Salvation: A Guaranteed Promise

1. Not by works
2. But by grace through faith

What’s the purpose of a guarantee? It is to assure or promise someone that certain conditions will be fulfilled under particular circumstances especially relating to a product, service, or transaction. It is supposed to give someone a sense of comfort. But guarantees are often anything but. You soon realize that many times a guarantee is nothing but a shame. The appliance is guaranteed for up to five years, but you then you realize that the fine print is worded as such that it’s almost impossible to meet the qualifications of the guarantee. Or a Politian guarantees that taxes will be cut if he is elected, but years later taxes have only increased. Perhaps a salesman guarantees that you’ll like

the way you look if you buy from his store. It doesn’t take you long to realize that a guarantee isn’t always a guarantee. But it is with God. Today we see that the promise of salvation is guaranteed to you. It doesn’t come to you through works, but by God’s grace alone, which is received by faith.

There are many religions in the world. There is Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Taoism—we could go on and on. Some people will say that they all have their strengths and weaknesses. They all have something to offer, yet are ultimately flawed in one way or another. Many believe that all the world’s religions are all the same. So we should simply learn to get along, or co-exist with each other. But when you examine all of the world’s religions, it becomes clear that there is only two religions in the world. The one true religion, and all false religions.

The one true religion—Christianity is a religion of grace. All the others are religions of works. All the other religions in the world guarantee something. They guarantee a spot in their version of the afterlife, a better situation when your soul is reincarnated, or whatever it might be. But how do you receive that guarantee? By doing good works. By obeying a certain set of laws—you can please whatever god you may happen to worship. If you do this or do that, than you will be saved. They are all religions of works. But not the one true religion—Christianity. We know that since we can’t obey God perfectly, we can’t save ourselves by what we do. It is only by God’s grace—his undeserved love for us that we are saved. For God sent his Son to die for our sins. And we receive this gift of forgiveness through faith in him.

So there is a religion of grace and a false religion of works. It’s one or the other. You can’t mix the two. If you add works to grace, as some try to do, than it’s not grace. If you try to be saved by obeying the law than you can’t be saved through faith in Christ—as God promises. If you can earn eternal life by obeying God, than it’s not by an inheritance, which is a free gift of grace. That is the point that Paul makes in verse 14. **For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.** Perhaps Paul puts in clearer in Romans 11. **If by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were,**

grace would no longer be grace. It's like working at a job—you get paid because you have done the work. And if you get paid for doing a job, than you get paid out of obligation—not as a gift. You can't be saved by God's grace through Christ plus what you do. Because then it doesn't depend on grace alone, but also by what you do. Jesus' work, then isn't enough. You add something to it. Which means that ultimately salvation depends on what you do. So you can't mix the two. It's like trying to mix oil and water. It simply doesn't work. It's either grace or works.

One of them ends in death. Now, it is true that if we kept the whole law, than we can earn our own way to eternal life. That is what Jesus did. But he is God. And we are not. No, we were born as sinners. As enemies of God. There hasn't been a day gone by that we haven't sinned against God—numerous times a day. We rebel against him time and time again. We fail to keep his commands. We fail to live the perfect life that he demands of us.

Sure we think we might do a good job from time to time. But even if we stumble and sin at just one point, than we are guilty of breaking all of the law. And the price we ought to pay for our sins is death. That means whoever tries to earn their own way to salvation is going to die. And not just die physically, but eternally. It doesn't matter under what guise of religion it is. If it's a religion of works, it will end in death.

It's the price we all ought to pay for our sins. We can't boast or brag that we are better than anyone else. By nature we aren't better than the Muslim, the Jew, or the Mormon. We are sinners just like they are. And no one in this room can claim that they deserve to be saved. We are all sinners, just like everyone else. We fall short of God's glory. So no one here can brag before God.

If it wasn't for God's grace we would all die. And it's not as if any of us deserve God's mercy. It's not as if God chose you because you are special, because he knew you would believe, or because he of what you would do or wouldn't do. No, we're sinners who deserve death. And we can't save ourselves. So we all go before God and plead for his mercy. And he sends us a Savior.

You want proof that salvation doesn't come by works? Look at Abraham. God chose him by grace. When God called him Abram

may have very well been worshiping a false god like his father. Yet, God chose him to be the Father of a great nation. He guaranteed Abraham that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land of Canaan. And that all nations of the world would be blessed through him—because the Savior of the entire world would come through his line. Abraham did nothing to be chosen by God. It's not as if he kept God's commands—he was a sinner, just like you and me. God didn't choose him because he did such a good job of obeying his law. God wouldn't give Moses the law until around 1000 years later.

It wasn't because of his works—his obedience to the law that God chose Abraham. But through faith. Paul makes this point in verse 13.

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants who would become as numerous as the stars in the sky. Even though Abraham was well advanced in years—over 75, and had yet to have any children, he believed God. So God said about him as Paul quotes in verse three, **Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.** Notice that it doesn't say that Abraham was credited with righteousness because of who he was, or what he had done. But by faith.

Righteousness is another name for holiness. Or perfection. God considered Abraham perfect and holy. Not because Abraham was. He was a sinner, just like the rest of us. And notice that he was credited with righteousness. He wasn't righteous. But God credited him with righteous. God looked at him as if he was righteous or holy. How? Through faith.

The same stands for us. We too are credited with righteousness. Credited—not earned or deserved. We are sinners, not perfect, not holy. Yet, credited with righteousness anyway. God looks at us as perfect. He considers us holy. He declares us not guilty. How? Through faith. Through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in him as our one and only Savior. Faith that he is true God and true man at the same time. That he took the sins of the whole world upon himself. That he gave us his perfect and holy life. That he died because of what we have done wrong. That he rose from the dead. That he will come

again on the last day. And he will take all who believe in him to his heavenly home. It is through faith in him that we receive all this that he has done for us.

It's faith in Christ. In nothing and no one else. Not you or your own works. You can't be saved by believing in the false gods of the Jews, Mormons, or the Jehovah Witnesses. Salvation isn't found in Buddha or Allah. Rather it is only by God's grace, received through faith in Jesus Christ. As Peter told the Sanhedrin in Acts 4, **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**

And so our salvation is guaranteed. And it's not like a guarantee that you often see today, that is really no guarantee at all. This is a guarantee from God. And so we know without a shadow of a doubt that we are saved. We are sure and certain that our sins are forgiven and that we will live in heaven forever. Why? Because it doesn't depend on us. If it did then we'd have no comfort. No assurance. We could never be 100% confident that we'd end up in heaven. We'd always wonder if we had done enough. Or if we had done the right things in order to please God. So we could never be sure if we were saved.

But our salvation depends on Christ. And what he has done for us. Through him and him alone we are saved. We do nothing. For he has done everything. And since it depends on him and everything he has already done we know what will happen. It's guaranteed. He did truly pay for your sins. He did truly rise from the dead so that you too will rise from the dead. And through faith, not by works, you will receive the grace of God that he has promised us through his Son.

There are guarantees that aren't really guarantees. And then there are guarantees from God. As he says in verse 16, **Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.** This promise is guaranteed because it is based not on us—who we are and what we have done, but on Christ and what he has done for us. Because of him your sins have been forgiven and you will live with him and all your fellow believers forever in heaven. God guarantees it. Amen.