

Romans 4:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void,
and the promise made of none effect:

Analysis

For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Paul poses a hypothetical syllogism: if inheritance comes *ek nomou* (ἐκ νόμου, "from law"), then two catastrophic consequences follow. First, *kekenōtai hē pistis* (κεκένωται ἡ πίστις, "faith has been emptied/made void"). The perfect tense indicates permanent voiding—faith would be rendered meaningless as a category. If law-works secure inheritance, then faith is superfluous decoration, not the instrumental means of receiving the promise.

Second, *katērgētai hē epaggelia* (κατέργηται ἡ ἐπαγγελία, "the promise has been nullified/abolished"). Again the perfect tense: the promise would stand permanently abolished. Why? Because a promise that depends on the promisee's performance is not really a promise but a contract or wage (cf. v. 4). God's covenant with Abraham was promissory, not contractual—"I will" not "if you will." To introduce law as a condition empties both faith (as the receiving instrument) and promise (as the giving mode) of meaning. Grace and works are incompatible bases for inheritance.

Historical Context

The debate over whether Gentiles must keep Torah to be saved was tearing apart the early church. Paul demonstrates that introducing law-keeping as a requirement doesn't just add a condition—it fundamentally transforms the nature of the

covenant from promise to contract, from grace to works, making both faith and promise meaningless. This parallels his argument in Galatians 3:15-18.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why are faith and law-based inheritance mutually exclusive rather than complementary, according to Paul?
2. How does making inheritance conditional on law-keeping change the nature of God's promise into something else entirely?
3. What promises of God do we effectively nullify by treating them as conditional on our performance?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	γὰρ	οἱ	ἐκ	νόμου	κληρονόμοι	κεκένωται
if	For	G3588	they which are of	the law	be heirs	is made void
G1487	G1063		G1537	G3551	G2818	G2758
ἡ	πίστις	καὶ	κατήργηται	ἡ	ἐπαγγελία·	
G3588	faith	and	made of none effect	G3588	the promise	
	G4102	G2532	G2673		G1860	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 7:19 (Word): For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

Hebrews 7:28 (Word): For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

Isaiah 55:11 (Word): So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Romans 4:16 (Faith): Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Romans 3:31 (Faith): Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Galatians 2:21 (Word): I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Philippians 3:9 (Faith): And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: