

# Third Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

**Good As Dead; Good For Life**

**Romans 4:13-25**

**Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 5)**

**Analysis by Norb E. Kabelitz**

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 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. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 23

Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Good as Dead!**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Called to be Godly and Good*

The Abraham story that Paul recalls from Genesis 17:1 involves a divine call: “Walk before me and be blameless,” (which is a command); and a reward, which is a promise, and “I will make you numerous.” How can a person (whether Abraham or I) respond to such a calling if his only resource is his fallible human nature and aged impotence and inadequacy? (Abraham was 99 years old! And Sarah was barren!) How can he (or I) “rise to the occasion” when “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up”? The divine call puts a heavy burden on a person-it’s even fearful when it comes from God Almighty (El Shaddai).

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *As Good as Dead*

While Paul’s treatment of Abraham’s story omits the moral and religious lapses in the Abraham narrative (and mine), when I take inventory of what resources I have to meet the demands of the covenant trade, my shelves are empty. My own body, called now to produce seed and progeny, is by itself “as good as dead” (v. 19). Without “faith” God’s command produces only despair, the experience of “wrath” and anxiety. (See, for example, how the King of Israel responds to the Syrian king’s request regarding Naaman the leper: “Am I God, ... that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?” 2 Kings 5:7.) Without promise, and faith in that promise, we experience only anxiety.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Good and Dead!**

Where neither faith, promise nor grace are present, only wrath remains (v. 15) in the form of anxiety, insecurity, or judgment. I experience the power of sin even when there is no command. The experience of wrath is a power that not only exposes my inadequacy, but also nullifies the possibility of a “trade”; I am good-and-dead. Your hand, O God, weighs heavy on me!

## **PROGNOSIS: God’s Goodness through Christ**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – God “Gives Life to the Dead”**

God makes the trade. He gives life to the dead (v. 17). He trades grace for wrath. The life-giving promise God gives us rests on his grace (v. 16). It does not rest on directive, law or command. Faith generates from God’s Yes and God’s promise, and is “reckoned as righteousness” (security and confidence) before God. Not only is Abraham reckoned as righteous, but we who see God’s Yes in Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, are given worth and justification (life). Jesus, who hands himself over to “wrath” for us, is raised for us. It is a godly trade based on the promise, and received by faith.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – God’s Promise for Life**

Faith in God’s promise (v. 17) sees God working through weakness and death-not just Jesus’-but our very own weakness and death, impotence and barrenness. And, as a consequence of such faith, weakness and death, impotency and barrenness, are turned into strength and life, potency and multiplication. The promise feeds this transformation (v. 20).

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Let God Be Good and Godly!**

Set free from justifying ourselves with religious regimens of self-improvement, we become advocates of God’s glory, God’s

godness, and God's goodness. In this way we, with Abraham, get to father/mother many nations. And by God's goodness we "inherit the earth" and heaven too.