

“GOD DOESN’T COUNT SIN AGAINST US.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 4:6-8

Introduction.

We all say we have faith in Jesus, we profess it, we sing about it. We all say Jesus is all we need, He is enough. But the truth is, we don't actually live that way. We all mix our faith with works, with trying to win or earn or deserve God's favor and approval by trying harder to be better and do better, with being moral and upright, having the appearance of godliness.

We still try to put some faith in being good, well sort of good, more good than bad, better than our parents or neighbors or co-workers. We are sort of generous, we give some money to the church. We are sort of loving when it doesn't cost us too much. We read the Bible, well not all the time but sometimes. We don't swear too much or drink too much usually. God grades on the curve, right, so we are OK.

We are trying harder to be better and do better in hopes of winning favor with God and man. We focus more on outward behavior than the inward heart. We talk about being raised right, about keeping to the straight and narrow, about getting our act together. Gaining approval by behavior

This is called moralism. We all into this trap, even churches. The church in Galatia abandoned the Gospel of God's grace for moralism.

Moralism doesn't work, it has never worked. Churches that major in moralism are joyless, and are full of families, marriages, children, that are destroyed by the lack of grace.

Moralism leads to judgmentalism, disapproval, impossible expectations, critical spirit, constant pressure to measure up. Husbands do it to wives, wives to husbands, parents to children.

Are we not called to live good and godly and upright lives? Are we not called to obey the Ten Commandments? Of course, but they are not the Gospel, we are not saved by keeping them. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. We are justified by God by faith. Then we receive grace to live lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The best that moralism can do for us is make us better behaved sinners, but still sinners nonetheless. Moralism is fake news, fake faith. It imitates holiness, but it is only the form of godliness without the power. It isn't real. It might win us the applause and approval of those around us, but not of God.

Luke 18:9-14 (NASB) Jesus told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

We sin against God and rob Him of His glory when we live or speak in a way that suggests improving our behavior will satisfy God. This is why Paul relentlessly argues against our constant temptation to justify ourselves by our works, no one is ever justified by anything they have done.

So Paul brings two expert witnesses into the courtroom to make his case. We heard from Abraham two weeks ago, and today Paul calls another witness to the stand King David. This would be like a politician in a speech appealing to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to make his case as strong as possible.

David is a great witness for the defense of the Gospel. Do you remember what he did? He infamously broke three of the Ten Commandments, he coveted Bathsheba, he committed adultery with her and he cause the murder of her husband Uriah. He willfully committed wicked, ungodly sins.

In Psalm 51 he confesses his iniquity, his bad heart, and he comes to the fatal conclusion there is no sacrifice or blood offering sufficient to atone for his sins.

He is without hope except to cast himself on God's mercy, to plead for forgiveness to cleanse him from his sin, to appeal to the God who counts us righteous by faith apart from works.

Paul quotes David's words in Psalm 32, one of the great penitential psalms you should know and pray when you are confessing sin. In the first two verses it gives three blessings of the person whom God counts righteous apart from works.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven.
Blessed are those whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

Let's look at this triple blessing from God.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven.

The imputation of righteousness includes with it the forgiveness of our sins. Righteousness is gained apart from works, and forgiveness is gained apart from works. Justification and forgiveness are not the same thing. There is no justification where there is no forgiveness. The sins that make us unrighteous and keep us from being declared righteous, must be forgiven, washed away.

God has made a way possible to separate sin from the sinner. Remember the scapegoat in the OT when the high priest would lay hands on it and spoke over it all the iniquities and sins of Israel on it, and then send it away into the wilderness where it is assured it will not return.

Our sins are forgiven as they are placed on a substitute on our behalf and carried away.

Who is this God who acts like this toward those who have sinned against Him, done Him wrong, offended His righteousness, cursed Him, disobeyed Him? The prophet Micah asked that question:

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression [rebellion] for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Who is this God who forgives the guilt of our sin and betrayal? Who has pondered the sheer miracle of the magnitude of God's grace, mercy, kindness, steadfast love?

And the blessings continue.

Blessed are those whose sins are covered.

In order for sins to be forgiven they must be covered. How can our sin and rebellion be covered?

In order for our sins to be covered they first must be uncovered. In order for David's sins to be covered, they first had to be uncovered to him by the prophet Nathan. Sins that are

kept covered up or hidden, are not covered by the blood of Jesus. Only sins that are uncovered in confession and repentance are then covered up by faith in the blood of Jesus.

When we uncover our sin, God covers it. When we cover it up, it remains uncovered.

Isaiah 53:6 ... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

Have your sins been forgiven and covered? Do you know how you know?

You will know it by your humility.

You will know it by your quickness to forgive and ask forgiveness.

You will know it by your not going around pointing out other people's sins.

You will know it by your not being defensive, trying to hang on to vestiges of pride.

You will know it when you are quick to assume you are the problem.

Do you know someone who never asks for forgiveness, who never confesses to a sin, who hates doing it? They don't have faith in Jesus. The person who has faith in Jesus, constantly says they are ungodly. If you are saved only by the righteousness of Jesus, why not say that, say how ungodly you are, and how your hope is in Jesus, that will help others who feel hopeless.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

In order for our sins to be forgiven, they must be covered and when they are covered, they are no longer counted against us. What does that mean? For those who by faith are justified and counted righteous by faith, their sin is not counted against them.

Isaiah 43:25 I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Ezekiel 18:22 None of the transgressions he has committed shall be remembered against him.

Colossians 2:14 ... by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

But if God is omniscient then how does He forget? In the literal sense God cannot forget.

When God says He doesn't remember, it means, He doesn't recall something to mind with the purpose of acting on it. He is choosing to no longer act according to our sin. He is choosing not to treat us as our sins deserve.

When God thinks about us, He doesn't think about us according to our sin, but according to Christ's perfect sinlessness and Christ's perfect sacrifice and Christ's righteousness given to us.

God will never again let the knowledge of our sin play any part in the way He relates to us. For the repentant believer, God chooses to no longer bring our sins to mind against us.

We have a God who does something better than forgetting, He forgives, He covers our sins, He counts them no more against us.

By faith our status before God is justified, righteous, forgiven, covered, with our sins imputed to Jesus.

The only remembering of our sin we should do is the kind of remembering that makes us more humble, more aware of God's grace and goodness, His mercy and forgiveness, with a deeper joy in His grace and if God doesn't hold our sins against us, how can we continue to hold the sins of others against them? Forgiving doesn't mean forgetting, it means letting it go, not holding on to it.

Implications and application.

The Christian life is a life of repentance. Here is how it goes. God by various means brings a sinner to an awareness of his sin, to the point where the sinner sees his debt and honestly confesses his own guilt and shame, his offenses against a holy God, his rebellion and neglect.

David does that in verse 5 of Psalm 32:

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Once a sinner makes that humble confession and sincere acknowledgement then God by the blood of Jesus and for the sake of Jesus, forgives him, doing two things. He covers all his sin with the blood bought righteousness of Jesus, and He counts all His sin as not against him, but against Jesus.

This is the sum of the Christian life. No Christian ever lives without sinning, not for a day or even an hour. But God has made a way for us to live in fellowship with Him, by

walking by faith, constantly acknowledging our sin and sinfulness, our need for debt forgiveness and our need for Jesus.

Grow in this grace the way Paul grew in it, least of apostles, least of saints, chief of sinners.

Will you admit you are a sinner? People with faith confess, people without faith don't confess. Confess to your wife, to your children, to elders, to friends. Don't claim you are good, moral, righteous. If you are proud, you don't know Jesus.

David acknowledged how God's hand was heavy upon him, how guilt and shame weighted him down, until he acknowledged the truth about himself and turned to the only hope and help there is.

Are you among the triple blessed whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered and not counted against him?

May you have a new, deeper peace and joy, knowing you are triple blessed by God in Christ. May your heart be filled with joy, even in the midst of whatever life-challenges you are in. May you know the joy of the Lord as your strength and hope.

You have a better righteousness than your own, you have God's. And your sins are not on you, they are on Christ on the cross. His blood covers them and God counts them no more.

Paul wants you to leave here today with an overwhelming sense of how blessed you are or can be because of the Gospel good news of your justification by faith. And this is not your doing, it is all and entirely Gods.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: You banished us from paradise and then you opened heaven's gates and called us back. The flaming sword of judgment is gone.

You cast us off, as was only just and right, but mercifully you forgave us.

You opened the prison gates and gave the condemned a full pardon.

You hated us and then you reconciled yourself to us.

You cursed us and then you blessed us.

You sprinkled us with clean water and washed away the dirt of our sin and shame.

You took our guilty conscience and made us pure.

Never again like Adam do we have to hide from your presence.

We who were heirs to Adam's sin, and children of darkness, are now sons of righteousness, heirs of an eternal promise.