

Romans 4:6-8

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It is God's blessing to us that He considers believers righteous before Him without considering their sins. By faith in God, our sin is covered and no longer prevents us from being in God's family.

The Apostle Paul is demolishing the argument of competing Jewish “authorities” who claim to be experts in Jewish law, meaning they claim to base their attack against Paul’s gospel message on scriptural arguments. It then makes sense that Paul would fight fire with fire and use scriptural arguments himself. That is exactly what Paul has done so far. In addition to arguing that the great founding biblical figure, Abraham, demonstrates that faith is the only means by which we are justified before God, now Paul turns to the greatest King of Israel, David. What does David have to say about having faith versus being a keeper of laws?

Paul now turns to a Psalm written by King David relevant to the subject. In introducing the Psalm, Paul tells us what this Psalm of David says: *Just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works* (v 6). It is not a payment of a debt, but a *blessing* that God considers any person righteous before Him, without in any way considering our deeds.

In this and the following verse, Paul quotes Psalm 32:1–2: *Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account* (vv 7–8). The introduction to Psalm 32 says “A Psalm of David, a contemplation.” This Psalm includes an admission by David that he is sinful, so it is also consistent with Romans 4:5, that God justifies the ungodly based on faith; David recognizes that he is ungodly. He does not compare himself with others; instead, David begins his contemplation with the wonderful reflection that it is a fantastic blessing that God is ready and willing to forgive.

The root of the Greek word translated *forgiven* in this verse occurs in Matthew 3:15 and is translated “let it be” as well as “consented.” When God forgives, He does not forget, for God’s knowledge has no limit. God consents to “let it be” without the consequence of separating us from belonging to His family as His children.

The companion description to God forgiving our sin is that our sins are *covered*. The first occurrence of the root Greek word “*kalypto*” translated in v 7 as *covered* speaks of the waves covering the boat while Jesus slept. The waves subsumed the boat to the point that the disciples woke Jesus with the news they were about to die. God covers our sins to the point that they perish from standing between us and God. When we believe on Jesus, we are restored to full membership in God’s family, and God covers that sin. It does not go away, it just loses its power under the waves of God’s saving grace.

Nowhere in these two verses from King David’s Psalm is there any indication that God’s forgiveness is attached to any sort of rule-following. There is no mention of circumcision, of

keeping ceremonial laws, sacrifice, or tithes. There is only an assertion that humans are really blessed if God forgives them.

So now in addition to demonstrating that God “counted” Abraham to be righteous, not because Abraham did anything that obligated God, but simply because Abraham believed (v 3), now Paul has demonstrated from the Bible that King David understood that forgiveness is solely a matter of God’s grace. There is no act, no words, and no ceremony we can do, say, or perform that invokes upon God any sort of obligation. God has simply promised that if we will believe, He will forgive (John 3:14-15). That makes the forgiven person *blessed* because *the Lord will not take into account* that person’s *sin*.

This is the core of Paul’s message to the Gentiles; God freely forgives those who believe. Into a Roman world where the power over every person’s life was vested in one man, Caesar, who could pronounce death over whomever he chose, there came the God-man Jesus, to set free every human from the power of death itself. And this power is unleashed through faith in God’s promise.

The competing Jewish “authorities” came to Rome to dispute this gospel message of grace, and undermine Paul’s influence in the world. Paul’s gospel message is also being taught by Aquila and Priscilla, who host a church in their house in Rome, and preached grace through faith alongside Paul in Greece (Romans 16:3; Acts 18:2, 18, 26). It is likely that they are actively engaged in this conflict with the competing Jewish “authorities” in the city of Rome, and this letter to the Romans will help support their efforts to teach righteousness apart from the Jewish law. Paul’s opponents claimed that we must do certain things for God and achieve righteousness before God through certain acts, such as circumcision.

As is typically the case, there is also alignment between the privilege and importance of the Jewish “authorities” and the position they advocate. By insisting that the Gentiles be circumcised and follow Jewish custom, they are also promoting their own importance as the primary authorities over Jewish custom and religious practice.

Unlike the competing Jewish “authorities,” Paul seeks to follow Jesus’s example and serve the best interest of the Gentiles, at his own expense (1 Corinthians 4:12, 9:15).

Biblical Text

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven,

And whose sins have been covered.

8 “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”