

## **Romans (18): Our Father Abraham (cont.)**

### **Introduction:**

I was disappointed that last Lord's Day I diverted from our notes to a fair degree, since I had hoped that we would be able to cover all what I had written. But it didn't happen. I do not, however, desire to go back over what I handed to you. We will address the same material that was expressed in those notes, but we will do so as we work through this 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans that is before us.

As pointed out earlier, Romans 4 should be understood as the final section of the major division of Romans that began with Romans 3:21. Once again, the outline of this section is as follows:

- III. God's Righteousness in the Sinner's Justification (3:21-4:25)
  - A. The righteousness of God in the believer's justification through faith (3:21-26)
  - B. The righteousness of God through faith and its relation to the law of God (3:27-31)
  - C. Abraham as the Father of All who have Faith (4:1-25)

Let us consider...

### **C. Abraham as the Father of All who have Faith (4:1-25)**

Toward the end of Romans 3, the apostle Paul had set forth the great biblical doctrine of *justification by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone*. This is an essential, even foundational teaching of Holy Scripture.

There have been numerous books written on this subject over the years, even centuries, but perhaps the best produced, that has stood the test of time, was written by **James Buchanan**, who was the Professor of Apologetics and later of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College, in Edinburgh, Scotland. He lived from 1804 until 1870. In 1867 he published *Justification by Faith*, which has been republished many times, and remains available through The Banner of Truth Trust publishers. In his preface he wrote these words about this important biblical teaching:

Justification by faith has traditionally, and rightly, been regarded as one of the two basic and controlling principles of Reformation theology. The authority of Scripture was the *formal* principle of that theology, determining its method and providing its touchstone of truth; justification by faith was its *material* principle, determining its substance. In fact, these two principles belong inseparably together, for no theology that seeks simply to follow the Bible can help concerning itself with what is demonstrably the essence of the biblical message. The fullest statement of the gospel that the Bible contains is found in the epistle to the Romans, and Romans minus justification by faith would be like *Hamlet* without the Prince.<sup>1</sup>

Then Buchanan addressed the relevance of this message to the life and vitality of the church in that a fresh understanding of the nature and relevance of this teaching has always been at the heart of great revivals of the churches through history.

A further fact to weigh is that justification by faith has been the central theme of the preaching in every movement of revival and religious awakening within Protestantism from the Reformation to the

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<sup>1</sup> James Buchanan, *Justification by Faith* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), p. vii.

present day. The essential thing that happens in every true revival is that the Holy Spirit teaches the church afresh the reality of justification by faith, both as a truth and as a living experience. This could be demonstrated historically from the records of revivals that we have; and it would be theologically correct to define revival simply as God the Spirit doing this work in a situation where previously the church had lapsed, if not from the formal profession of justification by faith, at least from any living apprehension of it.<sup>2</sup>

But Buchanan then declared in his book that there were certain pillars of truth, or presuppositions, on which the doctrine of justification is supported. They are three in number, and they must be understood and embraced, or the truth of justification will be lost to the church. He uses the analogy of the myth of Atlas, who held the world on his shoulders; so the doctrine of justification bears the life and vitality of the church on its shoulders. But just as Atlas had to stand upon something solid to hold the worldly sphere above him, so justification stands on a foundation, on truths that undergird the doctrine of justification through faith alone. Here are his words describing the waning influence of this doctrine among Protestants of his day:

How has it happened, then, we ask, that so vital a doctrine has come to be neglected in the way that it is today?

The answer is not far to seek. Just as Atlas, with his mighty load to carry, could not hover in mid-air, but needed firm ground to stand on, so does the doctrine of justification by faith. It rests on certain basic presuppositions, and cannot continue without them. Just as the church cannot stand without the gospel of justification, so the gospel cannot stand where its presuppositions are not granted. They are three: the divine authority of the Holy Scripture, the divine wrath against human sin, and the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ. The church that loses its grip on these truths, loses its grip on the doctrine of justification, and to that extent on the gospel itself. And this is what has largely happened in Protestantism today.<sup>3</sup>

I would argue that although the doctrine of justification through faith alone is widely proclaimed and accepted by Protestants, the meaning and relevance of the doctrine, and therefore its power to influence and impact Christians, has been greatly weakened because of the three foundations of the doctrine have greatly eroded in the life of the churches. Scripture is not seen as the sole authority for matters of faith and practice; the sufficiency of Holy Scripture is widely rejected or compromised. There is very little conception among believers” or the unbelieving world of “the divine wrath against sin”, and therefore the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ’s life and death to atone for great sinners, is stripped of its significance. In my opinion one of the great needs of the day is a recovery of the preaching of God’s law which permeates Holy Scripture, and as it is blessed by the Holy Spirit, people will become sinners to such a degree that they will not see how a holy God could forgive them, why God would ever move to save them from damnation, and only then, will the cross of Jesus Christ, and faith alone in Him, bring a true sense of peace, joy, and love, that will greatly and permanently move the believing sinner to follow Jesus in love and obedience. Only when people again see the great dilemma of a holy God pardoning them when they deserve His holy and eternal wrath, will the truth of justification through faith alone regain its proper place and role in the church.

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Let us look to our text in Romans 4. The epistle of the Romans is the heart of the Bible. Justification is the foundational idea Paul conveys in this epistle to the Romans, particularly in this section of the epistle that we are considering, which began with Romans 3:21 and now continues in Romans 4.

When we look at the first paragraph of Romans 4, which is verses 1-8, we read of Paul calling upon written Scripture, which we now call the Old Testament, to substantiate his teaching. Now, what will help us

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. ix, x.

as we work through this passage is the important point we made last Lord's Day: Paul not only called upon Abraham to illustrate the truth of justification through faith alone, that he had set forth toward the end of Romans 3, but Paul desired to show how God was using the gospel of Jesus Christ to fulfill His promises to Abraham through the church, in the blessing that Abraham received from God would be experienced also by the nations of the world. For Paul, God was working through the expansion of the gospel to fulfill His promise given long ago to Abraham.

To better understand what Paul assumes his readers know about these matters, we may read God's promise to Abram in **Genesis 17:1ff**.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless,<sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."<sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and *you shall be the father of a multitude of nations*.<sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, *for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations*.<sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.<sup>7</sup> And *I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*. (Gen. 17:1-7, ESV)

God was fulfilling His promise and purpose for the nation of Israel through raising Jesus from the dead and enthroning Him in heaven. Jesus Christ was seated on God's throne over His people, which was the fulfillment of God's promise to King David that his Son would be exalted to rule over the restored kingdom of Israel. Jesus Christ is the enthroned Son of David, the promised seed of Abraham, through whom all of the Old Testament prophets had foretold would come and enter His glory. And so, let us consider this chapter before us, Romans 4.

As Paul's common manner after he declared a teaching, he demonstrated that his teaching was consistent with and even taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. Here in Romans 4, Paul showed in a number of ways that Abraham, as well as King David, illustrated the teaching of justification through faith alone. We will read and consider the meaning of the first paragraph, which includes verses 1 through 8.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup>And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup>"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;  
<sup>8</sup>blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

Paul sets forth Abraham, as well as King David, because they were examples of noted Jewish men of the Scriptures. Paul shows that as great as these men were, they came into a right relationship with God through faith alone, not through good or righteous works that they had done.

It would be good if we understood why Paul would find it important to speak of Abraham when writing to this church comprised of Jewish and Gentile believers. The Jewish people highly revered Abraham and regarded him as their "father." They would refer to him as "father Abraham."<sup>4</sup> It was common for the Jews to believe that God's blessing belonged to Abraham because of Abraham's own righteousness. Abraham's life and character were held forth as models for Jews to emulate. Jewish writings

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gen. 26:24; 32:9; Josh., 24:3; Luke 1:73; 16:24, 30; John 8:53, 56; Acts 7:2; Rom. 4:12.

of that period in history recorded the Jews' high regard for Abraham's piety and obedience before God that they thought earned or warranted God having blessed him. Here are a few references to some ancient Jewish writings that reflect Jewish opinion of Abraham in the times that Paul wrote this epistle.

“Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life” (*Jub. 23:10*). Abraham “did not sin against thee” (*Pr. Man. 8*): “no one has been found like him in glory” (*Sir. 44:19*).<sup>5</sup>

The Jews believed wrongly that Abraham's blessing “earned” by him brought benefit to them because they were his physical descendants and by the fact that the males had been circumcised that showed their solidarity with Abraham and identified them as his descendants, therefore they were the inheritors of God's promises to their father. Some had thought that Abraham was so righteous, that even though he lived over 400 years prior to God giving His law through Moses on Mount Sinai, Abraham had kept that law perfectly.<sup>6</sup> What Paul (i.e. the Holy Spirit) did here in Romans 4 was remove Abraham from being a model for the Jews as one whose righteousness gained his right standing before God, which was not true, and Paul made Abraham, rather, into the model for faith, which was the instrument that God used to bring Abraham into a right relationship with Himself.

Abraham is wrested from the Jews as an exemplar of torah-obedience and made into an exemplar of faith. As a result, Abraham ceases to be for Paul the father of the Jews exclusively but the father of all who believe.<sup>7</sup>

Paul sets forth Abraham as not only an example of justification through faith alone, but also as the father of all who have the same kind of justifying faith. Whether true believers are Jewish or Gentile, since they have the same faith of Abraham, he is their father and they are the legitimate heirs of God's eternal promises to Abraham.

Paul opens this section of his epistle with a question, which was designed to stimulate the thinking and reflection of his readers. **Verses 1 and 2** reads, “*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*” Paul denies that Abraham had performed any righteous works that commended him before God. If he had, then Abraham would have a basis of boasting.

Paul' initial question links the reader with Paul's statements earlier in **Romans 3:27-31**.

<sup>27</sup>Then what becomes of *our boasting*? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since God is one--who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (*Rom. 3:21-31*)

The New King James Version reads a little differently from our English Standard Version (ESV) that we are principally using in our study of Romans. It reads this way: “*What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?*” (NKJV). The phrase, “according to the flesh”, is linked with the verb, “has found.” What is implied, then, is what it was that Abraham discovered through his own fleshly (or perhaps human or natural) effort or exertions. But our ESV shows a different connection of this phrase. “According to the flesh” is linked with “our forefather.” “*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?*” This suggests that Paul in this verse is drawing attention to Abraham as a physical ancestor to the Jews rather than Abraham as the spiritual father of all believers,

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

which Paul overtly addresses later in his argument. Paul is saying in verses 1 and 2 that Abraham had no works of righteousness that brought God's favor upon his physical descendants.

But we should also note that the expression, "according to the flesh", commonly has a negative connotation. It is used by Paul to describe the sinfulness of people. Paul may have been intimating that the physical descendants of Abraham are characterized by sinfulness, whereas he will show shortly that the spiritual descendants of Abraham are characterized by righteousness, for they are children of Abraham "according to the Spirit", not "according to the flesh." They are ones who stand righteous before God through faith alone, just as their father Abraham had stood before God before them.

Paul was asserting that Abraham did not relate to God according to works of righteousness that he had done. If he had, then Abraham would have a basis to boast before others as having been more righteous, more obedient than others, and therefore deserving of God's blessing. Of course this manner of relating to God through God's grace is everywhere asserted in the Holy Scriptures. All boasting is excluded from the true people of God, for they are saved by the works of Jesus Christ on their behalf, not due to things they have done to merit God's favor. God's dealings with sinners leaves them with nothing that would enable them to boast before God or before one another that credit belongs to them for their relationship with God.

We next read **verse 3**, "*For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Paul calls upon the written Scriptures to confirm his teaching. Paul's apostolic authority was itself one witness to the truth. The written Scriptures were a second witness. And the Scriptures commonly set forth the principle that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.<sup>8</sup>

Paul quotes **Genesis 15:6** to prove the doctrine (teaching) of justification through faith alone. Again, what **justification** means is that

*a sinner, through believing God for what He has promised regarding salvation, receives God's forgiveness of sins and thereafter God regards the believer as no longer a guilty sinner, but rather as a righteous man (or woman) before Him.*

Let us read in Genesis 12 of God's initial call to Abram, as he was originally known, when God initially came to Abram to call him to Himself.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." <sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12:1-5)

When God had first called Abraham to faith, who was the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham was an idol worshipper living in a land wholly given over to idolatry. But God in His grace had revealed Himself to Abraham, and had promised him that he would father a great nation. God had, therefore, to and through Abraham, promised to bless the Jewish people uniquely as an ethnic race and as a corporate nation. God had made a commitment to Abraham that He would bless him and his descendants. But we read in Genesis 12:3 that although God's blessing was particularly directed to Abraham and his physical descendants, it would ultimately extend to "all the families of the earth"; in other words, the nations, or the Gentiles.

Years later, when Abraham was dwelling in Palestine, God promised Him that his physical descendants would one day possess the land of Palestine. **Genesis 13** records the following promises of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28.

<sup>14</sup>And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; <sup>15</sup>for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. <sup>16</sup>And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. <sup>17</sup>Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” (Gen. 13:14-17)

Here we see that God had bound Himself to show favor to Abraham’s physical descendants. They would be great in number. Abraham could rest assured that one day his descendants would possess what came to be known as *the Promised Land*.

Let us now turn to **Genesis 15** where we read of further details of God’s plan for Israel.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” <sup>2</sup>But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” <sup>4</sup>And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” <sup>5</sup>And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” <sup>6</sup>***And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*** (Gen. 15:1-6)

Genesis 15:6 is the first time in the Bible that the word “believe” is used. What was it that Abram believed respecting God? God had promised Abraham that he would become the father of one who would be his heir, whose descendants would eventually be great in number. ***When Abram believed God regarding this, God credited righteousness to Abraham that was not his inherently; God had bestowed the gift of righteousness to Abraham in the presence of his faith.***

Now, Paul called upon Genesis 15:6 as Scriptural testimony of Abraham’s faith, an event that occurred early in Abraham’s walk with God. It was years after Abraham initially believed God that his son Isaac was born. It was many years later still, when Isaac was 12 years old, that God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to a high mountain and there sacrifice him to the Lord. Of course God prevented Abraham from carrying through with his intention, and God provided a ram to die in the place of Isaac. It was then that God said to Abraham, many decades after God’s declaration of righteousness to Abraham, these words of promise:

“By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup>and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Gen. 22:16-18)

The Jews of Paul’s day had taken this act of obedience that Abraham performed through faith alone, decades after Abraham had been justified through faith alone, and interpreted this work of Abraham sacrificing his son as *the meaning* of faith. In other words, instead of viewing Abraham as having exercised “faith in God”, Abraham was viewed as having exercised “faithfulness before God” as the condition of God accepting him as righteous. They changed the biblical teaching of justification by faith alone to justification by your faithfulness to God, in other words, by your works. Of Paul’s teaching in Romans 4, the commentator **Douglas Moo** wrote:

Here Paul distances himself emphatically from the typical interpretation. For Jewish interpreters often viewed Genesis 15:6 through the lens of Genesis 22, so that Abraham’s “faith” became his obedience to

God and was regarded as a “work” for which God owed Abraham a reward. Paul’s interpretation stands squarely against this tradition and is also a more faithful interpretation of the original.<sup>9</sup>

Now, when the Scripture declares, “*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*”, we should understand that faith is not something that brings merit to the one who believes. It is right and good to believe who God is and believe as true what He has said, but it should not be seen as warranting, or deserving of anything. It is sin to fail to believe God; to believe God is only the right thing to do. And so, we should not see “faith” as “righteousness” itself; rather, God has determined to give the gift of righteousness to the one who believes. God counted Abraham’s faith as though it were Abraham’s righteousness.

It is important, therefore, to understand that faith is not a “work” that we do that warrants or deserves God justifying us. Many Arminians, that is, those who believe that man saves himself through his free will, see faith as something that man contributes toward his own salvation and that God regards his faith as something meritoriously righteous; they might not say this overtly, but this is the implication of their gospel. Instead of this wrong view of faith, we understand faith as an *instrument* that God uses to save His people by His grace. And so to be precise, we say that we are justified *by* God’s grace, *through* faith, not *by* faith, even though it is commonly referred to in this way. This is how **Ephesians 2:8** and **9** read:

For *by* grace you have been saved *through* faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8f)

God saves people *by* His grace. He uses faith as the *instrument* to save them. When we were unbelievers, as sinners who had not yet had God’s grace working upon us and in us, we were unwilling to believe. This is because of the ignorance of our minds due to sin and the obstinacy of our hearts due to sin. When God begins to set forth His power to save a sinner, He illuminates the darkened mind of the sinner to the truth of his sinful condition and the just damnation his sin deserves of God. He also reveals the way of salvation that God has provided through His Son, Jesus Christ. God also at this time imparts the grace of regeneration, giving to the spiritually dead sinner a new heart that has a desire to know God and believe God, a desire to obey God and please God. It is this grace of illumination and regeneration that God calls sinners to salvation. The sinner now renewed in his heart and mind, believes wholly and solely upon Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. And upon his faith, which is the fruit of God’s grace, God justifies the believing sinner, regarding him thereafter as righteous and his sins being forgiven him.

We read in **verse 4** Paul’s clear statement that salvation which is by God’s grace could never be given by God due to the works of a sinner. “*Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.*” Works are wholly incompatible with salvation by grace. To be saved by works would render God a debtor to those who by their works placed God under obligation to show them favor. In contrast, **verse 5** records the truth of our doctrine. “*To the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...*” And then Paul calls upon a second Old Testament witness to validate this teaching. **Verses 6** through **8** read, “*just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:*

<sup>7</sup>“*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;*

<sup>8</sup>*blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.*”

Paul quotes Psalm 32, a psalm penned by King David. In this psalm David acknowledged the blessedness of the ones who is a sinner, nevertheless, the Lord does not hold his sins against him. We who

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<sup>9</sup> Moo, **Romans**, p. 262. What the Jews had wrongly done, redefine faith as faithfulness, is what many do who hold the so-called new perspective on Paul. The Jews were wrong then; these modern day Judaizers are also wrong.

believe on Jesus have our sins forgiven us by God. As the apostle John had written, “I write to you, little children, because *your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake*” (1 John 2:12). We also read,

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, *the forgiveness of sins*, according to the riches of His grace.” (Eph. 1:7)

and,

<sup>13</sup>He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption through His blood, *the forgiveness of sins*. (Col. 1:13f)

and,

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, *having forgiven you all trespasses,...*” (Col. 2:13)

To fail to see the presence and reality of our sin and not to see the gravity of our sin is itself a great evil. If a man but sees his sin in a measure as God sees his sin, it will put him on a course of recovery. But a man will do what he can do in his own perceived strength and ability as long as he has a concern to know God, but who does not yet know his own sin. The sinner himself will first try and *cover* his sin himself so that he and others not see his sin and in a vain effort to hide from God. Then he will succeed in hiding his sin from himself, deluding himself into thinking that his sin does not hurt him and will not damn him. But the Scripture declares, “He that covers his sins shall not prosper; but whosoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

And so, man would cover his sin, and he is cursed when he attempts to do so. ***But God would also cover man’s sin***, and man is blest when God does so.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
And whose sins are covered;  
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. (Rom. 4:7f)

But whereas a man will cover his sin to avoid dealing with it, God covers man’s sin with the blood of Jesus Christ. But God only covers sins after they are first exposed. And so God will do what He has to do to cause a man to see his sin and to see how evil is his sin, so that he might seek to find remedy in Jesus Christ alone. And so, God is in the business of finding sin out and exposing sin.

There are hounds on the track of every thief, murderer, and liar--upon every sinner of every kind. Each sin leaves a trail. The dogs of judgment will be sure to scent it out and find their prey. There is no disentangling yourselves from the mesh of guilt, no possibility of evading the penalty of transgression.<sup>10</sup>

And so, God is in the business of discovering sin and revealing sin in us and to us. **Charles Spurgeon** once wrote:

This fact is affirmed concerning the people of God: All who have trusted in the atoning sacrifice that was presented by the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary may accept this welcome assurance: God has covered all their sin (Psa. 32:5). How this hath come to pass, I will tell you. Before ever God covers a man’s sins, He unveils them. Did you ever see your sins unveiled? Did it ever seem as if the Lord put His hand upon you and said, “Look, look at them”? Have you been led to see your sins as you never saw them before? Have you felt their aggravations fit to drive you to despair? As you have looked at them, has the finger of detection seemed to point out your great evil? Have you discovered in them the depth

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<sup>10</sup> From **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892), in a sermon entitled, “Man’s Ways and God’s Way of Covering Sins”

of guilt, iniquity, and hell...that never struck your mind before? I recollect a time when that was a spectacle always before the eyes of my conscience. My sin was ever before me. If God thus makes you see your sin in the light of His countenance, depend upon it: He has His purposes of mercy toward you. When you see and confess it, he will blot it out. As soon as God in infinite lovingkindness makes the sinner know in truth that he *is* a sinner, and strips him of his rags of self-righteousness, He grants him pardon and clothes his nakedness. While he stands shivering before the gaze of the Almighty, condemned, the guilt is purged from his conscience. I do not know of a more terrible position in one's experience than to stand with an angry God gazing upon you and to know that wherever God's eye falls upon you, it sees nothing but sin, sees nothing in you but what He must hate and must abhor...Not until this gracious work of conviction is fully wrought does the Lord appear with the glorious proclamation that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus shall have his sins covered.<sup>11</sup>

To see sin as sin is essential, but it is not enough. One must not only see sin, but one must at the same time see Jesus. To see sin but not see Jesus is misery.

To have a sight of sin and a sight of Jesus at the same moment constitutes one of the holiest and richest pages in the history of a child of God. There are many of the Lord's people who see sin, but who do not see Jesus at the same moment--who do not look at their sins through the medium of the cross. To look at sin through divine holiness as reflected in the divine Law is to look and despair, *to look and die!* But to look at sin through Christ--to see it in the blood that cleanses it, in the righteousness that covers it, in the love that pardons it fully, freely, and forever--oh, *this* is to look and hope, *to look and live!* One eye upon sin and one eye upon sin's atonement will enable the soul to walk humbly and filially (i.e. as a child) with God. One eye looking at self and one eye looking at Christ will so regulate the experience of the soul, so accurately adjust its moral compass, as to preserve the balance between presumption and despair. This will lead to a humble, holy, watchful walk as it regards sin on the one hand, and to an assured, happy, hopeful sense of pardon, acceptance, and glory on the other.<sup>12</sup>

It was no exaggeration that Paul called upon David to testify:

*“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;  
<sup>8</sup>blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

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“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 24, 25)

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> In a sermon by **Octavius Winslow** (1808-1878) entitled, “A Sight of Sin and a Sight of Jesus.”