

MOUNT SINAI MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

MONDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

Psalm 32

Straight Talk About Crooked Living

Quote

“You have not got to the bottom of the blackness of sin until you see that it is a flat rebellion against God himself.”

Alexander MacLaren

I. Introduction

Different Labels, Same Poison

J. Wilbur Chapman, noted Methodist evangelist of the nineteenth century, told of a distinguished minister in Australia who preached regularly on sin. One of the church officers came to him after one sermon to talk with him. He said to the pastor, “We do not want you to talk so plainly as you do about sin. If our boys and girls hear you talking so much about sin, they will more easily become sinners.

Call it whatever you will, but do not speak so plainly about sin.”

The minister arose from his desk, walked to a utility closet, and brought back a small bottle of strychnine that was marked “Rat Poison.” He said, “I see what you want me to do. You want me to change the label. Suppose I take off this ‘Poison’ label and replace it with some milder label, such as ‘Essence of Peppermint.’ The milder you make the label, the more dangerous you make the poison.”

This is one of the values of Psalm 32. Without changing the labels and minimizing the effect of sin, this psalm speaks directly to the devastating power of unconfessed sin in the life of a believer. As seen in the life of David, sin committed against God led to sorrow and loss of vitality in his life. But as also witnessed in David’s life, when he confessed his sin, there was a resurgence of great joy as well as a passion for living to the glory of God. From this magnificent piece of inspired literature, we conclude that confessing our sin is a vital part of vibrant, victorious Christian living.

This psalm reflects the time when David was king over Israel. He sent his troops into battle against the Ammonites while he remained behind. During this time he fell into adulterous sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1–5). To make matters worse, he tried to cover up his sin by having her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed (2 Sam. 11:6–17). For the next year David lived with his guilty conscience in deep agony of spirit. He became emotionally distraught, physically ill, and mentally disturbed.

Nathan the prophet visited the king (2 Sam. 12:1–15) and told him a story of two men, one rich and one poor. One had many flocks, the other just one little lamb. Without warning, the rich man with many flocks took the poor man's one little lamb. When David heard this, he erupted, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" To this Nathan said, "You are the man!" Exposed, David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord." When Nathan heard this, he said, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

This psalm records the joy that David found through the confession of his sin to God. This psalm "of David" was written after his confrontation with Nathan the prophet. It is a *maskil*, meaning that it was intended to instruct and teach. Specifically, this psalm was written by David to teach the people of God to confess their sins to the Lord.

II. Commentary

Straight Talk About Crooked Living

MAIN IDEA

David, having experienced the forgiveness and blessing of God following the confession of his sin, instructs others in this path of forgiveness.

A David's Cleansing From Sin (32:1–2)

SUPPORTING IDEA: This psalm begins with the celebration of David over the forgiveness of his sins.

32:1a. This psalm begins, like the Sermon on the Mount, with the word blessed, which can be translated as "happy, joyful, or exuberant." Furthermore, it is in the plural which greatly intensifies the meaning of the word (i.e., abundant or overflowing blessing). David began by announcing and proclaiming the joyful happiness that he discovered in the Lord's forgiveness. This could be translated,

“How abundantly richly blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven.” The word *transgressions* indicates that a person has willfully departed from and defied God. The word *forgiven* (Heb. *nasa*) literally means “to have one’s sin lifted off.”

Unconfessed sin is like a great burden on God’s people, weighing them down mentally and emotionally. Forgiveness is implied here and stated later because David confessed his sin to God, and this ushered in his forgiveness (cp. Ps. 103:12; Isa. 1:18; 38:17; 43:25; Mic. 7:19; 1 John 1:9). David, in sinning with Bathsheba, was guilty of fornication and defying the authority of God over his life.

32:1b. David also knew that blessing would come to the person whose sins are covered. The mountain of sin that David had committed—from adultery to murder to hypocrisy—was now covered or concealed by God. In confessing his sin to God, the blemish of sin was put out of sight—out of God’s sight. This word *covered* (Heb. *kasa*) is a derivative of the word *kaphar*. It pictures the imagery of the Day of Atonement, the day on which the high priest of Israel took blood from an animal that had been sacrificed in the courtyard of the temple. He carried this blood into the Most Holy Place, where it was sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

32:2. David continued, How blessed are those whose sin (“iniquity,” KJV) the Lord does not count against him. This sin or iniquity is that which defiles and corrupts a person’s character. The Lord graciously chose not to count this sin against David, meaning that the debt he owed and the punishment he deserved were no longer on the books. David was polluted and perverted by his sin, but the forgiveness of God moved the Lord not to count David’s sin against him. Furthermore, this state of blessedness was reserved for the one in whose spirit is no deceit. David had lived many months deceiving himself by rationalizing and covering his sin.

B David’s Concealment of Sin (32:3–4)

SUPPORTING IDEA: David recalls the time when he refused to confess his sin to the Lord and experienced the chastening hand of God, both emotionally and physically.

32:3–4. Suddenly, the psalm shifts from the present (vv. 1–2) to the past. David suppressed and repressed his sin. He was talking about that time in his life, after he

sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, when he kept silent and refused to confess his sin to God. David's conscience brought an awareness of God's moral law. An alarm sounded within his soul when the law of right and wrong, God's law, was violated. The Bible is clear; what a man sows, that he will also reap (cp. Gal. 6:7).

If he sows to the flesh, he will reap in the flesh.

David declared that his bones wasted away, meaning that his physical stamina and vitality were drained because the Lord's hand was heavy upon him. It was God's hand inflicting this physical discipline upon David's body. Furthermore, David noted, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. David's failure to confess his sins led to a debilitating and draining weakness. He was also emotionally distraught, because he spoke of his groaning all day long. His soul was aching, racked with pain, agonizing, depressed, and downcast. His zest for life was slowly being drained away.

C David's Confession of Sin (32:5)

SUPPORTING IDEA: David stops deceiving himself and acknowledges, uncovers, and confesses his sin to the Lord.

32:5. Verse 5 is the most pivotal verse of this psalm, serving as a climactic turning point for David. Notice that David, in rapid-fire succession, stated the same truth three times in three different ways. This succession is shown in that he acknowledged ... did not cover up ... confess. David said of this cataclysmic shift, I acknowledged my sin to you. He confessed his sin to God because his sin was against God. All sin is ultimately against God, even when it is committed against other persons (cp. 2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51:4).

David also wrote, I ... did not cover up my iniquity, meaning that he did not attempt to conceal his iniquity when Nathan confronted him. The phrase "did not cover up" means to bring something out in the open or to reveal something. It is the same word used in verse 1 which is translated "whose sin is covered," but here it is in the negative, "did not cover up." The confession of sin is the uncovering of our sin before God, exposing it for what it is.

David then said to his own soul, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." To confess (Heb. *yada*) means to speak out openly, even to sing out in public praise. Here it means to declare openly one's sin to God, to speak out openly to him about

one's sin. This David did in Psalm 51:3 when he said to the Lord, "For I know my transgressions." David knew that he had transgressed the sovereign rule of God over his life. After David's actions that demonstrated true repentance, he declared of the Lord, You forgave the guilt of my sin. The word *forgave* (Heb. *nasa*) literally means "to have the burden of sin lifted off." Before the sin is confessed, it is a heavy burden.

D David's Counsel About Sin (32:6–11)

SUPPORTING IDEA: David instructs and counsels God's people on how they may also go about acknowledging their sin to God.

32:6. Having experienced God's forgiveness, David encouraged true believers to go to God and pray to him while he may be found. The prayer that the godly are urged to offer to God is the prayer in which we confess our sin to God, seeking his forgiveness (v. 5). David continued, Surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. The imagery is of a believer who is overwhelmed in a storm or flood that threatens his life. This flood of mighty waters is God's chastening deluge that brings severe consequences.

32:7. David turned to God in faith and trust. In the storms of life, David could say of the Lord, You are my hiding place. Interestingly, God was David's hiding place from God himself. It was God who was chastening David. It was his divine hand that was heavy upon him. Forgiveness for the believer is a deliverance from God's chastisement.

Furthermore, David exclaimed, You will protect me from trouble. To protect (Heb. *nasar*) means "to guard, to protect, to hide," or "to conceal" as a watchman would guard a city, preserving it from trouble (Jer. 31:6). While protecting his servant David, God surrounded him with songs of deliverance. From the depths of despair to the heights of praise, this psalm is a song of deliverance. Out of this painful ordeal flowed some of the greatest songs of praise.

32:8–9. David also counseled others: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. On the basis of David's own painful experience, he instructed others: I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding. The Lord exhorted the people not to be like the obstinate horse or stubborn mule that refuses to go where its rider leads. Instead,

the godly should respond promptly to God on their own accord. David was like a wild horse that rushed into sin, but when it came to confessing his sin, he held back like a stubborn mule.

The warning is clear for the person who will not humble himself before God's sovereign rule. If we do not submit to the Lord, we will be controlled by bit and bridle. If the people of God act as disobedient children, he will use severe means to get their attention and gain control (cp. Prov. 26:3). Persistent disobedience by the godly will lead to the chastening hand of God (Heb. 12:5–11).

32:10–11. David contrasted the woes of the wicked with the Lord's unfailing love.

These woes were distresses. At times the term was used to speak of sickness. Because David was trusting in the Lord, he knew that the Lord's unfailing love would surround him. This unfailing love (Heb. *hesed*) refers to God's covenant love, a binding, unconditional commitment on God's part to those who trust him (see "Deeper Discoveries," 23:6).

This psalm ends the way it began—with a declaration for the righteous to rejoice in the Lord and be glad. This call on the part of David is a call to all believers to rejoice in the Lord's forgiveness. Specifically, it is a call to sing, all you who are upright in heart!

MAIN IDEA REVIEW: David, having experienced the forgiveness and blessing of God following the confession of his sin, instructs others in this path of forgiveness.