

Psalm 32 • Dealing with Sin

Introduction

Psalm 32 is the first to be designated a “Maskil”. We’re not 100% certain what this means, but many Jewish commentators from old often identify it as a Psalm that is to be explained and accompanied by an interpreter. In other words, it was designed not just as a song or prayer but as a tool to instruct others. In this case, the teaching is how one is brought to a clear sense of their sin, acknowledge it, and discover the pardoning power of God’s grace. This is an Old Testament teaching on the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin by the grace of God. This is a particularly powerful Old Testament teaching in that there is no mention whatsoever of the Mosaic sacrifices often associated with sin. David provides an application of how the process is supposed to work and an indirect revelation of the true role of the ritual sacrifices.

¹How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!

²How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

[Read v.1-2]

Q: Why does David begin with the end result of this teaching concerning God’s forgiveness of sin?

A: As a teaching tool, it’s an introduction to the overall content of the lesson. We are provided the goal of the teaching in advance and to what the following verses specifically address.

Q: What is the implication of v.2 for those whose sins are not forgiven? What is the consequence?

A: God charges the person according to their sins, also known as “iniquity”. Final judgment will either provide pardon or condemnation.

Q: What is the further implication in v.2 concerning the person that has been forgiven?

A: The statement, “in whose spirit there is no deceit” describes someone that is not just thoroughly convinced of their sin, but sincere in their own repentance. Their confession was devoid of deceit or hypocrisy and therefore came from a sincere heart.

Point: The process of forgiveness involves sincerity on the part of the seeker, not just going through the motions of asking to be forgiven “yet again”.

³When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

⁵I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;

I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”;
And You forgave the guilt of my sin.
Selah.

[Read v.3-5]

Q: What are the basic things being compared and contrasted here?

A: In v.3-4 it’s “keeping silent about my sin” versus v.5’s “I acknowledged my sin to You”.

Q: What is the main difference between keeping silent versus confessing?

A: Keeping silent led not to forgiveness but further burdens and problems; confession was the only option resulting in forgiveness.

Application: What has been your experience in trying to live with sin? Have you noticed that sin is often associated with the word “burden”? What might be indicated by someone that no longer feels the burden of sin and its consequences?

Q: In the context of the Old Testament rituals of sacrifices for sin, what is David teaching in this first step of silence versus confession?

A: There has to be personal, discernible confession, not just a sacrifice to cover things up. The process begins with how one feels about sin and whether they’re willing to acknowledge it.

⁶Therefore, let everyone who is godly
pray to You in a time when You may
be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters they will
not reach him.
⁷You are my hiding place; You preserve
me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of
deliverance. Selah.

[Read v.6-7]

Q: Besides David, who are additional biblical characters that prayed for the forgiveness of sin?

A: Moses and Daniel are prominent examples who began the process not by burning sacrifices but by engaging God in prayer. However, none is more preeminent than Christ Himself:

*“And forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”
Luke 11:4*

Q: What is implied in the caveat that one should pray to God “in a time when You may be found”?

A: At the highest level, the opportunity to come to Christ for forgiveness of sin will come to an end. At a more granular level, it probably also refers to seeking God at every opportunity, not just during appointed times associated with rituals or the operation of the Tabernacle/Temple. (For us today, it's not waiting for a church service.)

Q: What do you suppose the reference to “a flood of great waters” means?

A: Think of the example of Noah: Those that remained in a right, forgiven relationship with God were saved in spite of the overwhelming flood which destroyed everyone else. Forgiveness of sin is the only real and valid “rescue” from God's point of view since He sees what sin (or its forgiveness) will produce for us in eternity.

Q: Why do you suppose so many terms of protection are employed in v.7 to describe the state of the forgiven person, such as “hiding place”, “preserver”, and “surround”?

A: It conveys the teaching that Believers are not immune from the problems of this life, but protected.

Application: *How seriously do you not just pray for forgiveness of sin, but seek God's protection from it? Having obtained forgiveness, you don't walk right back out into sin's stronghold, do you?*

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;
I will counsel you with My eye upon you.
⁹Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
Otherwise they will not come near to you.

[Read v.8-9]

Q: What are the 3 things that God will do subsequent to forgiveness of sin that are the most effective means of not revisiting sin?

1. "I will instruct you" is the biblical way of stating, "I will make you understand", not simply convey information. God provides understanding not just of the consequences of sin, but the benefits of righteousness.
2. "...teach you in the way you should go" is God's promise to provide the path that leads to Him, defined by His will and ways so that we know for sure the right way to walk in Him.
3. "I will counsel you with My eye upon you" is a way of stating that He will not just guide us with His Word but accompanied by His very presence.

Q: How are the things in v.8 contrasted with the example of the horse and mule in v.9?

A: An integral part of the process of forgiveness of sins is to learn the right lesson and become better for it, ceasing to repeat the same behavior over and over again.

Point: *These things combine to describe the work of sanctification, one wholly and exclusively devoted to God's will and way alone. The teaching here is that forgiveness is but a beginning leading to a lifestyle **AWAY** from sin and **TOWARDS** a life dedicated to God.*

Application: *Have you come away changed/on a different course after seeking God's forgiveness or, like a stubborn mule, returned to the same behavior? Do you understand that seeking forgiveness is not the **END** of the process but the beginning for something larger leading to permanent change? What results have you experienced when your actions stop at merely asking for forgiveness?*

¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
But he who trusts in the LORD,
lovingkindness shall surround him.
¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

[Read v.10-11]

Q: What is the proper context of v.10 given the discussion to this point?

A: Those that are like mules and learn nothing incur greater sorrows as they're mired in the same, repeated behavior. Those that embrace His instruction, teaching, and counsel are showing that they are "he who trusts in the LORD" and therefore experiences not just forgiveness, but the whole of God's grace.

Q: What is the key phrase provided in v.11 that describes the goal of not just being forgiven, but living in the abundance of God's grace?

A: "Upright in heart". It describes someone who has undergone real, legitimate change from a heart predisposed to sin to a heart inclined towards God's ways. It sums up the true goal of forgiveness, to effect permanent and lasting change.

Epilogue

*The purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices were designed as the **END** of the process, not the process in and of itself. Each person, coming to the personal realization of their sin and first seeking God through prayer, finalized the process with a sacrifice. In our New Testament world, this is what Christ did for us on the cross. In either case, God's desire is for the person to be changed from the heart, no longer bound to nor seeking sin, but fully engaged in the process of sanctification—being wholly dedicated from the heart.*