

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
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The Reality of Sin & Guilt (Part II)

Lords Day 44

Question 114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

Answer: No: but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; (a) yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God. (b)

(a) 1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. Rom.7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. Rom.7:15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. Eccl.7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. 1 Cor.13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. (b) Rom.7:22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: Ps.1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

Question 115. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

Answer: First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know (a) our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; (b) likewise, that we constantly endeavour and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come. (c)

(a) Rom.3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Ps. 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. (b) Matt.5:6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Rom.7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Rom.7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (c) 1 Cor.9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. Philip. 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Philip.3:12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Philip.3:13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, Philip.3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul Wells has noted, "When it comes to saying what sin is in its fundamental nature, we run into [the] problem that goes beyond the modern trivialisation of sin. It is easy to slip from talking about sin to talking about sins, and so to limit ourselves to specific problems that can easily be sorted. Sin, however, is singular before it is plural and concerns man's fundamental situation in life. Sin is not primarily what we do, but what we *are*."

"Moreover, looking at sin is like trying to see the bottom of a muddy pond. IT is murky and incomprehensible. 'Man worships at an altar of a stagnant pool and when he sees his reflection he's fulfilled.' Why should we sin, and why do we sin again? Such questions underline the folly and irrationality of sin. The enigma is that nobody finds sin naturally disagreeable but enjoyable and satisfying—at least until its toxic waste starts to pollute the atmosphere of life.

"The reasons for sin are enigmatic and inexplicable. Attempts to locate its essential nature in a fundamental attitude such as pride, laziness, or self-centredness run aground on the mysteriousness of sin. Nonetheless, its negative orientation cannot be doubted, as day by day we suffer from it, because of our own nature as sinners and that of those around us. Man's relationship with him: 'Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; (Ps. 51:4). This is surprising, as David's sin was against Uriah and Bathsheba, whom he had wronged, but he sees it primarily as a break of relations with God. Man's sin offends God. He is the first victim, because the creature's sin opposes his will and desire."¹

You cannot read the Psalms, in particular, without coming across the theme of repentance again and again. Martin Luther was once asked, "What are your favorite Psalms?" - to which he responded, "The Psalms of Paul." This was Luther's way of declaring the Old Testament foundation for so much of Paul's theology, especially as found in the "Penitential Psalms." There are seven of these: Psalm 5, 32, 37, 51, 102, 130 and 143 – Psalms that portray a deep sense of sin, and a heart-felt experience of forgiveness (Psalm 32:1, 2 cited by Paul in Romans 4:6). Psalm 32 is the first of thirteen Psalms that bears the heading MASCHIL. The meaning is somewhat obscure. It could mean "a didactic Psalm," that is, used to instruct (cf. v. 8); it could mean "meditation," or it could refer to "a skillful Psalm," one that required delicate and artistic ability musically. In any case, the emphasis is on understanding, and attention to its parts is stressed. Chronologically the psalm was written after the great confession of Psalm 51, and II Samuel 12:14ff provides the historical setting for both Psalms.

I. DAVID'S COMMENDATION (vv. 1, 2)

The blessedness of forgiveness – the Psalm begins with a beatitude ASHREY, literally "Oh, the happinesses or blessednesses," the Hebrew word is in the plural and express overwhelming gladness. The sense of blessedness is directly linked to forgiveness. "He who is not acquainted with God's holiness and purity, who knows not sin's desert and sinfulness, knows nothing of forgiveness."²

A. Sin. vv. 1, 2 set forth the objective facts. Three different words are used to describe sin:

1. PESHA - "transgression," the LXX has ANOMIA - "lawlessness." The word means apostasy, rebellion, a breaking away from God, expressed by outward defiance of God's revealed will as stated in the Law.
2. CHATAAH - "sin," Greek HARMATIA – erring from or missing the mark, a deviation from the path (compare Romans 3:12).
3. AVON - "iniquity" - this word describes the inward perversion of our nature – the depravity of our being manifesting itself in outward wrong-doing. "At first our conscience becomes awakened to the guilt of some act of transgression, but as the terrible question presses itself more and more upon our attention, we are finally landed in the painful conviction that behind the isolated acts of transgression, and in the manifestation of sin, there is *iniquity*, the natural depravity of our being."³ Cf. David's remark in Psalm 51:5.

B. Atonement. Three words are used to describe forgiveness, and all with "atonement" in mind.

1. NASA - "forgiven" - literally it means to "bear away," in the sense that a burden is removed (cf. Exodus 34:7; John 1:29).
2. KASAH - "to cover, to hide." This word and KAHPHAR are cognate. It is in the sight of God that sin is covered (cf. Isaiah 38:17, 43:25, 44:22).
3. LO-CHASHAV - "not reckoned or imputed" - refers to canceling the account after payment has been paid.

NOTE: These three terms can only be understood in light of Leviticus 16 and the great Day of Atonement, which typified the "lamb of God," the suffering servant of Jehovah depicted in Isaiah 53. Compare the terms used there.

C. Sincerity. "... in whose spirit there is no guile;" that is, no deceitfulness. There is open honesty with oneself and with God; there is no attempt made to cloak or hide the facts (cf. Proverbs 28:13). "God only thus forgives and justifies one who, with all truth and sincerity of heart, confesses his sin, making no reservation, no excuses, no attempts to still hold fast and hide some darling lust."⁴

II. DAVID'S CONFESSION (vv. 3-5)

The way of restoration. Having stated the objective truth, David now illustrates the doctrine from his own experience.

A. His Affliction (3, 4). He kept silent, and three things kept him company:

1. His bones waxed old – *decay*
2. God's hand was heavy upon him – *depression*
3. His life dried up – *drought*

As one of the old divines has wisely said, "He who will not speak his sin to God has to groan."⁵ The Psalmist suffered and complained, but did not confess (compare Hosea 7:14). V. 4 closes with a SELAH, meaning "stop and be thoughtful."

B. His confession (5). Stated in a threefold manner:

1. *I will acknowledge* - "make known" - literally "I will begin to make known." The tense of the Hebrew verb graphically represents the confession being made or in the ongoing act of confession.
2. *I will confess* – prefaced with "I said." Calvin observed, "While the wicked are dragged by force, just as a judge compels offenders to come to trial, he assures us that he came deliberately and will full purpose of mind; for the term, 'said' just signifies that he deliberated with himself."⁶
3. *I hid not* – literally I did not cover; same word as in v. 1. Only God is allowed to cover sin.

C. His Forgiveness (5). And THOU forgivest – the "thou" is emphatic in the Hebrew text, and the form of the sentence expresses the immediateness of God's pardon. Another SELAH follows.

III. DAVID'S CONFIRMATION (vv. 6, 7)

He based this admonition upon his own experience - "For this reason" is instructional. Note to whom it is addressed:

A. Everyone Who is Godly – that is believing, one who actually seeks after God, who does not ignore God. The Hebrew word for 'godly' is CHASSID, one who loves God.

B. Everyone who... Prays – thus, who seeks after the true and living God (compare Hebrews 11:6).

NOTE: "... in a time when thou mayest be found" implies that there is a time when God may not be found (cf. Proverbs 1:28 and II Corinthians 6:2), a time when only judgment is found. The expression, "flood of

great waters," describes judgment, a hearkening back to the time of Noah (Genesis 6) and the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Compare also Isaiah 28:2, 17, 30:28 and Nahum 1:8.

C. His Appropriation (7) - David applies his own admonition, "Thou art my secret hiding place." Again the "Thou" is emphatic. Shouts of joy and deliverance accompany the redeemed, compare with v. 11 – SELAH.

IV. GOD'S COMMUNICATION (vv. 8, 9)

At this point the language of the Psalm points to God as the speaker, who declares what He will do what His people are not to do.

A. The Affirmation (8) - "I will instruct... teach... guide." Note the triple assurance. All of this involves an intimate relation with the living God.

B. The Admonition (9) - "Be not" like horse and mule, that is without understanding. God desires willing obedience, but His will is not hampered by man's will; God can and does put bit and bridle upon men (cf. Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4; and Pharaoh, Exodus 5-14).

V. DAVID'S CONVICTION AND CONCLUSION (vv. 10, 11)

God can and will deal with man, whether man wishes to deal with God or not. David confirms this in v. 10. Here he contrasts the mercy shown to the righteous with the misery of the rebellious; all of the saints are to rejoice and shout for joy. Note the final triplet - "rejoice," "exult" and "shout in triumph." David understood his forgiveness only in the light of atonement - "without the shedding of blood there is *no* forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). Note the words of John Owen, "To see into the mystery of the love of the Father, working in the blood of the Mediator; to consider by faith the great transaction of divine wisdom, justice, and mercy therein, - how few attain unto it! To come unto God by Christ for forgiveness, and therein to behold the law issuing all its threats and curses in his blood, and losing its sting, putting an end to its obligation unto punishment, in the cross; to see all sins gathered up in the hands of God's justice, and made to meet on the Mediator, and eternal love springing forth triumphantly from his blood, flourishing into pardon, grace, mercy, forgiveness – this the heart of a sinner can be enlarged unto only by the Spirit of God."⁷

¹ Paul Wells, *Crosswords: The Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement* (Christian Focus 2006), p. 60

² John Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm 130, in Works IV* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 394.

³ David Baron, *Types, Psalms, and Prophecies: Being a Series of Old Testament Studies* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1981), p. 91.

⁴ J.J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (George Bell and Sons, 1883), p. 121.

⁵ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David II* (rpt. Baker, 1978), p. 101.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms I* (Eerdmans, 1963), p. 531.

⁷ Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 407.