

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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| Series: | Scripture Memory | | Pastor/Teacher |
| Number: | 117 | | Gary L.W. Johnson |
| Text: | 1 John 1:8-10; Psalm 32 | | |
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CONFESSION OF SIN (Part III)

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 trivialization 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-centeredness 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: Psalms 5, 32, 37, 51, 102, 130 and 143 – Psalms that portray a deep sense of sin, and a heartfelt 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 2 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 expresses 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 wrongdoing. “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 *kaphar* 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 cancelling 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 with 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* forgives – the “thou” is emphatic in the Hebrew text, and the form of the sentence expresses the immediateness of God’s pardon. Another *Selah* follows.

NOTE: As in Psalm 51, David desires not only forgiveness but cleansing from the pollution of sin. This is also the thought of 1 John 1:9. Hiebert observes that “The words *to forgive us our sins*” indicate God’s response to the guilt of our sins. As a failure to conform to God’s law, our sins make us guilty and subject to punishment. But when we confess them to Him He acts to *forgive (aphē)*, as a definite act *to remove*, more literally *to send away*, those sins so that they no longer stand between us and God. They are *sent away as a cloud is dissolved, never to appear again*. And we should not allow Satan to bring up those sins again and use them to disrupt our peace with God. The added phrase, *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* declares that our sins not only make us guilty but also make us unclean. The aorist verb *cleanse (katharisē)* declares that upon our confession God specifically acts to cleanse us from the pollution of our sins. Sin produces a defilement which only God can remove. He acts to remove *all unrighteousness (pasēs adikias)*, underlining that the cleansing is total, not partial. *All unrighteousness* is similar to *all sin* in verse 7, but the noun *unrighteousness* here describes our sin as a failure to measure up to the standard of right as set forth by the Word of God. This total cleansing restores us to fellowship with God. The *blood of Jesus Christ his Son* (v. 7) is the cleansing agent, not our confession; but the confession of our sins makes possible the application of the divine cleansing. Stott offers the reminder, *There are many warnings in Scripture about the danger of concealing our sins, and many promises of blessing if we confess them.*”⁷

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 2 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 – thus the heart of a sinner can be enlarged unto only by the Spirit of God.”⁸

CONCLUSION: Martin Lloyd-Jones highlights how the character of God is accented in our text: “*He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* What does this mean? Well, says John, if you want further comfort and assurance, here it is – it is the very character of God Himself. God has promised that in Christ He has provided the way. He promised it in the old dispensation; He gave us types and shadows, all the ceremonies of the Levitical priesthood. But, God said, I am going to provide a perfect sacrifice, and when He comes, sin will be entirely forgiven. And God is faithful; all He has promised has been perfectly fulfilled. He has promised that if we confess our sins, if we look to His Son dying upon that cross, He will forgive us freely. Therefore have no doubts, says John; rely upon the faithfulness of God to His own word and promises. But even stronger than that, John tells us that God is just, and this is John’s way of putting what Paul has said in Romans 3:25. Paul puts it like this: The problem of sin to God, if I may put it with reverence, is, how can He forgive sin and still remain a holy and just God? The answer is in the cross of Christ. He has set Him forth *to be a propitiation for our sins*, and the result is that in the light of the death of Christ upon the cross, God can be *just and the justifier* (v. 26) of the ungodly. The cross of Christ justifies God; he remains holy because He has punished sin in the death, the shed blood, of His Son. So as I am aware of my sinfulness and my unworthiness and my unrighteousness, I look to the blood of Jesus Christ, and I see there the forgiveness of God. I see the justice of God; I know that there God has forgiven and still forgives and will forgive. It is not that I am to make merchandise of the blood of Christ; not that I am to regard the blood of Christ as a cheap thing which allows me to continue in sin that grace may abound. No, it is that I can have this confidence that the death of Christ upon the cross is the propitiation for my sins – indeed, for the sins of the whole world – and that all my sins have been dealt with and are covered, are removed and banished there in Him. Knowing thus the faithfulness and justice of God and the power of the blood of Christ to deliver me and to cleanse me from the guilt and stain of my sins, I can with confidence go forward, knowing that all is clear, my conscience has been cleansed, and I can continue to walk with God.”⁹

ENDNOTES

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 J. Calvin, *Commentary on The Book of Psalms I* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 531.

⁷ D. E. Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (BJU Press, 1991), p. 67.

⁸ Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

⁹ M. Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship with God: Studies in 1 John* (Crossway, 1993), p. 144.