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On Dealing Biblically With Sin: Our Victory in Christ

by Dr. Dan Pecota

Most of us, no doubt, have favorite verses, passages or chapters in the Bible. Some of my favorite verses are the typical: John 3:16, 3:36 and Romans 8:1 (in a modern version, because the best Greek texts do not have the phrase: "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit"), but also Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Galatians 2:20 and 6:14, Ephesians 2:8-10, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 4:14-16 and others.

Think of the following that show the tenderness, compassion and understanding of our Lord. In Matthew 12:20 we read: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not extinguish..." Recall the incident of Jesus healing the youthful demoniac after the Transfiguration. In Mark 9:22, the father says, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." When Jesus gently rebukes him, the father replies, "I do believe, help my unbelief." Jesus puts the best possible interpretation on the miserable failure of the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane in saying, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." These Scriptures greatly encourage me whenever I fail.

Among my favorite passages are: Romans 8:28-39, Philippians 2:1-11 and 1 John 1:5-2:2. (In fact, in one of my classes I have the students memorize these.) Some of my favorite chapters are: Isaiah 6, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 11, Revelation 22 and, of course, many of the Psalms.

The author of *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says,

"Among all the books of antiquity, none has made such a powerful appeal to the human heart as *The Psalms*. In no other book of the Bible can one find such varieties of religious experience. Here the heart of Israel is laid bare in manifold expressions of faith, for Israel knew experientially the truth of God's revelation. In the various psalms Israel's insights of former days are united with worship and thus given permanence. ...Hence, in the Book of Psalms there is a universal quality which can only come from a combined expression of the spiritual experiences of men in many periods of history and in a variety of circumstances of life. Each man was motivated by his desire to respond to the living God. All were united by the inherent desire to respond by means of their deepest emotions. Every type of religious experience is reflected in the crucible of daily life and projected upon the life of the believer today. There is thus in the Psalms a timelessness which makes the book applicable to every age of history." (pg 491).

You name the emotion or the religious experience and it finds expression in *The Psalms*. One of my favorites is Psalm 32. It has been for years; long before I read in *Christianity Today* (vol. 40, #12; 10/28/96, p. 17) that it is the "favorite Old Testament passage" of Luis Palau. In this Psalm David gives us insight into the universal dilemma of sin and how he handles it. It is a penitential psalm which someone has entitled, "The Joy of Forgiveness." (See also Ps. 51.)

In a sense, I also see it as prophetic of the work Christ accomplished for the whole world by his dying on a cross. Palau says, "Psalm 32 is a clear statement of the New Testament gospel. For troubled souls overwhelmed by their guilt, sin, and failure, few passages in all of Scripture give peace like this one. Offering assurance of forgiveness, Psalm 32 lets us know that God has set us free." Isn't that great!!

How did David handle sin in his life?

He Recognized That God Had Covered His Sin (1-2)

David uses four distinct words for "sin" in these two verses. The word *transgressions* conveys the idea of willful disobedience, rebellion. Who among us has not been in that place? I think of the Old Testament descriptions of Israel. Words that speak to the idea *rebellion* occur 154 times in the *NIV*.

The word *sins* refers to the concept of sin which we call "missing the mark." Haven't we all fallen short?

The third word, *sin-iniquity*, refers to a twisted mind, a perverse spirit. Immediately I think of the Pharisees and the false teachers who sought to turn the believers from the truth. Don't we have our share of these in our time? We need to seek God's help to prevent us from becoming a Pharisee and from teaching false doctrine!

The fourth word, *deceit*, refers to both self-deception and to the deceit of others. As to the latter, I think of Ananias and Sapphira in their deceitful attempt to gain the public praise of the apostles. Regarding the former, remember the message to the church in Laodicea. Jesus introduces himself as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness." The Laodiceans felt they were already rich and didn't need forgiveness. However, Jesus said to them: "But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." How self-deceived can one be? In his first letter (1:8) John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is

not in us." Who among us has the arrogance to claim that we are **perfectly** obeying the two great commandments? Even as I write this I know I am not! Remember that God hates a lying tongue (Prov. 6:17).

Our God loves to show mercy and forgiveness. Read Psalm 103:8-14. **YEA!!** O how happy, blessed is the person who recognizes that about God. He does not count my sin against me—because of Christ. He paid the debt of sin, and the Father will not twice demand payment. It is God's nature to forgive. Remember 1 John 1:9 He is **just**. Would we think that justice has been served if a convicted criminal goes free? But the Father has placed all the sins of the whole world on our Lord. Jesus paid my prison time. **YEA!!**

God has covered our sins. Some of you may sing the chorus that goes in part: "I am covered over with the robe of righteousness that Jesus gives to me. I am covered over with the precious blood of Jesus, and he lives in me. What a joy it is to know my heavenly Father loves me so, and gives to me my Jesus. When he looks at me, he sees not what I used to be, but he sees Jesus." He sees us through the sprinkled blood on the **MERCY** seat.

He Recognized That Sin Concealed Will Destroy (3-4)

David expresses the burden that silence, regarding his sin, brought him. He uses graphic terms to describe how he feels. His unacknowledged sin causes him deep distress. He says that his "bones wasted away through (his) groaning all day long." His strength, literally his life-juices, "was sapped as in the heat of summer." He was experiencing a spiritual drought.

He knew all this came from God. He says, "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me..." Please note that it was **God's** hand that caused him all the distress he had been going through. *The NIV Study Bible* says, "Neither the sin nor the form of suffering is identified, other than that the latter was physically and psychologically devastating. But it would be uncharacteristic of the Psalms to speak of mere emotional disturbance

brought on by suppressed sin. Some affliction, perhaps illness, was the instrument of God's chastisement..." (pg. 816).

If this seems too heavy an idea remember Psalm 38:3-5. I have a belief that "pop psychology" has given guilt the wrong conception. I am not referring to what some call "neurotic guilt."

Among us are those who, no matter how trivial their act or attitude, have a heavy burden of guilt. They are like Charlie Brown in the "Peanuts" cartoon: "Everything I do makes me feel guilty."

True guilt functions as God's good gift, to let us know that something has gone awry. We should not seek to evade or avoid real guilt. More often, it seems, our problem is not guilt but the lack of it. For those who have tender consciences, please understand me. I seek not to place more guilt on you. But, when we sin, we need to feel the guilt pangs of our offense; we need to feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I have more concern for my spiritual condition when I don't feel guilty as compared to when I do. An American psychiatrist, Karl Menninger wrote: *Whatever Became of Sin?* I think our society needs to reflect on that question.

The originator of the cartoon characters, Frank and Ernest, depicts them carrying a lantern as they are searching for something. This is to remind us of the philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope who carried a lantern in search of an honest man. The cartoon is based on this incident. Ernest says to Frank, "Frankly I'd be satisfied with finding a guilty man who acknowledged it." I shall never forget a former pastor's frequent exhortation: "I'd rather sleep with a wet dog than a guilty conscience." Wouldn't that be awful? To sleep with a wet dog? So, let us be willing to thank God for being gracious in allowing us to experience guilt. And wouldn't that idea "blow the socks off" some? But unless we experience guilt we will never know the joy of confession and forgiveness.

He Recognized That Sin Confessed Brings Forgiveness

David affirms that full confession brings blessed

relief. Haven't we experienced that, probably more frequently than we care to admit. He refused to cover up his iniquity. He recognized that the sin was **his**; he did not blame others, like so many of us do in our society. In this verse, David refers to "**my sin, my iniquity, my transgressions and my sin.**" In so doing he uses the three most common words for "sin" in the Old Testament. He willingly acknowledged he was the sinner.

Observe, as well, that David was determined to confess. He said to himself, and to God, "I will confess." One cannot help but think of the prodigal son, who understood his condition and the better situation of the servants at his home. He would have stayed in the pig sty if he had not said to himself, "I will arise and go to my father."

Forgiveness does not automatically happen whenever we sin. Remember 1 John 1:9. Recall also what we refer to as The Lord's Prayer. (I would prefer to call it The Model Prayer.) Part of what we are to pray is: "Forgive us our debts/transgressions as we forgive our debtors/those who transgress against us." This must be part of our daily prayer experience.

God forgave the guilt of David's sin. **YEA!!** As far as God was concerned, the past was forgotten. Please keep in mind and heart the verse that says, "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps.103:12).

We also need to recall the time when Peter came to Jesus with the question: "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus responded, "Peter, you've got to be kidding! Not seven times, but 70x7." (A Pecota paraphrase.) Now Jesus certainly did not mean we should keep a card file on each of our friends and put a check mark every time we forgive them. (Whenever I forgive one of my friends 487 times, I say to myself, "Hooray, only three more times do I have to forgive this "turkey.") He meant we are to forgive without limitations. I have said to myself, more times than can be counted, "If God expects me to forgive that way, how great is His forgiveness?" **His mercy has no limit!**

*He Recognized That **Confidence** Before God Comes To Those Who Resolve The Issue Of Sin (6-11) He had confidence of **refuge** (6-7)*

David exhorts us to pray as he did: Now, while God may be found. In a sense, God hears only two prayers: the prayer of the sinner and the prayer of the godly. Jesus teaches this in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee in the temple. Feeling prideful, the Pharisee stood before the God of heaven and congratulated himself. The Publican would not lift his head skyward, and instead, beat his breast in remorse and contrition and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus reports that the latter went to his home justified.

God becomes our refuge from guilt. The waters may rise and we might experience personal condemnation. Fingers might also be pointed at us. (Please keep in mind that I do not exclude from my thinking Jesus' teaching about about a brother who sins against another in Matthew 18:15-20. Nor do I exclude Paul's teaching in Galatians 6:1 about a person caught in a sin. Obviously, there has to be an awareness of sin in both cases.) But, whatever the distress, God remains our hiding place and deliverer.

*He had confidence of **guidance** (8-9)*

Though my view of these verses may be contrary to some, I think my opinion meshes well with the basic flow of the Psalm. For example, some may view these verses as coming from a priest giving godly instruction to the people. I personally think it is quite appropriate to relate these with the words of David. He says, "Let my experience guide, instruct you. Learn from me." I don't believe it would be out of line to compare this admonition to his sin with Bathsheba. He instructs us not to be like a stubborn mule, which he is, until Nathan confronts him, and he quickly repents. He learns his lesson, and he appeals to us to gain wisdom through his failure and contrition.

*He had confidence of **God's unfailing love** (10)*

David asserts that the wicked have woes. Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that the

wicked are on top; they are the ones who have it made. Remember Proverbs 13:15—"The way of the unfaithful (AV=transgressors) is hard." The wicked have present woe, and distress. But even more tragically, they face eternal separation from God. In the past, friends of mine have said something like this: "I'm not worried about hell; I'll have a lot of friends there." But that is not true by any stretch of the imagination. There will be no good of any kind there.

A confessor is surrounded by God's unfailing love. The one who trusts in the Lord stands secure for time and eternity. Praise his name forever. **YEA!!**

Therefore, "rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" You have dealt with the sin in your life, so you are now righteous and upright in heart in the eyes of him who is altogether pure and righteous. Our bodies are now the temple of the **Holy Spirit**. Joy and gladness are for the righteous. Singing is for the upright. We all know that, but a question remains: **Will we follow the word of the Lord through David to get there?** That decision is ours to make, and no one can make it for us!



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The Barnabas Files newsletter is published monthly by Northwest College. It is our intention that this publication, written by our faculty, will be an inspiration and will encourage the reader.

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