

PSALMS

Chapter 32

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.¹¹ Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Ps 32 A grateful testimony of joy for God’s gift of forgiveness toward those who with integrity confess their sins and are receptive to God’s rule in their lives. The psalm appears to be a liturgical dialogue between David and God in the presence of the worshipers at the sanctuary. In vv. 1–2 and again in v. 11 David speaks to the assembly; in vv. 3–7 he speaks to God (in their hearing); in vv. 8–10 he is addressed by one of the Lord’s priests. (CSB)

Numbered with other penitential psalms (6; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). *Maskil*. Penitential psalm of Confession and Absolution. Luther saw these psalms as instructive in the sense of wisdom and understanding within a spiritual and holy context over against a worldly context (cf 14:2; 53:2). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, blessed in forgiveness; vv 3–4, wasting away; v 5, confession; vv 6–7, the Lord is a hiding place; vv 8–9, instruction; vv 10–11, proverbs of trust in the Lord. (TLSB)

32 title *maskil*. Occurs also in the titles of Ps 42; 44–45; 52–55; 74; 78; 88–89; 142. The Hebrew word perhaps indicates that these psalms contain instruction in godliness. (CSB)

This psalm is one of the clearest statements of the doctrines of repentance, justification and forgiveness in the OT. It is closely related to Psalm 51. It appears that this psalm, like Psalm 51, was written to express David’s repentance after the prophet Nathan had confronted him with his sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12). The aim of this psalm is to teach its readers the wisdom of sincere repentance. (PBC)

32:1–2 Exuberant proclamation of the happy state of those who experience God’s forgiveness. (CSB)

Blessed ... Blessed. The happy condition of those who revere the Lord and do his will (see 94:12; 112:1; 119:1–2; 128:1; Pr 29:18; cf. Ps 41:1; 106:3; Pr 14:21; Isa 56:2), who put their trust in him (see 40:4; 84:5, 12; 144:15; 146:5; Pr 16:20; Isa 30:18; Jer 17:7; cf. Ps 2:12; 34:8), and so are blessed by God (see especially 41:1–3; 144:12–14; see also Mt 5:3–12). The Psalter begins by

proclaiming the blessedness of the godly and ends by calling all living things to praise God in his earthly and heavenly sanctuaries (Ps 150). (CSB)

The word means more than “happy,” because happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances. “Blessed” here refers to the ultimate well-being and distinctive joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. (CSB-Mt)

happiness; only in masculine plural construction as interjection, how *happy!*:—blessed, happy. (CSB)

O how very happy is the man. Means the full measure of the happy circumstances. (Leupold)

Who has a joy, of which neither crosses nor losses can deprive him; who will be happy as long as he lives; and who has still more happiness in store for him when death is past. The psalmist is not speaking of the good man as happy because he is aiming at happiness, but as being so because he follows the Law of God, and finds joy therein, without seeking for joy for its own sake. (PC)

are forgiven ... are covered ... does not count against him. Repetition with variation emphasizes and illumines. For Paul’s use of these verses see Ro 4:6–8. (CSB)

Hbr *kasah*. God grants a verdict of not guilty in light of true confession (cf LC III 92). Christ’s very blood (cf Heb 9:13–14) covers and cleanses us from all our sin. Augustine: “Not by the merits of works, but by the grace of God, man is delivered, confessing his sins” (NPNF 1 8:70). Luther: “The salvation of Christ is called ‘salvations’ and ‘mercies’ (cf. Ps. 28:8; 17:7; 25:6), because it saves many and ascribes a manifold salvation to all” (AE 10:146). (TLSB)

There has always been only one way to salvation, forgiveness through faith in Christ. David was forgiven through faith in Christ, not through his own efforts to improve his life or to make up for his sins. Forgiveness of sins is not something we achieve by something we do, but it is a verdict of God based on Christ’s work. (PBC)

This is a forensic act, a judgment from the throne of heaven. The man is still a sinner, but God consents to liberate him. (Leupold)

32:2 counts no iniquity – When sin is confessed and Absolution occurs for the sake of Christ, God does not hold that sin against the penitent sinner. (TLSB)

in whose spirit is no deceit. † Having been forgiven by God, the believer sincerely acknowledges his sins and does not try to excuse or cover them up. (CSB)

Forgiven by God, the believer sincerely acknowledges his sin and does not try to excuse or cover it up. Aug: “Nor has he in his mouth boastings of righteousness, when his conscience is full of sins” (NPNF 1 8:70). (TLSB)

Although Christ has paid for the sins of all people and God has declared the sins of the whole world forgiven, only those who receive this promise with sincere repentance and faith benefit from it. (PBC)

32:3-7 David speaks to God in the presence of the assembly; his discourse is for their benefit as well (cf Ap V 42). (TLSB)

32:3–5 Testimony to a personal experience of God’s pardon. God’s heavy hand, brought down “day and night” on the stubborn silence of unacknowledged sin, filled life with groaning, but full confession brought blessed relief. 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 guilt. Some affliction, perhaps illness, was the instrument of God’s chastisement (see Ps 38). (CSB)

32:3 *I kept silent...bones wasted away* – Luther: “For one who keeps silent (that is, who does not confess), his bones quickly grow old, that is, his powers in which he formerly stood in good things are always reduced more and more by sins” (AE 10:147). (TLSB)

David here looks back upon the time when he had so grievously sinned, fallen out of grace, and even continued to deny his guilt. For a year or so, he had tried to cover his sin before God and man. At that time, his heart was filled with falsehood and deceit. He hid his sin, not only before men, but also before God. While he was doing this, he continued in a state of impenitence with the result that his bones withered, his body wasted away. As long as a person hides his sin, he holds to his sin, and seeks to justify his act. Sin then claims him as its victim. Its grip upon man’s soul also affects the body, the physical being. It deprives man of peace and joy. David found this out in a special measure. This is still the experience of men today in a greater or lesser degree when they stubbornly cling to their sin. They find that peace and joy has fled from their life. (Stoeckhardt)

1 John 1:8-10, “⁸ *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*”

32:4 *hand was heavy* – He presses us toward contrition, confession, and repentance (cf Rm 7). (TLSB)

strength was dried up – Under God’s heavy hand he wilted like a plant in the heat of summer. (CSB)

Here David mentions the real cause of all his bodily and spiritual miseries. He felt the weight of the hand of God upon him. The hand of God is God’s wrath. He felt at this time that God was angry with him and had become his enemy. When God lays his heavy hand upon men, they faint and pine away. A guilty sinner cannot endure the weight of the hand of God oppressing him. The moisture of his strength momentarily is changed, is consumed, is dried up. This expression is similar to the foregoing one where he complained about his bones withering. Here again we see that sin affects our bodily well-being. It robs man of his strength and courage, of the spirit of enterprise, even of the desire to live. Sin always entails God’s wrath, especially when the sinner wants to cling to his sin through impenitence. When men feel this pressure on their heart and conscience, they lose all interested in life. (Stoeckhardt)

Selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

32:5 Again repetition is used. (CSB)

sin ... iniquity ... transgressions. See 51:1–2; the three most common OT words for evil thoughts and actions. (CSB)

He uses the strongest term possible (*peschahai* – treasonable acts) to refer to his sin. He regards and calls his sin a revolt against the King of heaven. He had become an apostate, a rebel. David even uses the plural to name his offense. This shows that he thinks not only of one sin but that he is aware that his infamous act of adultery was followed by a host of other sins. He now makes a clean breast of them all. He confesses all his sins unto the Lord. (Stoeckhardt)

confess – Earlier we heard that David cried and groaned under the weight of his sins. In what respect was that different from this confession? During that time he ignored God as his Lord, and in open hostility even defied the Lord’s authority. He tried to hide his sin from him and refused to confess it. Such behavior is a sign of impenitence. Impenitent sinners may indeed give an appearance of esteeming God’s Word, but if they will not open their heart to God in willing confession, then all their groaning and crying is a praying to God virtually, but a cursing of God which leads to despair. (Stoeckhardt)

What brought about this change of attitude in David? It did not come about as a matter of chance. A stubborn sinner does not suddenly soften and lay aside his hypocrisy by himself. In David’s case we know that this was brought about when Nathan the prophet, had come to him and had convicted him of his sin. (2 Samuel 12:13). It is God’s interposition by his Word which leads a wayward sinner to repentance. The conversion of the sinner is always and only the work of divine grace through the Word. (Stoeckhardt)

David’s confession was not the efficient cause (*causa adaequata*) for God’s forgiveness. If a sinner presents himself to God as what he is, it certainly cannot be considered a meritorious act. His very confession implies that there is nothing good to be found in him. For this reason penitence and confession cannot be made out as the meritorious cause for one’s forgiveness. God forgave David for his own sake. Divine forgiveness, flowed into his heart from the Word as he repented, as the first sparks of faith and repentance were kindled in his heart. (Stoeckhardt)

David invites all who read this psalm to follow him in confessing their sins to the Lord and receiving the peace and comfort which forgiveness brings. No burden is more painful than an awareness of guilt and the impending judgment of a holy God. No joy is greater than confidence of forgiveness and peace with God. When we have sinned, let us come boldly to the throne of grace so that we may find forgiveness and peace in time of need. (PBC)

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you forgave – Hbr *kasah*, “to cover up.” When we intentionally cover our sin, it troubles both body and mind. When we confess our iniquity, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins (cf 51:1–2; Rm 4:7–8; 1Jn 1:8–9; see Ap XII 10; see also SC, Confession, p xl). (TLSB)

32:6–7 A chastened confession that life is secure only with God. (CSB)

32:6 Though addressed to God as confession, it is also intended for the ears of the fellow worshippers. He admonishes them to “seek the LORD while he may be found ... while he is near” (Isa 55:6) and not to foolishly provoke his withdrawal—and the coming near of his heavy hand—as David had done. A God who forgives is a God to whom one can entrust and devote his life (see 130:4). (CSB)

godly – “He shows that even saints ought to seek forgiveness of sins. They are more than blind who do not realize that wicked desires in the flesh are sins” (Ap V 47–48). (TLSB)

The plea for forgiveness on the part of the godly is uttered daily and runs through their whole life, while the time of grace does yet endure. (Stoeckhardt)

may be found – Before the hour of judgment. (TLSB)

mighty waters. † Powerful imagery for threatening forces or circumstances. This and related imagery are found in ancient Near Eastern creation myths. In many of these a primal mass of chaotic waters (their threatening and destructive forces were often depicted as a many-headed monster of the deep; see 74:13–14 and note) had to be subdued by the creator-god before he could fashion the world and/or rule as the divine king over the earth. Though in these myths the chaotic waters were subdued when the present world was created, they remained a constant threat to the security and well-being of the present order in the earth (the world in which man lives). Hence by association they were linked with anything that in human experience endangered or troubled that order. They were also associated with the sea, whose angry waves seemed determined at times to engulf the land. Imagery drawn from sea and death, sometimes side by side, was used by OT poets to depict threats and distress (see 18:4–5, 16; 42:7; 65:7; 74:12–14; 77:16, 19; 89:9–10; 93:3–4; 124:4–5; 144:7–8; Job 7:12; 26:12; 38:8–11; Isa 5:30; 8:7–8; 17:12–14; 51:9–10; Jer 5:22; 47:2; 51:55; Hab 3:8–10. For imagery associated with the realm of death. (CSB)

God may use extreme measures to disturb the routine of one’s life in order to show His anger due to sin (cf 69:1–2; 144:7; Jb 7:12; Jer 5:22; 47:2). Aug: “Let none think, when the end has come suddenly, as in the days of Noah, that there remains a place of confession, whereby he may draw nigh unto God” (NPNF 1 8:71). (TLSB)

32:7 *surround me with songs of deliverance.* Because of your help, I will be surrounded by people celebrating your acts of deliverance, as I bring my thank offerings to you (see also 35:27; 51:8). (CSB)

God takes David from seclusion to public acknowledgment from those who see God's work of salvation. (TLSB)

Certain of divine deliverance under all conditions, they can but sing and extol their mighty Lord for his deliverance. He has delivered their soul from death by his grace. All other evils can not bring them any harm. They surround themselves with jubilation, ever certain of God's deliverance. (Stoekhardt) –

What a confident attitude a man may assume when he is sure of the pardon of God that is reflected in this verse. (Leupold)

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32:8–10 A priestly word of godly instruction, either to David (do not be foolish toward God again) or to those who have just been exhorted to trust in the Lord (to trust add obedience). Some believe that the psalmist himself here turns to others to warn them against the ways into which he had fallen (see 51:13). (CSB)

32:8 *I will instruct you* – Luther's translation is: “I will guide thee with my eyes.” What is claimed here can, strictly speaking, only be said of God. God's eye is his providential care and love, by which he draws and exercises a wholesome influence upon a pardoned sinner. This expression gives an evangelical coloring to the foregoing terms such as, God's counseling, leading and instructing. It indicates God's continuous, loving concern that the pardoned sinner ever remain on the way of sanctification. This which is called new obedience, is the result of God's gracious act of justification. (Stoekhardt)

Cf Lk 22:61. God graciously watches for the soul's welfare and its sinful desire to stray from Him. (TLSB)

32:9 God's servant must be wiser than beasts, more open to God's will than horses and mules are to the will of their masters (see Isa 1:3). (CSB)

Luther: “Through adversities they are drawn away from good times and are thus by scourge and chain led forcibly (as horses and mules are controlled by the bit) to faith and the church” (AE 10:149). (TLSB)

32:10 *sorrows of the wicked* – Impenitent and hardened hearts. They suffer because sin naturally brings sorrow. (TLSB)

God will indeed as a general rule, be obligated to resort to disciplinary means to bring such to their senses. (Leupold)

unfailing love – There may always be difficulties to overcome, but God’s faithful covenant love will always be there. Even if divine love chastens believers, that love will always have their best interest at heart (see Ps. 30). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

32:11 A final word to the assembled worshipers—let the praise of God resound. (CSB)

The truly repentant confess their sins and, therefore, have every reason to be glad and rejoice in God’s gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. (TLSB)

They gave evidence of true sincerity by their free and frank confession. (Leupold)

The last verse of the psalm forms a balance with the first verse. In the first David was lauding the bliss of the forgiven believer; in the last verse he is calling for the righteous, the upright in heart, to praise and shout for joy. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Ps 32 Luther: “The beginning of this psalm teaches two things: first, that all are in sins [no one is righteous] and no one is blessed; second, that no one is capable of meriting the forgiveness of sin, but it is the Lord alone who forgives freely by not imputing [guilt]” (AE 10:147). Ps 32 also shows the physical, mental, and spiritual implications of being silent in sin. God calls us to confess our sins quickly with contrite hearts in order to receive Absolution. Only He can relieve the troubled heart. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn 1:9). • Lord Jesus Christ, grant me the honesty to examine my life according to Your Ten Commandments. Show me my sin, to know and feel it in my heart and disdain it. Most of all, grant forgiveness by Your gracious hand. Amen. (TLSB)