

What A Relief!
Psalms 32:1-11

My sin – O, the bliss of this glorious thought –
 My sin – not in part, but the whole,
 Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well with my soul,
 It is well, it is well with my soul.

CCLI1292471

What a great realization!

Now, if we just took that first line alone, understanding the weight of our sin and the ensuing punishment that is attached to it, I don't think we would be singing how glorious they are. The author of this well-known hymn isn't reflecting on his sin being a good thing to sing about. The glorious thought Horatio Spafford is rejoicing in is that our sin has been nailed to the cross and we bear it no more. No wonder he could conclude as he does in the refrain that it is well with my soul.

For those of you familiar with John Bunyan's classic story, you will remember that *Pilgrim's Progress* is the tale of "a man clothed in rags, standing there, faced away from his own house, a Book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. As he stood there, he opened the book and read. What he read made him weep and tremble. Unable to contain himself he broke out with "a lamentable cry, saying, 'what shall I do?'"

The reason for this outburst of woe was because of the great burden, that burden was sin and that sin brought condemnation and death and he wondered about how to get rid of it. Thus began his journey to find a way to unload this burden that he was carrying. Listen to what Bunyan says about what happened to Christian and reflect on the lyrics of Spafford's song *It Is Well With My Soul*.

"Now I saw in my dream the highway up which Christian was to go. It was fenced on either side with a Wall and that Wall is called Salvation. Burdened Christian ran this way, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran until he came to a place somewhat ascending

and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below in the bottom, a Sepulcher.

I saw in my Dream that just as Christian came up to the Cross, his Burden loosed from his shoulders, and fell off from his back. It began to tumble and continued to tumble until it came to the mouth of the Sepulcher, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, 'He has given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.' Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Now as he stood looking, behold, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him with, 'Peace be to you.' So the first said to him, 'Your sins are forgiven you'; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment,; the third also set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the celestial gate: so they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing, 'Thus far did I come laden with my sin, nor could anything ease the grief that I was in, till I came here. What a place is this! Must here be the beginning of my bliss? Must here the burden fall from off my back? Must here the strings that bound it to me crack? Blest cross! Blest sepulcher! Blest rather be the Man that there was put to shame for me!"

Christian praises both the cross and the Christ who went to the cross who took his burden away. That should be the experience of each of us who have sought salvation through Christ alone, that there is nothing beside the cross and the atoning sacrifice of Christ who shed His blood as a covering for sin for which we give our praise. And that feeling of bliss should still be ours as we think of the great price that made it possible for the burden of our sin to be removed – not just the penalty for sin, but also the guilt associated that accompanies the burden perpetuated by the whispering lies of the devil

himself who wants to continually remind us of what we did making us believe that God couldn't possibly forgive or love someone who has committed such things. And yet when we remember that our sins were nailed to the cross so that we bear it no more it truly is well with our soul.

That, my friends, is the glorious realization of the psalmist as he opens **Psalm 32** and the reason for his praise and the invitation for those who have also experienced forgiveness of sin to join him in praise.

They say that confession is good for the soul. **In my 50 years of driving, I have been pulled over by the police on several occasions. A couple were for speeding and once for having a headlight out. I had to pay the speeding tickets, but I was let go for the headlight with an admonition to get it fixed. If you have had either experience, you know how you feel when the officer hands you that piece of paper vs. how you feel when he tells you he's not going to issue a ticket.** There is remorse on the one hand and relief on the other. Or how about if you see a police car in the medium and you are speeding, do you slow down and as you pass by his car do you glance in the mirror to see if the lights come on? Even if he doesn't come after you, is there a twinge of guilt knowing you were in the wrong?

Some link this Psalm with **Psalm 51**, which is David's confession for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah, but there is nothing that indicates a direct correlation. In the opening verses, David expresses the blessings of forgiveness.

I. THE BLESSINGS OF FORGIVENESS – vv. 1-2

It's the same feeling expressed by Spafford in his hymn and how Christian felt in Bunyan's classic. But I want you to notice that in this psalm, we do not know the specific nature of the sin or sins which he has committed, but what we do know is the joy he felt at knowing that his sins had been forgiven. He well understood the gravity of the consequences and what he deserved and the bliss of being forgiven those consequences. In **verses 1-2** David speaks about the cheerful man.

A. The Cheerful Man – vv. 1-2

There was a song we sang at camp that began:
**Happy am I, all of my sins forgiven,
 What a great day, life is now worth the livin'**

David says the man whose transgressions are forgiven is blessed. It's the same word that begins **Psalm 1** and the same word used in **Matthew 5**. It means to be happy, joyful, cheerful. David gives us four reasons why this person is blessed.

His transgressions are forgiven.

His sins are covered.

His iniquity is not counted against him.

His spirit has no deceit (guile).

There are 15 different Hebrew words to describe sin in the Old Testament and David, by the leading of the Holy Spirit in writing this psalm, uses four in the first two verses. Their basic meaning may carry a similar idea as God defines sin which is evil or lawlessness as we see in **I John 3:4**, but there are some differences in their meanings.

Transgressions refers to defiance. It's a willful rebellion or revolt against authority. It's the child who defiantly says 'NO' to parents. It is an intentional choice to disobey. Other words to describe transgression are deliberate, presumptuous, arrogant, and flagrant.

The person who commits a transgression does so with the full knowledge that what they are doing is in direct contradiction to what God has said. They are premeditated, meaning that they are thought out with an intent to carry out a deliberate act in spite of knowing that it is wrong. They ignore their conscience or the counsel of others. In effect they are saying "I'm going to do this and nothing is going to stop me. I don't even care what God says about it. I'm going to do it anyway." This kind of sin is willful defiance against God. So egregious is this type of sin that **Numbers 15:30-31** says that anyone committing this type of sin was to be cut off from God's people.

Charles Spurgeon pointed out, **"All sins are great sins, but yet some sins are greater than others. . . ."**

While all transgression is a greatly grievous sinful thing, yet there are some transgressions which have a deeper shade of blackness, and a more double scarlet-dyed hue of criminality than others.”

Yet, David says the person who has this type of sin forgiven is happy.

The second word used is **sin**. We tend to lump everything under this very broad category. It's the word Paul uses in **Romans 3:23** which means *to miss the mark or to fall short*. It refers to doing something against God or another person by doing the opposite of what is right. It could be doing something that has a negative result. Or it could be failing to do something we know is right as Paul stated in **Romans 7:18** that in his nature he wanted to do what was right but didn't do it. Sin is falling short of God's glory.

Even these are forgiven resulting in a cheerful man.

The third term David uses is **iniquities**. It is similar in nature to transgressions in that it is also a premeditated choice, but the difference is that the person committing this type of sin continues without repentance.

Micah 2:1 “Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.”

In **Psalms 51:2** David asked in repentance that God would “wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

The person who commits such willful sin has no fear of God. This is the type of sin that Eli's two sons committed. Rather than repent, they continued in their sin until repentance was no longer possible and God punished them.

But David says that even these people God forgives making the man who repents cheerful.

Jeremiah 33:8 “I will cleanse them from all the iniquities they have committed against Me and will forgive all their iniquities of rebellion against Me.”

Hebrews 8:12 “For I will forgive their iniquities and will remember their sins no more.”

So when we come back to the song *It Is Well*, it's important to know that all our sins are forgiven, not just part of them, all of them are nailed to the cross.

There was another song we sang at camp, which in part says:

My sins are gone
And will not be remembered,
God in mercy tenderly forgives.
He lives within, assuring my salvation
giving confirmation that his Word is true,

That's the joy John Newton felt and what we should also experience to realize that we are all a bunch of wretches who were lost, but now saved by God's amazing grace. In mercy He withholds what I deserve and by grace through faith gives me those beautiful words “**today you will be with me in paradise.**” David says all our sins are forgiven. They are not held against us. Forgiveness is to be released or dismissed from something.

Romans 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” which means that through Christ the sinner has been released from the rightful penalty we deserve from God because all the charges against us have been dropped. **Colossians 1:14** in the Amplified Bible says that sins' penalty has been cancelled.

When we begin to comprehend even an inkling of the vast difference between the Holy nature of God and our sinful depraved nature and that through Christ all the charges and resulting penalties for our sin have been forgiven because of Christ, we should be ecstatic. To cover sin is to put it out of one's mind. **Micah 7:19** says that God will cast out sin into the deepest sea, never to be seen again or counted against us. In **Psalms 103:12-13** we read that God's compassion toward us means He removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west.

Because of Christ, our sin is not counted against us. The KJV uses the term **impute** which is an accounting term and simply means that our sins are not credited to our record. **Psalms 130:3-4** “If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand. But with You there is forgiveness, therefore You are feared.”

When the ledger of our life is looked up, God doesn't see a record of our sin, He only sees the blood of Christ. My sins are gone and will not be remembered. No wonder this person is cheerful.

David then uses a fourth term for sin in speaking about the cunning man. This happy man has no **guile** or **deceit**. In other words, this man is honest and genuine. There is no hypocrisy. He's honest with himself about his sin. Augustine said "The beginning of knowledge is to know yourself to be a sinner."

He's also honest with God about his sin. He admits to God that he sinned with his words, actions, and motives and repents of his sin to be reconciled with God. Repentance is to admit wrongdoing, looking to God for forgiveness with actions that follow by changing behavior that is in line with God's commands. It is motivated by a love for God and a desire to obey Him. The literal meaning is to change one's mind which leads to a change in one's actions. An example would be Zaccheaus.

Do you feel the blessing of having your sins forgiven when you have openly admitted them to God and felt the release and relief of His forgiveness?

But what happens when we say nothing, when we remain silent, when we bottle them up and try to keep them hidden?

David speaks to that issue in **verses 3-4**. We'll call it the bane of silence.

II. THE BANE OF SILENCE – vv. 3-4

Bane means harm, ruin, death, or poison. Take your pick. None of them is pleasant.

Robyn remembers well one particular Christmas morning in which she and her siblings were up early. The rule was they had to keep quiet until mom and dad came out. Why a container of straight pins was left out to get spilled onto the floor is still a mystery, but her then toddler brother fell on them only to raise a wake-up-the-dead scream and raise the ire of their father. But no one would fess up to what happened keeping silent, so they all got punished for disturbing his sleep.

In **verse 3**, David speaks about his despair from sin.

A. His Despair From Sin – v. 3

He had just talked about the joy of sins that had been forgiven which infers that repentance had occurred. But in **verse 3** he says there was a time when he kept silent. Silence means more than just not speaking about something. Here it also refers to resistance. If this psalm is in reference to his sin with Bathsheba, he kept silent for about a year. In other words, he refused to confess it.

How many of you know that your sin is not secret to God? If you're not sure about that, just read **Psalm 139**. God not only knows what you did, He knows what you said, He even knows your thoughts and your motives. We call that His omniscience.

David says that his bones wasted away. There was a physical toll on David's body from keeping silent. Physical weakness resulted from his unwillingness to confess. It caused him to groan. If you have experienced any kind of injury or ailment, you know full well that the pain alone can cause tremendous physical and mental anguish. I'm sure I caused some sleepless nights for Robyn while the throbbing I had from both my back and shoulder caused me to groan audibly. We can groan when we try to conceal sin.

My dad was a terrific mechanic, but even he had his challenges. After grandpa could no longer drive, dad got his car. After driving it a while, the check engine light came on. He tore that engine apart multiple times trying to figure out why the light wouldn't go off. Finally, he had the solution. He put a piece of electrical tape over the light.

That's how we are with sin. We try to ignore it and hope it will just go away, but all the while we leave it unconfessed it's hurting us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Unconfessed sin had taken away David's song and it was eating at him.

Noodle this from Charles Spurgeon who writes: "Under terrors of conscience, men have little rest by night, for the grim thoughts of the day dog them to their chambers, and haunt their dreams, or else they lie awake in a cold sweat of dread."

You may remember from High school literature the short story written by Edgar Allen Poe titled *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The story is about a man who came to detest another man whom he served. So one night he decided to murder him putting the remains in the floor boards. A short while later there was a knock on the door. Opening it, he found the police coming to investigate a scream heard by a neighbor. Feeling a bit smug that he wouldn't be found out he invited them in and showed them around. During their conversation, he began to hear a faint noise – a thumping sound. The noise grew louder. He wondered if the officers could hear it. The noise grew so loud in his imagination that he couldn't stand it any longer and confessed to the murder.

When you try to silence your sin, how do you feel? David not only felt the gnawing effect of his unconfessed sin on him physically and mentally, he also describes his discipline for sin.

B. His Discipline For Sin – v. 4

Because of his unconfessed sin, God's hand was heavy on David. If you want a description of what that might look like, take some time to read **Psalm 38:1-11**. It's an accurate picture of what God's discipline looked like in David's case.

Psalm 3:10-11 “Remove Your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of Your hand. You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; You consume their wealth like a moth – each man is but a breath.”

But keep in mind one very important truth that we learn from **Hebrews 12:1-11** that when God disciplines the believer for sin, it is out of His love.

I like what Charles Spurgeon once said **“God doesn't allow His children to sin successfully.”** His hand will be heavy upon you to break your silence and bring your repentance.

Proverbs 28:13 “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

Sin may not be the reason for your physical ailments. Remember the disciples asked Jesus about who

sinned that a man was born blind. Usually, they are the result of the sin cursed world we live in. But sin can be the reason for some physical suffering as Paul tells the Corinthians who had taken communion in an unworthy manner and the reason some were weak and sick and some had even died (**I Cor. 11:27-30**).

The bane of silence because of unconfessed sin is like a poison, it can bring pain, suffering, and ruin. In **verses 5-7** David learned that there is a benefit of confession.

III. THE BENEFIT OF CONFESSION – vv. 5-7

You have heard it said that **“confession is good for the soul.”** Maybe that's what David had in mind. After all, he had been experiencing the heavy hand of God on his life for keeping silent about his sin. In the first part of **verse 5**, we see David's repentance for his sin to God.

A. David's Repentance for His Sin to God – v. 5a

We see three things that David did with his sin. He decided to acknowledge his sin to God.

Psalm 51:1-4

Since God already knows our sin, we might as well admit it and agree with Him, instead of trying to keep it covered up. That's what Adam and Eve tried to do in the garden. They knew they had sinned and yet tried to conceal it by hiding among the flora and fauna as if the divine eye of God didn't know where they were trying to cover it up by sewing some leaves together. We only fool ourselves into thinking that we can hide it from God.

I'm pretty sure it's just a fanciful tale, but it serves as a good lesson for us. Whether George Washington actually chopped down a cherry tree, he said he couldn't keep a lie. We benefit from repenting of our sin.

In **verses 5-7** we see the benefit when we confess sin.

B. David's Remission of His Sin By God – vv. 5b-7

John tells us the same thing that David understands, that when we **“confess our sins [God] is faithful**

and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9)

Remember that all means all that’s all all means.

As Spafford said in his hymn “**My sin – not in part, but the whole.**” Every bit of it. 100% of it. When I sin and then confess, God is faithful, reliable, truthful to forgive. Confession initially is when we first receive Christ as our Savior and then thereafter confession is the means by which we maintain fellowship with God. In accordance with God’s nature our confession results in His gracious commitment to forgive because He promised to. **Numbers 14:18 [God is] “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression.”**

My sins are gone and will not be remembered, God in mercy tenderly forgives. It is like the child who confesses to breaking his mother’s antique dish who receives tender compassion and words of comfort from his mother. It is the prodigal who sinned against the father only to receive a welcome mat and restored relationship with his confession.

David had found that confession brought forgiveness and a restored relationship in which he found the security of God through the protection afforded to the one who was his hiding place. In that place he found ample reason for praise and trust. David found that when he tried to cover his sin, God exposed them, but when he confessed his sin, God covered them.

David ends this beautiful psalm with the benefit of trust.

IV. THE BENEFIT OF TRUST – vv. 8-11

In **verses 8-9** we see the benefit of teaching about God.

A. The Benefit of Teaching About God – vv. 8-9

Some believe this is instruction to David not to be foolish in sinning against God again.

Others believe David is offering instruction to others about avoiding sin or about the consequences

of remaining silent about their and the need for confession.

In either case, it serves as instruction to us that we cannot hide our sin from God and that we need to confess to God. David indicates in **Psalms 51:13** that he would take what he had learned from his sin with Bathsheba and teach others how important it is to obey God in the first place, but when we do sin, God’s forgiveness lifts the burden. By teaching them the benefits of confession, he says it will bring others back to God.

It serves as a good lesson for us. James speaks of confessing our faults one to another. Now I don’t think that means every sin we commit that we should confess every single one publicly. But I do think that where sin is public, there should be a public confession and where sin is private, keep confession private, but all sin should be confessed to God. Peter’s confession of his denial was with Jesus alone, not with the other 10. Zacchaeus’s sin was public and so was his confession. Our confession can teach others.

David concludes with the benefit of trusting in God.

B. The Benefit of Trusting In God – vv. 10-11

We can trust the Lord that when He says He will forgive, He will keep His promise. We can trust in His unfailing, never changing love for us. David’s trust in God was reason to praise the Lord.

Ready confession results in responsive rejoicing because of God’s mercy and goodness toward us as we experience His forgiveness. In fact, it is an invitation from David to all those who have experienced God’s forgiveness and cleansing power to rejoice and give God praise.

If you are feeling the effect of unconfessed sin, God is inviting you to come to Him and be forgiven. **Would you be free from your burden of sin?** Accept His invitation. Then you, too, can say it is well with your soul. Oh, what a relief it is!