

**PSALM 32:
THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS
(OR, “PSALM 1 FOR SCREW-UPS”)**

INTRODUCTION

Text and Textual Variants

Of David. A Contemplative Poem.¹

¹ Blessed *is the one whose* transgression is lifted away²,
whose sin is covered up.³

² Blessed *is the person*⁴ to whom the LORD reckons no iniquity,
and in whose spirit⁵ there is no deceit.

³ When I kept silent *about my sin*, my bones wore out
through my groaning⁶ all the day *long*.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my life-moisture was transformed

¹ For מְשֹׁכֵל, the Greek reads συνέσεως, “of understanding.” See Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), p. 48 for a discussion of this uncertain term.

² Literally, “lifted away [with respect to] transgression.”

³ Literally, “covered up [with respect to] sin.”

⁴ The MT reads אָדָם, “man,” but this should not be taken to refer exclusively to males. Rather, it refers by synecdoche to both genders. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 624.

⁵ For בְּרוּחָו, the Greek reads ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ, “in whose mouth,” presupposing בִּפְיוֹ. The Syriac reads *blbh*, presupposing בַּלְבוֹ. However, both of these variants lack Hebrew manuscript support, and the MT reading is therefore preferable.

⁶ Literally, “in my roaring.”

*as in the intense heat of summer.*⁷

*Selah*⁸

⁵ I made known my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I *will* confess concerning⁹ my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Selah

⁶ On account of this, *let* everyone who is faithful
pray to you at a time *when you may be found*;¹⁰
surely in the flood of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷ You *are* a hiding place for me;

⁷ Though my translation of this colon is quite literal, the meaning of *לְשִׁיבָה בְּחַרְבֵי קִיץ* is uncertain. The Greek rendered the entire phrase *ἐστράφην εἰς ταλαιπωρίαν ἐν τῷ ἐμπαγήναι ἄκανθαν*, “I was turned unto wretchedness in the fastening *in me* a thorn,” reading a presupposed first-person passive form of *הָפַךְ*; a presupposed *לְשִׁיבָה*, instead of *לְשִׁיבָה*; and a presupposed *קִיץ*, instead of *קִיץ*. Furthermore, one Greek recension reads *כ* instead of *ב* at the beginning of the word *בְּחַרְבֵי* (yielding a simile: “like the droughts...”), which smooths out the line by making the comparison explicit.

The MT *לְשִׁיבָה* is the first-person suffix attached to a word which occurs only one other time in the OT (Num. 11:8), where it describes the taste of the manna as “juicy,” as of a cake made with oil. The presupposed *לְשִׁיבָה* (“into my destruction”) behind the Greek is a smoother reading, because the verb *הָפַךְ*, when it means “transform into,” usually takes two accusatives, one preceded by *לְ* (“turn ___ into [לְ] ___”). This, then, also explains the presupposed first-person passive form of *הָפַךְ*, for that would supply and implied first object of the verb: “I was turned into ___.”

On balance, the difficulty of the MT colon as it stands, regarding translation and interpretation, speaks in its favor regarding the question of originality. Barring several accidental scribal errors, it would be very difficult to explain the transition from the variants (not to mention the proposed emendations) to the MT.

⁸ The meaning of *סֵלָה* is uncertain. It is the imperative form of the verb “to rise,” and is perhaps a liturgical or musical instruction for the use of the psalm in worship. See Ross, *Psalms: Volume 1*, p. 152.

⁹ The Greek reads *κατ’ ἐμοῦ* (“against myself”), supported by two Hebrew manuscripts which read *עָלַי*. However, *עָלַי* is a rare form, occasionally preserved in poetry, of *עָלַי*. The rarity of the MT form makes it more likely to be original than the variant.

¹⁰ Literally, *לְעֵת מְצִיָּה* means “in a time of finding,” which should cause little difficulty. The Greek reads *ἐν καιρῷ εὐθέτω*, “in a suitable time,” which yields the sense of the phrase. However, the proposed emendations (followed by some English translations) for *מְצִיָּה* seek to delete the following word, *רַחֵם*, which makes little sense if given its usual rendering as “only.” I prefer to follow the disjunctive accent on *מְצִיָּה*, and place *רַחֵם* with the subsequent line, rendering it as an asseverative particle (“surely”).

you guard me from trouble;
 you surround me with joyful 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 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
 with bridle and halter, its trappings,¹¹ it *must be* restrained,
or else it will not come near you.¹²

¹⁰ Many *are the* sorrows of the unforgiven *one*,
 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!

Composition and Context

For centuries, the Church has included Psalm 32 among its seven penitential psalms.¹³ However, this categorization is based on content, not form, for this psalm is more properly categorized as a declarative praise psalm (also called an [individual] thanksgiving psalm) – albeit one that emphasizes the confession of sin. As such, it includes a clear report of deliverance (vv. 3-5), praise (v. 7), and didactic praise (vv. 6, 9-11).¹⁴ Nevertheless, the psalm also exhibits signs of influence from the wisdom tradition, including the introductory *’ashrê* (“blessed”) formula (vv. 1-2), the use of

¹¹ The meaning of יָדָיו, “its jewelry, trappings,” is uncertain. The Greek reads τὰς σιαγόνας αὐτῶν, “their jaws,” but the presupposed Hebrew behind this variant lacks manuscript support, and the MT is to be preferred as original.

¹² לֹא יָבֹא אֵלֶיךָ, “not to come near to you,” is a difficult phrase to render, because the adverb לֹא is oddly joined to the infinitive construct (which probably explains the variant כל). In fact, the editors of BHS think it is a corrupted phrase, perhaps for metrical reasons. For the extended simile in the verse (“Do not be like a horse...”) to make sense in the context, something similar to “or else it will...” must be understood and supplied in translation before this phrase.

¹³ The other six penitential psalms are Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. See Bernhard H. Anderson, with Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), pp. 78-9.

¹⁴ See Ross, *Psalms: Volume 1*, pp. 122-4.

simile and admonition (v. 9), and the use of common wisdom terms – such as “instruct,” “counsel,” and “way.”¹⁵

On the question of authorship, although Davidic authorship is not certain, it is likely, for the superscription refers to David (דָּוִד, “of [by] David”), St. Paul attributed verses 1-2 to David (Rom. 4:6-8), and there is no internal reason why the psalm could not have originated from David himself.¹⁶ However, the traditionally proposed link between Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 – interpreting the unconfessed sin referred to in Psalm 32:3-4 as David’s adultery with Bathsheba – is purely speculative. The psalmist recounts his own experience, but does so in a way that allows for universal application. Nevertheless, the account of David’s moral failing and subsequent confession of sin in 2 Samuel 11-12 would fit the description of Psalm 32:3-5, and may be read profitably as an instructive illustration of the psalm’s message.

Psalm 32 focuses upon the joyful results of finding forgiveness. Beginning with a generalized principle the psalmist describes the blessedness of the honest person who has received forgiveness of sin (vv. 1-2), before recounting a personal narrative of unconfessed sin (vv. 3-4), subsequent confession, and forgiveness (v. 5) – which illustrates the opening generalization’s validity. The rest of the psalm (vv. 6-11) delivers the lessons drawn from the psalmist’s experience, applying the truths of the opening generalization to the psalmist’s audience by urging them to confess their sins, receive forgiveness (vv. 6, 9-10), and worship God (v. 11) for the provision of protection (v. 7) and instruction (v. 8).

Exegetical Analysis

Summary

Based upon his personal experience of confessing sin and receiving forgiveness which ended his suffering due to unconfessed sin, the psalmist urges his audience

¹⁵ See Ross, *Psalms: Volume 1*, pp. 141-5.

¹⁶ For a discussion of opinions both traditional and critical regarding questions of authorship in the psalms, which deals with biblical and extra-biblical evidence that far exceeds the scope of this paper, see Ross, *Psalms: Volume 1*, pp. 42-7.

first to confess their sins to God to receive the benefits of forgiveness, and then to joyfully worship God for the provision of those benefits.

Outline

- I. The psalmist declares that the honest person whose sins have been forgiven by the LORD is blessed (1-2).
- II. Speaking to the LORD, the psalmist recounts a personal narrative of suffering due to unconfessed sin, confessing sin, and immediately receiving forgiveness (3-5).
 - A. He describes a personal experience of intense suffering due to unconfessed sin (3-4).
 - B. He tells of his honest admission of his sin to the LORD, and the LORD's immediate forgiveness (5).
- III. Based upon his personal experience of forgiveness, the psalmist prays that God's faithful people would confess their sins as soon as possible, to receive the personal protection for which he praises the LORD (6-7).
 - A. He prays that God's faithful people would confess their sins, for they will receive divine protection (6).
 - B. He praises the LORD for the protection which enables him to participate in worship (7).
- IV. The LORD responds to the psalmist, promising intimate instruction on how to live according to God's will (8).
- V. The psalmist admonishes his audience not to stubbornly keep silent about their sins, for those who do not receive forgiveness will experience suffering, but those who trust God enough to confess their sins will experience the benefits of God's faithfulness (9-10).
 - A. He admonishes his audience not to stubbornly resist the instruction to confess their sins (9).
 - B. He declares that those who do not receive forgiveness will experience suffering, but those who trust God enough to confess their sins will enjoy God's faithful love (10).
- VI. The psalmist commands those who heed his admonition to worship God with joyful enthusiasm (11).

COMMENTARY IN EXPOSITORY FORM

I. The honest person whose sins have been forgiven by the LORD is blessed (1-2).

Psalm 32 opens by echoing the very first word of the Psalter: “blessed.” This word (אַשְׁרָיִם) refers to the joyful good fortune enjoyed by those who conform to God’s will, therefore having a healthy relationship with him.¹⁷ However, while Psalm 1 describes the blessedness of the righteous person who avoids sin, Psalm 32 offers the hope of blessedness to the unrighteous person who commits sin. In fact, three terms are used synonymously to describe the comprehensive nature of human sin. First, “transgression” (פְּשָׁעַיִם), comes from the verb meaning “to break (with),” and describes an act which breaks relationship through rebellion against God.¹⁸ Second, “sin” (חַטָּאתַיִם) comes from the verb meaning “to miss (a mark), fall short,” and carries the idea of falling short of God’s standards, as expressed in God’s Law.¹⁹ Third, “iniquity” (עֲוֹנוֹתַיִם) comes from the verb meaning “to bend, curve, turn aside, twist,” and here describes turning away from God’s standards for living.²⁰

However, the person who has committed such comprehensive sin can still be called “blessed,” because God’s forgiveness is just as complete – here described using three words/phrases.²¹ First, “lifted away” (נִשְׁאָרִים) compares forgiveness (by an implied metaphor) to lifting or carrying a heavy burden off of someone – thereby comparing sin to a heavy weight, and emphasizing the relief which forgiveness brings.²² “Covered” (כִּסְּוִים) compares forgiveness (by an implied metaphor) to

¹⁷ It is important to distinguish the verb behind this term (אָשַׁר, “to call blessed”) from the other Hebrew word commonly translated “bless” (בָּרַךְ, “to enrich”). See M. Sæbø, “אָשַׁר,” in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament [TLOT]: Volume 1* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 197; cf. Ross, *Psalms: Volume 1*, p. 185.

¹⁸ R. Knierim, “פִּשְׁעַיִם,” *TLOT* 2:1033-7.

¹⁹ R. Knierim, “חַטָּאתַיִם,” *TLOT* 1:406.

²⁰ עֲוֹנוֹת can also refer to the guilt of sin, or the punishment for sin. See R. Knierim, “עֲוֹנוֹת,” *TLOT* 2:862-6.

²¹ Interestingly, none of them is the verb which properly means “to forgive, pardon” (סָלַח). See J. J. Stamm, “סָלַח,” *TLOT* 2:798-9.

²² F. Stolz, “נִשְׁאָרִים,” *TLOT* 2:772-3.

removing something from sight, emphasizing God’s refusal to notice sin once it has been forgiven. This emphasis is also present in the third description, “against whom the LORD reckons no iniquity,” which uses the verb “to think, reckon” (הָשִׁב; here הִשָּׁב, a habitual imperfect) to refer to God’s continual evaluative assessment of the sinner, not as sinful, but as righteous – an assessment only possible through the grace of divine forgiveness.²³

The psalmist, however, adds an unexpected fourth description of the blessed person, which does not involve the forgiveness of sin: “in his spirit there is no deceit” (v. 2b). “Spirit” here refers to the seat of one’s moral character (metonymy of subject), which is not characterized by falsehood. Is deceit, then, the one unforgiveable sin? Surely not. Instead, the psalmist means to emphasize a particular kind of honesty – the willingness to speak the truth about one’s sins – without which one will not receive God’s comprehensive forgiveness. Should the sinner have the honesty to confess their sins and receive such forgiveness, such a person is truly blessed.

II. While unconfessed sin may lead to personal suffering, confession leads to immediate forgiveness (3-5)

A. Unconfessed sin may lead to intense personal suffering (3-4).

Here begins the report of deliverance, beginning with a report of the dilemma, which is common in declarative praise psalms. What is uncommon is that the psalmist requires deliverance not from external enemies (as frequently throughout the Psalter), but from an internal condition. Having stated a general principle (that the honest, forgiven sinner is blessed), the psalmist now demonstrates the validity of the principle with a personal narrative, which begins with intense suffering due to unconfessed sin. “When I kept silent” describes the opposite of the specific honesty referred to in verse 2: the particular silence of refusing to confess his sins. In verse 3, the effects of this silence are vividly compared (through implied metaphor) to a debilitating disease, accompanied by continual (“all the day,” a synecdoche) groans of pain (רָשַׁעְתִּי, “in my roaring,” a metonymy of adjunct) that caused his entire body and person within his bony frame (עֲצָמַי, “my bones,” a metonymy of subject) to

²³ W. Schottroff, “הָשִׁב,” *TLOT* 2:480-1.

waste away – the point of comparison being the intensity of the suffering, even if the psalmist’s actual suffering was not physical.²⁴

In verse 4, the psalmist attributes his suffering (through an anthropomorphism, “your hand”) to the continual (“day and night,” a merism) and burdensome (תִּכְבֵּד, “was heavy,” a preterite and implied metaphor) chastening of the LORD to lead him to confession and repentance (cf. God’s “hand” of judgment in Ps. 38:10; 39:2). He then augments the previous comparison of his suffering to a debilitating disease with a comparison (again, through implied metaphor) to an intense fever (לְשִׁגְיִי בְחַרְבְּגִי קִיץ, “my life-moisture was transformed in the intense heat [plural] of summer”). Admittedly, the Hebrew in this line is very difficult, but the overall sense comes through of one’s bodily moisture depleting due to a high internal temperature – and the point of comparison is again the intensity of the anguish.

B. Confession leads to immediate forgiveness (5).

The dilemma adequately described, the psalmist now recounts the LORD’s deliverance, which was precipitated by the psalmist’s own willingness to speak the frank truth about his sin – again described using the same three terms for sin as earlier. “I made known to you” (אֶדְבָרֶיךָ, a causative *hiphil* preterite of the verb “to know”) describes the entire process of confession, to which the following “I did not cover up” (לֹא־כִפֵּיתִי, an intensive *piel* perfect) makes a comparison through an implied metaphor, poignantly related to the previous implied metaphor for forgiveness. Confession could only take place after the psalmist stopped attempting to conceal (through silence) his sin.

The rest of verse 5 emphasizes God’s immediate provision of forgiveness upon confession, for the psalmist merely recounts his past expression of the resolve to confess (אֶדְבָרֶיךָ, a *hiphil* cohortative of resolve from the verb which can also mean “to praise,” but here refers to the acknowledgement of [one’s] sin, instead of [God’s] glory), and the LORD immediately forgives (נִשְׁאַף, “you lifted away,” again an implied metaphor) the totality of the psalmist’s sin (עֲוֹנוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר־אֵתָּה, an unusual compound word, “the iniquity [of] my sin”).

²⁴ If the suffering being described was literally physical, then “my bones wore out” would be an instance of hyperbole.

III. Therefore, God’s people should confess their sins as soon as possible, to receive personal protection which enables communal worship, and divine instruction in how to live righteously (6-8).

A. God’s people should confess their sins as soon as possible, to receive personal protection (6).

The psalmist draws an explicit logical link (על-זאת, "on account of this") between his personal narrative and the instruction which he now gives, in the context of a prayer to the LORD, to his audience – comprised of the “faithful.” This word (יִשְׁתָּחֵוּ) is traditionally rendered “godly, pious,” which perhaps masks the connection with the term often used to describe the LORD’s faithful covenant love (חַסְדּוֹ). The “faithful” are therefore those who are the beneficiaries of God’s loyal love, and who demonstrate such love in their own lives.²⁵ Such people are indirectly entreated by the psalmist to pray (יִתְפַּלֵּל, an indirectly reflexive *hithpael* imperfect of instruction from the verb “to mediate,” as in “pray, seek mediation for oneself”) to God. This is not just any prayer, but specifically in the context of this psalm a prayer of confession of one’s sins to God “in a time of finding” (לְעֵת מְצִיָּה) – not meaning that God can only be found at particular times, but rather emphasizing that confession needs to take place as soon as possible, given the intense suffering which unconfessed sin may produce.

Should the psalmist’s audience heed his instruction and confess their sins, then they “surely” (כִּי, used asseveratively) would receive divine protection from the unexpected chaos and danger of life – including the previously-mentioned potential danger from not confessing one’s sins – here vividly compared (through an implied metaphor) to the intensity of being preserved from a life-threatening flash flood (לְשֹׁטַף מַיִם רַבִּים), “in the flood of many waters”) should one be caught in a dry riverbed (*wadi*) after an heavy rain. The comprehensive extent of divine preservation is compared to not even getting wet in such a scenario (לֹא יִגִּיעוּ, “they shall not reach [cause to touch] him”).

²⁵ The full meaning of כָּל-יִשְׁתָּחֵוּ is difficult to render in English, given the connection between the word יִשְׁתָּחֵוּ, traditionally rendered “godly, pious,” and חַסְדּוֹ, the term often used to describe YHWH’s faithful covenant love. The “godly” are therefore those who are the beneficiaries of YHWH’s faithful and loyal love, and who demonstrate such love in their own lives. See H. J. Stoebe, “חַסְדּוֹ,” *TLOT* 2:462-3.

B. *God is a source of protection for his people, enabling them to worship him as a community (7).*

Considering divine protection in the context of indirect instruction causes the psalmist to break into direct (אַתָּה, "you," in an emphatic position) praise for personal protection. As the source of such protection, he LORD is compared (through a metaphor) to a physical refuge or hiding place (סִתְרָה) for concealment from one's enemies. Furthermore, he is the agent of protection, actively guarding (תִּצְרַנִּי, "you protect me," a progressive imperfect) the psalmist "from trouble" (מִצָּר, a phonetic wordplay with תִּצְרַנִּי).

In the second half of verse 7, the psalmist states the effect (through metonymy) of divine protection, as well as forgiveness: restoration to the worshipping community. God "encompasses" (הִסְבִּיבָנִי, an intensive *poel* imperfect of the verb "to go around") the psalmist with the "joyful shouts of deliverance" (רִנֵּי פִלְטָה) by forgiving his sin (the cause), which enables him to participate in worship by giving him another thing to praise God for as he joins the other worshipers who are joyfully shouting in celebration of God's deliverance (the effect; cf. v. 11 below).²⁶ Forgiveness thereby leads to personal protection and communal worship.

C. *God provides his people with personal instruction on how to live righteously (8).*

At this point, the psalmist's prayer of praise is interrupted by a direct word from the LORD. Surely the psalmist is not claiming to offer God instruction! And the use of second-person singular pronouns in this verse lessens the probability that the psalmist is speaking directly to his audience. Instead, God himself promises (אֲשַׁכֵּילְךָ וְאֹרְךָ...אֲעֵצָה) "I will instruct you and I will teach you...I will counsel [you]," cohortatives of resolve) to provide the psalmist with direct and personal instruction (עָלַיָּךְ עֵינַי, "upon you my eye," an anthropomorphism). He will teach the psalmist how to live righteously, "in the way" (בְּדַרְךָ, an implied metaphor for the pattern of one's life) that "you should go" (תֵּלֵךְ, an imperfect of obligation) – how to

²⁶ Granted, if the psalmist needed forgiveness for a particularly egregious sin, such as the capital offense spoken of in Psalm 51, then forgiveness was required before he could even enter the sanctuary, much less offer sacrifices there.

live a life in conformity with God’s Law, so as to avoid in the future the sins that the psalmist had committed and confessed.

IV. Those who, through their own stubbornness, do not receive forgiveness will ultimately suffer, but those who trust God enough to humbly confess their sins and receive forgiveness will enjoy God’s faithful love, and worship God with joyful enthusiasm (9-11).

A. *God’s people must not stubbornly resist the instruction to confess their sins (9).*

The psalmist then responds to God’s promise of instruction by extending his own instruction to his audience, as evidenced by the change to the plural “do not be” (אַל-תִּהְיֶינָה). This phrase begins a strong prohibition, expressed by the comparison (through a simile) of the prohibited behavior, stubbornness, with the senseless behavior of a “horse or a mule without understanding” (כִּסּוּסִים כְּפָרֶדֶד אֵין הִבִּין). Though the Hebrew in the remainder of verse 9 is difficult, for the comparison to make any sense in the context of the psalm, the overall sense is clear. Just as a senseless mule “must be restrained” (לְבָלֹם, the *lamed* preposition affixed to the infinitive construct of בָּלַם, expressing necessity) with “bit and bridle, its trappings” (בְּמַתְגַּי־וּרְסוֹן עֲדָיו), or else it will “not come near” (בְּלֹ קָרִב) its master, so humans often resist the chastening of the LORD by refusing to confess their sins (cf. vv. 3-4). And yet, given God’s willingness and ability to immediately forgive repentant sinners upon confession of their sin (cf. v. 5), the psalmist admonishes his audience to not resist the chastening power of God, but rather to confess their sins before such chastening is necessary.

B. *Those who do not receive forgiveness will ultimately suffer, but those who trust God enough to confess their sins and receive forgiveness will enjoy God’s faithful love (10).*

Having given a strong injunction based on his own experience, the psalmist offers another generalized principle (cf. vv. 1-2) to undergird his instruction. The audience should confess their sins to God because, if they do not, they will ultimately suffer. To understand this verse, it is necessary to realize that “the unforgiven [one]” (רָשָׁע), usually translated “wicked”) does not refer to an especially egregious sinner (such as a serial-killer or demagogue), but rather to someone who is not a member of God’s covenant community, and who therefore does not receive forgiveness. Regardless of

the outward appearance of such a person's life, if they do not come to believe in God, which will lead to the confession of their sin and the reception of forgiveness, they stand condemned and will therefore ultimately suffer – if not in this life, then in the life to come. Much like the suffering depicted in verses 3-4 above, here the comparison is made (through implied metaphor, מְכָאוֹתַיִם, “pains”) between the intensity of such suffering (whether physical or otherwise) and physical pain.

However, if the previously-unforgiven do confess, they will receive forgiveness, protection, instruction, and all other benefits of God's faithful, loyal, covenant love (תְּסֹדָה, a metonymy of cause for the benefits). They will be surrounded by it, in fact, as full members of the worshipping covenant community. But such a marked change in life, from unforgiven to forgiven, requires immense trust, for only the “the one who trusts in the LORD” (הַבּוֹטֵחַ בַּיהוָה) will be willing to frankly admit the sin, transgression, and iniquity of his life to God and humbly ask for forgiveness. By stating the two markedly different outcomes of life, the psalmist is calling his audience to choose the latter path of trust, confession, and forgiveness.

C. *Because they have received forgiveness, God's people should praise him with joyful enthusiasm (11).*

Trust in the LORD leads to confession of sin. Confession of sin leads to God's forgiveness, as well as protection and instruction. But now the psalmist closes with a call to praise, because the path that began with trust must inevitably lead to joyful and enthusiastic worship. The command to “be glad in the LORD and rejoice” (שִׂמְחוּ בַיהוָה וְגִילוּ) means to take great delight in him – specifically because of his provision of forgiveness and its attendant benefits of protection and instruction. It is only because of God's gracious removal of sin that the audience can be addressed as “O righteous [ones]” (צַדִּיקִים) and “all [you] upright in heart” (כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל-לֵב), terms which describe the life lived, in response to God's forgiveness, in accordance with God's Law (cf. “the way you should go,” v. 8). The psalmist makes it clear that his audience's joy due to God's forgiveness should express itself enthusiastically and loudly. “Shout for joy” (וְהִרְגִּילוּ) echoes the previously mentioned “shouts of deliverance” in the worshipping community, and refers to a loud cry with a raised voice – in this case, as an outward expression of the inward joy of being forgiven.

MESSAGE AND APPLICATION

The main point of Psalm 32 is that, *because unconfessed sin ultimately leads to suffering, God's people must confess their sins to receive the benefits of forgiveness, and then joyfully worship God for the provision of those benefits.* The truth of this passage is clearly stated elsewhere in Scripture, as in Proverbs 28:13: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." For Christians, God's forgiveness is every bit as grace-based and immediate as it was for the psalmist. Therefore, St. Paul rightly quotes Psalm 31:1-2 in Romans 4:7-8, to demonstrate that God has always "reckoned" or "imputed" righteousness (by not reckoning iniquity) on the basis of faith, not of works. And yet, as Psalm 32 clearly demonstrates, without the confession of sin, there will be no forgiveness – only ultimate suffering. But Christians have the added confidence of knowing the exact basis upon which God forgives sin: the shed blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, upon the cross. Therefore, 1 John 1:8-9 states the truth of Psalm 32 in New Testament terms: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The twofold application of the passage is clear: we must confess our sins humbly and honestly, and worship God enthusiastically and joyfully. And yet the clarity of the applications do not diminish their difficulty in the modern Church – where what we call "confession" is more like the individual "silence" of Psalm 32:4 than the public and communal confession Scripture demands. Though our worship may be loud, it will not fulfill the commands of Psalm 32:11 until confession finds its place again within the life of the Church.

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