

THE LIFE OF FAITH Chapter 7 The Restoration of David

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Transcript

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Chapter 7

The Restoration of David

His Conviction An interval of some months elapsed between what is recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and that which is found at the beginning of chapter 12. During this interval David was free to enjoy to the full that which he had acquired through his wrongdoing. The one obstacle which lay in the way of the free indulgence of his passion was removed; Bathsheba was now his. Apparently, the king, in his palace, was secure and immune. So far there had been no intervention of God in judgment, and throughout those months David had remained impenitent for the fearful crimes he had committed. Alas, how dull the conscience of a saint may become. But if David was pleased with the consummation of his vile plans, there was one who was displeased. The eyes of God had marked his evil conduct, and the Divine righteousness would not pass it by. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence", yet he adds, "but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Ps. 50:2 1). God may suffer his people to indulge the lusts of the flesh and fall into grievous sin, but he will not allow them to remain content and happy in such a case: rather are they made to prove that "the way of transgressors is hard". In the 20th chapter of Job, the Holy Spirit has painted a graphic picture of the wretchedness experienced by the evil-doer. "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth; yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him... It shall go ill with him that is left of his tabernacle. The heavens shall reveal his iniquity" (vv. 12-16, 26, 27). Notably is this the case with backsliders, for God will not be mocked with impugntity (to be attacked as false). The coarse pleasures of sin cannot long content a child of God. It has been truly said that "Nobody buys a little passing pleasure in evil at so dear a rate, or keeps it so short a time, as a good man." The conscience of the righteous soon reasserts itself, and makes its disconcerting voice heard. He may yet be far from true repentance, but he will soon experience keen remorse. Months may pass before he again enjoys communion with God, but self-disgust will quickly fill his soul. The saint has to pay a fearfully high price for enjoying "the pleasures of sin for a season". Stolen waters may be sweet for a moment, but how quickly his "mouth is filled with gravel" (Prov. 20:17). Soon will the guilty one have to cry out, "he hath made my

chain heavy.., he hath made me desolate: he hath filled me with bitterness. . . thou has removed my soul far off from peace" (Lam. 3:7, 11, 15, 17). Though the inspired historian has not described the wretchedness of David's soul following his murder of Uriah, yet we may obtain a clear view of the same from the Psalms penned by him after his conviction and deep contrition. Those Psalms tell of a sullen closing of his mouth: "when I kept silence" (32:3). Though his heart must frequently have smitten him, yet he would not speak to God about his sin; and there was nothing else he could speak of. They tell of the inward perturbation and tumult that filled him: "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long" (32:3): groans of remorse were wrung from his yet unbroken heart. "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me" (v. 4)—a sense of the Divine holiness and power oppressed him, though it did not melt him. Even a palace can afford no relief unto one who is filled with bitter remorse. A king may command his subjects, but he cannot calm the voice of an outraged conscience. No matter whether the sun of the morning was shining or the shades of even were falling, there was no escape for David. "Day and night" God's heavy hand weighed him down: "my moisture is turned into the drought of summer", he declared (v. 4)—it was as though some heated iron was scorching him: all the dew and freshness of his life was dried up. Most probably he suffered acutely in both body and soul. Thus he dragged through a weary year—ashamed of his guilty dalliance, wretched in his self-accusation, afraid of God, and skulking in the recesses of his palace from the sight of the people. David learned, what we all learn (and the holier a man is, the more speedily and sharply the lesson follows on the heels of his sin), that every transgression is a blunder, that we never get the satisfaction which we expect from any sin, or if we do, we get something with it which spoils it all. A nauseous drug is added to the exciting, intoxicating drink which temptation offers, and though its flavor is at first disguised by the pleasanter taste of sin, its bitterness is persistent though slow, and clings to the palate long after that has faded away utterly (Alexander Maclaren). With equal clearness does this appear in the 51st Psalm. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (v. 12) he cries, for spiritual comforts had entirely deserted him. "O Lord, open thou my lips: and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (v. 15): the dust had settled upon the strings of his harp because the Spirit within was grieved. How could it be otherwise? So long as David refused to humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God, seeking from him a spirit of true repentance, and freely confessing his great wickedness, there could be no more peace for him, no more happy communion with God, no further growth in grace. O my reader, we would earnestly press upon you the great importance of keeping short accounts with God. Let not guilt accumulate upon thy conscience: make it a point each night of spreading before him the sins of the day, and seeking to be cleansed therefrom. Any great sin lying long upon the conscience, unrepented of, or not repented of as the matter requires, only furthers our indwelling corruptions: neglect causes the heart to be hardened. "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness" (Ps. 38:5): it was his foolish neglect to make a timely application for the cure of the wounds that sin had made, which he there laments. At the end of 2 Samuel 11 we read, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord", upon which Matthew Henry says, "One would think it should be followed that the Lord sent enemies to invade him, terrors to take hold on, and the messengers of death to arrest him. No, he sent a prophet to him" —"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David" (12:1). We are here to behold the exceeding riches of Divine grace and mercy: such "riches" that legal and self-righteous hearts have murmured at, as a making light of sin—so incapable is the natural man of discerning spiritual things: they are "foolishness" unto him. David had wandered far, but he was not lost. "Though the righteous fall", yet it is written "he shall not be utterly cast down" (Ps. 37:24). O how tenderly God watches over his sheep! How faithfully he goes after and recovers them, when they have strayed! With what amazing goodness does he heal their backslidings and continue to love them freely! "And the Lord sent Nathan unto David" (12:1). It is to be duly noted that it was not David who sent for the prophet, though never did he more sorely need his counsel than now. No,

it was God who took the initiative: it is ever thus, for we never seek him, until he seeks us. It was thus with Moses when a fugitive in Midian, with Elijah when fleeing from Jezebel, with Jonah under the juniper tree, with Peter after his denial (1 Cor. 15:5). O the marvel of it! How it should melt our hearts. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself (2 Tim.2:13). Though he says, "I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes", it is at once added, "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail" (Ps. 89:32,33). So it was here: David still had an interest in that everlasting covenant "ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5). "And the Lord sent Nathan unto David." Probably about a year had elapsed from what is recorded in the beginning of the preceding chapter, for the adulterous child was already born (12:14). Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, "Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer his people to lie still in it". No, God will exhibit his holiness, his righteousness, and his mercy in connection therewith. His holiness, by displaying his hatred of the same, and by bringing the guilty one to penitently confess it. His righteousness, in the chastening visited upon it; his mercy, in leading the backslider to forsake it, and then bestow his pardon upon him. What a marvelous and blessed exercise of his varied attributes! "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him(!): I will lead him also and restore comforts unto him" (Isa. 58:17, 18). "And the LORD sent Nathan unto David." The prophet's task was far from being an enviable one: to meet the guilty king alone, face to face. As yet David had evinced no sign of repentance. God had not cast off his erring child, but he would not condone his grievous offences: all must come out into the light. The Divine displeasure must be made evident: the culprit must be charged and rebuked: David must judge himself, and then discover that where sin had abounded grace did much more abound. Wondrous uniting of Divine righteousness and mercy—made possible by the cross of Christ! The righteousness of God required that David should be faithfully dealt with; the mercy of God moved him to send Nathan for the recovery of his strayed sheep. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10). Yes, Nathan might well have quailed before the commission which God now gave him. It was no easy matter to have to rebuke his royal master. Varied indeed are the tasks which the Lord assigns his servants. Often are they sent forth with a message which they well know will be most unpalatable to their hearers; and the temptation to tone it down, to take off its sharp edge, if not to substitute another which will be even more acceptable, is both real and strong. Little do the rank and file even of God's people realize what it costs a minister of the gospel to be faithful to his calling. If the apostle Paul felt his need of requesting prayer "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly" (Eph. 6:18, 19), how much more do God's servants today need the support of the supplications of their brethren and sisters in Christ! For on every side the cry now is "speak unto us smooth things"! On a previous occasion God had sent Nathan to David with a message of promise and comfort (7: 4, 5 etc.); now he is ordered to charge the king with his crimes. He did not decline the unwelcome task, but executed it faithfully. Not only was his mission an unenviable one, but it was far from easy. Few things are more difficult and trying to one with a sensitive disposition than to be called upon to reprove an erring brother. In pondering the method here followed by the prophet—his line of approach to David's slumbering conscience—there is valuable instruction for those of us who may be called upon to deal with similar cases. Wisdom from on High (we do not say "tact", the worlds term, for more often that word is employed to denote the serpentine subtleties of the serpent than the honest dealings of the Holy Spirit) is sorely needed if we are to be a real help to those who have fallen by the wayside—lest we either condone their offences, or make them despair of obtaining pardon. Nathan did not immediately charge David with his crimes: instead, he approached his conscience indirectly by means of a parable—clear intimation that he was out of communion with God, for he never employed that method of revelation with

those who were walking in fellowship with him. The method employed by the prophet had the great advantage of presenting the facts of the case before David, without stirring up his opposition of self-love and kindling resentment against being directly rebuked; yet causing him to pass sentence against himself without being aware of it—sure proof that Nathan had been given wisdom from above! There scarcely ever was any thing more calculated, on the one hand, to awaken emotions of sympathy, and, on the other, those of indignation, than the case here supposed; and the several circumstances by which the heart must be interested in the poor man's case, and by which the unfeeling oppression of his rich neighbor was aggravated (Thomas Scott).

The prophet began, then, by giving an oblique representation of the vileness of David's offence, which was conveyed in such a way that the king's judgment was obliged to assent to the gross injustice he was guilty of. The excuselessness, the heartlessness, and the abominable selfishness of his conduct was depicted, though Uriah's loyal service and the king's ingratitude and treachery, and the murder of him and his fellow-soldiers, was not alluded to—is there not a hint here that, when reproofing an erring brother we should gradually lead up to the worst elements in his offence? Yet obvious as was the allusion in Nathan's parable, David perceived not its application unto himself— how this shows that when one is out of touch with God, he is devoid of spiritual discernment: it is only in God's light that we can see light! "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die" (v. 5). David supposed that a complaint was being preferred against one of his subjects. Forgetful of his own crimes, he was fired with indignation at the supposed offender, and with a solemn oath condemned him to death. In condemning the rich man, David unwittingly condemns himself. What a strange thing the heart of a believer is! What a medley dwells within it! Often filled with righteous indignation against the sins of others, while blind to its own! Real need has each of us to solemnly and prayerfully ponder the questions of Romans 2:21-23. Self-flattery makes us quick to mark the faults of others, but blind to our own grievous sins. Just in proportion as a man is in love with his own sins and resentful of being rebuked, will he be unduly severe in condemning those of his neighbors. Having brought David to pronounce sentence upon a supposed offender for crimes of far less malignity than his own, the prophet now, with great courage and plainness, declared, "Thou art the man" (v. 7), and speaks directly in the name of God: "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel". First, David is reminded of the signal favors which had been bestowed upon him (vv. 7, 8), among them the "wives" or women of Saul's court, from which he might have selected a wife. Second, God was willing to bestow yet more (v. 8): had he considered anything was lacking, he might have asked for it, and had it been for his good the Lord had freely granted it—cf. Psalm 84:11. Third, in view of God's tender mercies, faithful love and all-sufficient gifts, he is asked "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" (v. 9). Ah, it is contempt of the Divine authority which is the occasion of all sin—making light of the Law and its Giver, acting as though its precepts were mere trifles, and its threats meaningless. The desired result was now accomplished. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13). Those words were not uttered lightly or mechanically, as the sequel shows. His Repentance The emperor Arcadius and his wife had a very bitter feeling towards Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople. One day, in a fit of anger, the emperor said to one of his courtiers. "I would I were avenged of this bishop!" Several then proposed how this should be done. "Banish him and exile him to the desert," said one. "Put him in prison," said another. "Confiscate his property," said a third. "Let him die," said a fourth. Another courtier, whose vices Chrysostom had reproofed, said maliciously, "You all make a great mistake. You will never punish him by such proposals. If banished the kingdom, he will feel God as near to him in the desert as here. If you put him in prison and load him with chains, he will still pray for the poor and praise God in the prison. If you confiscate his property, you merely take away his goods from the poor, not from him. If you

condemn him to death, you open heaven to him. Prince, do you wish to be revenged on him"? Force him to commit sin. I know him: this man fears nothing in the world but sin." O that this were the only remark which our fellows could pass on you and me, fellow-believer (From the Fellowship magazine).

We recently came across the above in our reading, and thought it would form a most suitable introduction to this section. What cause have we to fear SIN!—that "abominable thing" which God hates (Jer. 44:4), that horrible disease which brought death into the world (Rom. 5:12), that fearful thing which nailed to the cross the Lord of glory (1 Pet. 2:24), that shameful thing which fouls the believers's garments and so often brings reproach upon the sacred Name which he bears. Yes, good reason has each of us to fear sin, and to beg God that it may please him to work in our hearts a greater horror and hatred of it. Is not this one reason why God permits some of the most eminent saints to lapse into outrageous evils, and place such upon record in his Word: that we should be more distrustful of ourselves, realizing that we are liable to the same disgracing of our profession: yea, that we certainly shall fall into such unless upheld by the mighty hand of God. As we have seen David sinned, and sinned grievously. What was yet worse, for a long season he refused to acknowledge unto God his wickedness. A period of months went by ere he felt the heinousness of his conduct. Ah, my reader, it is the inevitable tendency of sin to deaden the conscience and harden the heart. Therein lies its most hideous feature and fatal aspect. Sin suggests innumerable excuses to its perpetrator and ever prompts to extenuation. It was thus at the beginning. When brought face to face with their Maker, neither Adam nor Eve evidenced any contrition; rather did they seek to vindicate themselves by placing the blame elsewhere. Thus it was with each of us whilst in a state of nature. Sin blinds and hardens, and naught but Divine grace can illumine and soften. Nothing short of the power of the Almighty can pierce the calloused conscience or break the sin-petrified heart. Now God will not suffer any of his people to remain indefinitely in a state of spiritual insensibility: sooner or later he brings to light the hidden things of darkness, convicts them of their offences, causes them to mourn over the same, and leads them to repentance. God employs a variety of means in accomplishing this, for in nothing does he act uniformly. He is limited to no one measure or method, and being sovereign he acts as seemeth good unto himself. This may be seen by comparing some of the cases recorded in the Scriptures. It was a sense of God's awe-inspiring majesty which brought Job to repent of his self-righteousness and abhor himself (Job 42:1-6). It was a vision of the Lord's exalted glory which made Isaiah cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:1-5). A sight of Christ's miraculous power moved Peter to cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Those on the day of Pentecost were "pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37) by hearing the apostle's sermon. In the case of David, God employed a parable in the mouth of his prophet to produce conviction. Nathan depicted a case where one was so vilely treated that any who heard the account of it must perforce censure him who was guilty of such an outrage. For though it is the very nature of sin to blind its perpetrator, yet it does not take away his sense of right and wrong. Even when a man is insensible to the enormity of his own transgressions, he is still capable of discerning evil in others: yea, in most instances it seems that the one who has a beam in his own eye is readier to perceive the mote in his fellow's. It was according to this principle that Nathan's parable was addressed to David: if the king was slow to confess his own wickedness, he would be quick enough to condemn like evil in another. Accordingly the case was spread before him. In the parable (2 Sam. 12:1-4), an appeal is made to both David's affections and his conscience. The position of Uriah and his wife is touchingly portrayed under the figure of a poor man with his "one little ewe lamb", which was dear to him and "lay in his bosom". The one who wronged him is represented as a rich man with "exceeding many flocks and herd" which greatly heightened his guilt in seizing and slaying the one lone lamb of his neighbor. The occasion of the offence, the temptation to commit it, is stated as "there came a traveler unto the rich man": it was to minister unto him that the rich

man seized upon the poor man's lamb. That "traveler" which came to him pictures the restless flesh, the active lusts, the wandering thoughts, the roving eyes of David in connection with Bathsheba. Ah, my reader, it is at this point we most need to be upon our guard. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Part of that task lies in regulating our thoughts and repelling unlawful imaginations. True it is that we cannot prevent wandering thoughts from entering our minds nor evil imaginations from surging up within us, but we are responsible to resist and reject them. But this is what David failed to do: he welcomed this "traveler", he entertained him, he feasted him, and feasted him upon that which was not lawful—with that which belonged to another: pictured in the parable by the lamb belonging to his neighbor. And, my reader, it is when we give place to our sinful lusts, indulge our evil imaginations, feed our wandering thoughts upon that which is unlawful, that we pave the way for a sad fall. "Travelers" will come to us—the mind will be active—and our responsibility is to see that they are fed with that which is lawful: ponder Philippians 4:8 in this connection. Nathan, then, traced the trouble back to its source, and showed what it was which occasioned and led up to David's fearful fall. The details of the parable emphasized the excuselessness, the injustice, the lawlessness, the wickedness of his crime. He already had wives of his own, why, then, must he rob poor Uriah of his! The case was so clearly put, the guilt of the offender so evidently established, the king at once condemned the offender, and said, "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die" (12:5). Then it was that the prophet turned and said to him, "Thou art the man". David did not flame forth in hot resentment and anger against the prophet's accusation: he made no attempt to deny his grievous transgression or proffer any excuses for it. Instead, he frankly owned, "I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13). Nor were those words uttered mechanically or lightly as the sequel so clearly shows, and as we shall now see. David's slumbering conscience was now awakened, and he was made to realize the greatness of his guilt. The piercing arrow from God's quiver, which Nathan had driven into his diseased heart, opened to David's view the awfulness of his present case. Then it was that he gave evidence that, though woeful had been his conduct, nevertheless, he was not a reprobate soul, totally abandoned by God. The dormant spark of Divine grace in David's heart now began to rekindle, and before this plain and faithful statement of facts, in the name of God, his evasions vanished, and his guilt appeared in all its magnitude. He therefore was far from resenting the pointed rebuke of the prophet, or attempting any palliation of his conduct: but, in deep humiliation of heart, he confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord". The words are few: but the event proved them to have been the language of genuine repentance, which regards sin as committed against the authority and glory of the Lord, whether or not it has occasioned evil to any fellow-creature (Thomas Scott).

In order to fully obtain the mind of God on any subject treated of in his Word, Scripture has to be diligently searched and one passage carefully compared with another—failure to observe this principle ever results in an inadequate or one-sided view. It is so here. Nothing is recorded in the historical account in 2 Samuel about the deep exercises of heart through which David now passed; nothing is said to indicate the reality and depth of his repentance. For that we must turn elsewhere, notably to the penitential Psalms. There the Holy Spirit has graciously given us a record of what David was inspired to write thereon, for it is in the Psalms we find most fully delineated the varied experiences of soul through which the believer passes. There we may find an unerring description of every exercise of heart experienced by the saint in his journey through this wilderness scene; which explains why this book of Scripture has ever been a great favorite with God's people; therein they find their own inward history accurately described. The two principal Psalms which give us a view of the heart exercises through which David now passed are the 51st and the 32nd. The 51st is evidently the earlier one. In it we see the fallen saint struggling up out of "the

horrible pit and miry clay". In the latter we behold him standing again on firm ground with a new song in his mouth, even the blessedness of him "whose sin is covered". But both of them are evidently to be dated from the time when the sharp thrust of God's lancet in the hand of Nathan pierced David's conscience, and when the healing balsam of God's assurance of forgiveness was laid by the prophet upon his heart. The passionate cries of the sorely-stricken soul (Ps. 51) are really the echo of the Divine promise—the efforts of David's faith to grasp and appropriate the merciful gift of pardon. It was the Divine promise of forgiveness which was the basis and encouragement of the prayer for forgiveness. It is to be noted that the title affixed to the 51st Psalm is "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Beautifully did Spurgeon point out in his introductory remarks, "When the Divine message had aroused his dormant conscience and made him see the greatness of his guilt, he wrote this Psalm. He had forgotten his psalmody while he was indulging his flesh, but he returned to his harp when his spiritual nature was awakened, and he poured out his song to the accompaniment of sighs and tears." Great as was David's sin, yet he repented, and was restored. The depths of his anguish and the reality of his repentance are evident in every verse. In it we may behold the grief and the desires of a contrite soul pouring out his heart before God, humbly and earnestly suing for his mercy. Only the Day to come will reveal how many sin-tormented souls have found a path for backsliders in a great and howling desert. Although the psalm is one long cry for pardon and restoration, one can discern an order and progress in its petitions—the order, not of an artificial reproduction of a past mood of mind, but the instinctive order in which the emotion of contrite desire will ever pour itself forth. In the psalm all begins (v. 1), as all begins in fact, with the grounding of the cry for favour on "thy loving-kindness", the multitude of thy tender mercies"; the one plea that avails with God, whose love is its own motive and its own measure, whose past acts are the standard for all his future, whose own compassions, in their innumerable numbers, are more than the sum of our transgressions, though these be "more than the hairs of our head". Beginning with God's mercy, the penitent soul can learn to look next upon its own sin in all its aspects of evil (Alexander Maclaren).

The depth and intensity of the Psalmist's loathing of self is clearly revealed by the various terms he uses to designate his crime. He speaks of his "transgressions" (vv. 1, 3), and of his "iniquity" and "sin" (vv. 2, 3). As another has forcibly pointed out, "Looked at in one way, he sees the separate acts of which he had been guilty—his lust, fraud, treachery, murder; looked at in another, he seems them all knotted together in one inextricable tangle of forked, hissing tongues, like the serpent—locks that coil and twist round a Gorgon head. No sin dwells alone; the separate acts have a common root, and the whole is matted together like the green growth on a stagnant pond, so that, by whatever filament it is grasped the whole mass is drawn toward you." A profound insight into the essence and character of sin is here exhibited by the accumulated synonyms. It is transgression, or as the Hebrew word might be rendered "rebellion" —not merely the breach of an impersonal law, but the revolt of a subject's will against its true King; disobedience to God, as well as contravention of a standard. It is iniquity—perversion or distortion—acting unjustly or dealing crookedly. It is sin or "missing the mark", for all sin is a blunder, shooting wide of the true goal, whether regard be had for God's glory or our own wellbeing and happiness. It is pollution and filth, from which nothing but atoning blood can cleanse. It is evil (v. 4), a vile thing which deserves only unsparing condemnation. It is a fretting leprosy, causing him to cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (v. 7). "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (v. 4). In these words David gives evidence of the sincerity of his contrition and proof that he was a regenerate man. It is only those possessing a spiritual nature that will view sin in the presence of God. The evil of all sin lies in its opposition to God, and a contrite heart is filled with a sense of the wrong

done unto him. Evangelical repentance mourns for sin because it has displeased a gracious God and dishonored a loving Father. David, then, was not content with looking upon his evil in itself, or in relation only to the people who had suffered by it. He had been guilty of crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah, and even Joab whom he made his tool, as well as against all his subjects; but dark as these crimes were, they assumed their true character only when seen as committed against God. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (v. 5). Many have been puzzled by this verse in the light of its setting, yet it should occasion no difficulty. Certainly it was not said by David in self-extenuation; rather was it to emphasize his own excuseless guilt. From the second half of verse 4 it is plain that he was vindicating God: thou hadst nothing to do with my sin: it was all mine own—out of the proneness unto evil of my depraved nature. It was not thou, but my own evil lusts, which tempted me. David was engaged in making full confession, and therefore did he acknowledge the defilement of his very nature. It was to humble himself, clear God, and magnify the Divine grace, that David said verse 5. In the clear light of Psalm 51 we cannot doubt the reality, the sincerity, nor the depth of David's repentance and brokenhearted contrition. We close this section with a brief quotation from Thomas Scott: Let not any vile hypocrite, who resembles David in nothing but his transgressions, and who adds the habit of allowed sin to all other aggravations, buoy up his confidence with his example: let him first imitate David's humiliation, repentance, and other eminent graces, before he thinks himself, or requires others to consider him as a backslider.

His Forgiveness The inward experience of a believer consists very largely of growing discoveries of his own vileness and of God's goodness, of his own excuseless failures and of God's infinite forbearance, with a frequent alternation between gloom and joy, confession and thanksgiving. Consequently, the more he reads and meditates upon the Word, the more he sees how exactly suited it is to his case, and how accurately his own checkered history is described therein. The two leading themes of Scriptures are sin and grace: throughout the Sacred Volume each of these is traced to its original source, each is delineated in its true character, each is followed out in its consequences and ends, each is illustrated and exemplified by numerous personal examples. Strange as it first sounds, yet it is true that, upon these two, sin and grace, do turn all the transactions between God and the souls of men. The force of what has just been said receives clear and striking demonstration in the case of David. Sin in all its hideousness is seen at work within him, plunging him into the mire; but grace is also discovered in all its loveliness, delivering and cleansing him. The one serves as a dark background from which the other may shine forth the more gloriously. Nowhere do we behold so unmistakably the fearful nature and horrible works of sin than in the man after God's own heart, so signally favored and so highly honored, yet failing so ignominiously and sinking so low. Yet nowhere do we behold so vividly the amazing grace of God as in working true repentance in this notorious transgressor, pardoning his iniquity, and restoring him to communion. King Saul was rejected for a far milder offence: Ah, he was not in the covenant! O the awe-inspiring sovereignty of Divine grace. Not only has the Holy Spirit faithfully recorded the awful details of David's sin. He has also fully described the heart-affecting repentance of the contrite king. In addition thereto, he has shown us how David sought and obtained the Divine forgiveness. Each of these is recorded for our learning, and, we may add, for our comfort. The first shows us the fearful tendency of the flesh which still indwells the believer, with its proneness to produce the vilest fruit. The second makes known to us the lamentable work which we make for ourselves when we indulge our lusts, and the bitter cup we shall then be obliged to drink. The third informs us that grievous though our case be, yet it is not hopeless, and reveals the course which God requires us to follow. Having already considered the first two at some length, we will now turn to the third. As it is in the Psalms that the Spirit has recorded the exercises of David's broken heart, so it is therein we learn of how he obtained the Divine pardon for his aggravated offences. We will begin by

turning to one of the last of the "penitential" Psalms, which we believe was probably penned by David himself. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord" (130:1). There are various "depths" into which God suffers his people, at times, to fall: "depths" of trial and trouble over financial losses, family bereavements, personal illness. There are also "depths" of sin and guilt, into which they may plunge themselves, with the consequent "depths" of conviction and anguish, of darkness and despair—through the hidings of God's face, and of Satanic opposition and despondency. It is these which are here more particularly in view. The design of the Holy Spirit in this 130th Psalm was to express and represent in the person and conduct of the psalmist the case of a soul entangled in the meshes of Satan, overwhelmed by the conscious guilt of sin, but relieved by a discovery of the grace of God, with its deportment upon and participation of that grace. We quote the helpful paraphrase of John Owen in its opening verses: O Lord, through my manifold sins and provocation I have brought myself into great distresses. Mine iniquities are always before me, and I am ready to be overwhelmed with them, as with a flood of waters; for they have brought me into depths, wherein I am ready to be swallowed up. But yet, although my distress be great and perplexing, I do not, I dare not, utterly despond and cast away all hopes of relief or recovery. Nor do I seek unto any other remedy, way, or means of relief, but I apply myself to thee, Jehovah, to thee alone. And in this my application unto thee, the greatness and urgency of my troubles makes my soul urgent, earnest, and pressing in my supplication, whilst I have no rest, I can give thee no rest; oh, therefore, attend and hearken unto the voice of my crying!

When the soul is in such a case—in the "depths" of distress and despondency—there is no relief for it but in God, fully unburdening the heart to him. The soul cannot rest in such a state, and no deliverance is to be obtained from any creature helps. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless (the grief-stricken and helpless) findeth mercy" (Hosea 14:3). In God alone is help to be found. The vain things which deluded Romanists have invented—prayers "to the Virgin", penances, confession to "priests," fastings, masses, pilgrimages, works of compensation—are all "cisterns which hold no water". Equally useless are the counsels of the world to sin-distressed souls—to try a change of scenery, diversion from work, music, cheerful society, pleasure, etc. There is no peace but in the God of peace. Now in his very lowest state the Psalmist sought help from the Lord, nor was his appeal in vain. And this is what we need to lay hold of when in similar circumstances: it is recorded to this very end. Dear Christian reader, however deplorable may be your condition, however dire your need, however desperate your situation, however intolerable the load on your conscience, your case is not hopeless. David cried, and was heard; he sought mercy, and obtained it; and the Divine promise to you and me is, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). David was not the only one who cried unto God out of "the depths". Think of the prophet Jonah: following a course of self-will, deliberately fleeing from God's commandment, then cast into the sea and swallowed by the whale: yet of him too we read, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" (2:2). It was his hope in the plenitude of Divine grace that moved David to seek unto the Lord. "If thou, Loan, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Loan, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope" (Ps. 130:3-5). In the third verse he owns that he could not stand before the thrice Holy One on the ground of his own righteousness, and that if God were to "mark iniquities", that is, impute them unto condemnation, then his case was indeed hopeless. In the fourth verse he humbly reminds God that there was forgiveness with him, that he might be revered and adored—not trifled with and mocked, for Divine pardon is not a license for future self-indulgence. In the fifth verse he hopefully waits for some "token for good" (Ps. 86:17), some "answer of peace" (Gen. 41:16) from the Lord. But it is in the 51st

Psalm that we find David most definitely and most earnestly suing for God's pardon. The same intensity of feeling expressed in the use of so many words for sin, is revealed also in his reiterated synonyms for pardon. This petition comes from his lips again and again, not because he thought to be heard for his much speaking, but because of the earnestness of his longing. Such repetitions are signs of the persistence of faith, while those which last, like the prayers of Baal's priests "from morning till the time of evening sacrifice", indicate only the supplicant's doubts. The "vain repetition" against which the Lord warned, is not a matter of repeating the same form of request, but of mechanically multiplying the same—like the Romanist with his "pater nosters (our fathers)"—and supposing there is virtue and merit in so doing. David prayed that his sins might be blotting out (v. 1), which petition conceives of them as being recorded against him. He prayed that he might be washed (v. 2) from them, in which they are felt to be foul stains, which require for their removal hard scrubbing and beating—for such is, according to some of the commentators, the force of the Hebrew verb. He prayed that he might be cleansed (v. 7) which was the technical word for the priestly cleansing of the leper, declaring him clear of the taint. There is a touching appropriateness in this last reference, for not only lepers, but those who had become defiled by contact with a dead body, were thus purified (Num. 19); and on whom did the taint of this corruption cleave as on the murderer of Uriah? The prayer in the original is even more remarkable, for the verb is formed from the word for "sin", and if our language permitted it, would be rendered, "thou shalt un-sin me." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). His sin had made manifest his weakness and sensuality, but his remorse and anguish evidenced that above and beyond all other desires was his abiding longing after God. The petitions of this Psalm clearly demonstrate that, despite his weakness and Satan's victory over him, yet the root of the Divine matter was in David. In asking God to create in him a clean heart, David was humbly placing himself on a level with the unregenerate: he realized too his own utter inability to quicken or renew himself—God alone can create either a new heart or a new earth. In asking for a right spirit, he was owning that God takes account of the state of our souls as well as the quality of our actions: a "right spirit" is a loving, trustful, obedient, steadfast one, that none but God can either impart or maintain. In the midst of his abased confessions and earnest cries for pardon, there comes with wondrous force and beauty the bold request for restoration to full communion: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (v. 12). How that request evidenced a more than ordinary confidence in the rich mercy of God, which would efface all the consequences of his sin! But note well the position occupied by this petition: it followed his request for pardon and purity—apart from these, "joy" would be nought but vain presumption or insane enthusiasm. "And uphold me by thy free Spirit" (v. 12). First, he had prayed, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (v. 11)—an obvious reference to the awful judgment which fell upon his predecessor, Saul; here, assured that the previous petition is granted, and conscious of his own weakness and inability to stand, he asks to be supported by that One who alone can impart and maintain holiness. Ere passing on to consider the gracious answer which David received, perhaps this is the best place to consider the question, Was he justified in asking God for forgiveness? Or to put it in a form which may better satisfy the critical, Are we warranted in supplicating God for the pardon of our sins? For there are those today who insist that we occupy a different and superior relation to God than David did. It will no doubt surprise some of our readers that we raise such a question. One would naturally think it was so evident that we ought to pray for forgiveness that none would question it; that such a prayer is so well founded upon Scripture itself, is so agreeable to our condition as erring believers, and is so honoring to God that we should take the place of penitent suppliants, acknowledging our offences and seeking his pardoning mercy, that no further proof is required. But alas, so great is the confusion in Christendom today, and so much error abounds, that we feel obliged to devote one or two paragraphs unto the elucidation of this point. There is a group, more or less influential, who argue that it is dishonoring to the

blood of Christ for any Christian to ask God to pardon his sins, quoting "having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13). These people confuse the impetration of the Atonement with its application, or in less technical terms, what Christ purchased for his people with the Holy Spirit's making good the same to them in the court of their conscience. Let it be clearly pointed out that, in asking God for forgiveness, we do not pray as though the blood of Christ had never been shed, or as though our tears and prayers could make any compensation to Divine justice. Nevertheless, renewed sins call for renewed repentance: true, we do not then need another Redeemer, but we do need a fresh exercise of Divine mercy toward us (Heb. 4:16), and a fresh application to our conscience of the cleansing blood (1 John 1:7, 9). The saints of old prayed for pardon: "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity: for it is great" (Ps. 25:11). The Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12), and that prayer is assuredly for Christians today, for it is addressed to "our Father"! In praying for forgiveness we ask God to be gracious to us for Christ's sake; we ask him not to lay such sins to our charge—"And enter not into judgment with thy servant" (Ps. 143:2); we ask him for a gracious manifestation to us of his mercy to our conscience—"Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice" (Ps. 51:8); we ask him for the comforting proofs of his forgiveness, that we may again have "the joy of his salvation". Now it is in the 32nd Psalm that we learn of the answer which "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10) granted unto his erring but penitent child. In his introductory remarks thereon Spurgeon said, "Probably his deep repentance over his great sin was followed by such blissful peace that he was led to pour out his spirit in the soft music of this choice song." The word "Maschil" at its head signifies "Teaching". "The experience of one believer affords rich instruction to others, it reveals the footsteps of the flock, and so comforts and directs the weak." At the close of the 51st Psalm David had prayed, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (v. 15): here the prayer has been heard, and this is the beginning of the fulfillment of his vow. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Ps. 32:1, 2). In the former Psalm David had begun with the plaintive cry for mercy; here he opens with a burst of praise, celebrating the happiness of the pardoned penitent. There we heard the sobs of a man in the agonies of contrition and abasement; here we have an account of their blessed issue. There we had the multiplied synonyms for sin and for the forgiveness which was desired; here is the many-sided preciousness of forgiveness possessed, which runs over in various yet equivalent phrases. The one is a psalm of wailing; the other, to use its own words, a "song deliverance". The joy of conscious pardon sounds out in the opening "Blessed is the man", and the exuberance of his spirit rings forth in the melodious variations of the one thought of forgiveness in the opening words. How gratefully he draws on the treasures of his recent experience, which he sets forth as the taking away of sin—the removal of an intolerable load from his heart; as the covering of sin—the hiding of its hideousness from the all-seeing Eye by the blood of Christ; as the imputing not of sin—a debt discharged. How blessed the realization that his own forgiveness would encourage other penitent souls—"For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee" (v. 6). Finally, how precious the deep assurance which enables the restored one to say, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance" (v. 7)! Here, then, is hope for the greatest backslider, if he will but humble himself before the God of all grace. True sorrow for sin is followed by the pardon of sin: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Is it possible that such a backslider from God can be recovered, and admitted afterwards to comfortable communion with him? Doubtless it is: "for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption", and he will never cast out one humble penitent believer, whatever his former crimes have been, nor suffer Satan to pluck any of his sheep out of his hand. Let then those who are fallen return to the Lord without delay,

and seek forgiveness through the Redeemer's atoning blood (Thomas Scott).

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