

PSALM 32

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 32

[A Psalm], of David, Maschil

This is the first of the psalms that bears this title: some think it is the name of a musical instrument, on which this psalm was sung; others the first word of a song, to the tune of which it was sung, as Aben Ezra; some say it is so called, because it was explained by an interpreter, as Jarchi; and the Rabbins^{f468} say, that every psalm that is called “Maschil” was dictated by an interpreter: the Targum renders it “a good understanding”; and the word properly signifies “instruction”, or “causing to understand”^{f469}; and it may be the apostle has some reference to this title in (~~445~~1 Corinthians 14:15); It is an instructive psalm; a didascallic ode, as Junius renders it: it gives an account how the psalmist was instructed under a dispensation of Providence; and was brought to a sense of sin, and acknowledgment of it; and was favoured with a discovery of pardoning grace; and in it he takes upon him to instruct others, (~~438~~Psalm 32:8,9), and does instruct in the doctrine of the pardon of sin by the grace of God.

Ver. 1. *Blessed [is he whose] transgression [is] forgiven*, etc.] Or “lifted up”^{f470}; bore and carried away: sin is a transgression of the law; the guilt of it charged upon the conscience of a sinner is a heavy burden, too heavy for him to bear, and the punishment of it is intolerable: forgiveness is a removal of sin, guilt, and punishment. Sin was first taken off, and transferred from the sinner to Christ, the surety; and who laid upon him really and judicially, as the sins of the people of Israel were put upon the scapegoat typically; and was bore by him, both guilt and punishment, and taken away, finished, and made an end of; and by the application of his blood and sacrifice it is taken away from the sinner’s conscience; it is caused to pass from him, and is removed afar off, as far as the east is from the west; it is so lifted off from him as to give him ease and peace, and so as never to return to the destruction of him; wherefore such a man is a happy man; he has much peace, comfort, calmness, and serenity of mind now can appear before God with intrepidity, and serve him without fear; no bill of indictment can hereafter be found against him; no charge will be

exhibited, and so no condemnation to him. The same is expressed, though in different words, in the next clause;

[whose] sin [is] covered; not by himself, by any works of righteousness done by him; for these are a covering too narrow; nor by excuses and extenuations; for prosperity and happiness do not attend such a conduct, (^{<4083>}Proverbs 28:13); but by Christ; he is the mercy seat, the covering of the law; who is the covert of his people from the curses of it, and from the storm of divine wrath and vengeance, due to the transgressions of it; his blood is the purple covering of the chariot, under which the saints ride safe to heaven; the lines of his blood are drawn over crimson and scarlet sins, by which they are blotted out, and are not legible; and being clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness, all their sins are covered from the eye of divine Justice; not from the eye of God's omniscience, which sees the sins of all men, and beholds those of his own people; and which he takes notice of, and corrects for, in a fatherly way; but from vindictive justice, they are so hid as not to be imputed and charged, nor the saints to be condemned for them; such are unblamable and unproveable in the sight of God, and are all fair in the eyes of Christ; and their sins are caused to pass away from themselves, and they have no more sight and conscience of them; and though sought for at the last day, they will not be found and brought to light, nor be seen by men or angels. There is something unseemly, impure, nauseous, abominable, and provoking in sin; which will not bear to be seen by the Lord, and therefore must be covered, or the sinner can never stand in his presence and be happy.

Ver. 2. *Blessed [is] the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity*, etc.] Or "does not think of it"^{f471}; with respect unto men, at least to the harm of them; his thoughts are thoughts of peace, and not of evil; their sins and iniquities he remembers no more; he does not charge them with them, he does not reckon them, or place them to their account, having imputed them to his Son; (see ^{<4159>}2 Corinthians 5:19). The Apostle Paul interprets this as inclusive of the imputation of righteousness without works; even of the righteousness of Christ, in which the blessedness of a man lies, (^{<4016>}Romans 4:6-8); for such an one is accepted with God, is justified in his sight, and is secure from condemnation and wrath; it is well with him at all times, in life, at death, and at judgment; he is an heir of eternal life, will enter into it, and be for ever glorified;

and in whose spirit [there is] no guile: for being thoroughly convinced of sin, he is sincere in his repentance for it, without deceit and hypocrisy in his confession of it; as David, the Apostle Paul, and the publican were, when they acknowledged themselves sinners; his faith, in looking to Christ for pardon and righteousness, is from the heart, and is unfeigned, and so is his profession of it before God, angels, and men; and whatever hypocrisy and guile are remaining in the old man, there is none in the new spirit put into him; in the new man, which is created in him, and which sinneth not: as the other phrases are expressive of pardon and justification, this points at internal sanctification, and which serves to complete the description of the happy man; such an one as David himself was; and this happiness he illustrates from his own experience in the following verses.

Ver. 3. *When I kept silence,* etc.] Was unthoughtful of sin, unconcerned about it, and made no acknowledgment and confession of it to God, being quite senseless and stupid; the Targum adds, “from the words of the law”; which seems to point at sin as the cause of what follows;

my bones waxed old; through my roaring all the day long; not under a sense of sin, but under some severe affliction, and through impatience in it; not considering that sin lay at the bottom, and was the occasion of it; and such was the violence of the disorder, and his uneasiness under it, that his strength was dried up by it, and his bones stuck out as they do in aged persons, whose flesh is wasted away from them; (see ^{<941B>}Psalm 102:3,5).

Ver. 4. *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me,* etc.] Meaning the afflicting hand of God, which is not joyous, but grievous, and heavy to be borne; especially without his gracious presence, and the discoveries of his love: this continued night and day, without any intermission; and may design some violent distemper; perhaps a fever; since it follows,

my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. That is, the radical moisture in him was almost dried up, as brooks in the summer season; his body was parched, as it were, with the burning heat of the disease; or with an apprehension of the wrath of God under it, or both: and so he continued until he was brought to a true sense of sin, and an acknowledgment of it, when he had the discoveries of pardoning love, as is expressed in (^{<931B>}Psalm 32:5). The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions read, “I am turned into distress, through a thorn being fixed”; and so Apollinarius paraphrases the words,

“I am become miserable, because thorns are fixed in my skin;”

reading **wtq** for **ytq**; and which Suidas^{f472} interprets “sin”, that being like the thorn, unfruitful and pricking; (see ^{<4717>}2 Corinthians 12:7).

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<488D>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee*, etc.] The sin of Adam, in which he was concerned; original sin, the corruption of his nature, the sin that dwelt in him, his private and secret sins, which none knew but God and himself; even all his sins, which were many, with all their aggravated circumstances; wherefore he uses various words to express them by, in this and the following clauses; as “sin”, “iniquity”, and “transgressions”; the same that are used in the doctrine of pardon in the preceding verses; his confession being of the same extent with pardon, and all these he calls his own; as nothing is more a man’s own than his sins are; and these the psalmist acknowledged to the Lord; or “made”, or “will make known”^{f473} to him: not that any sin is unknown to God, even the most secret ones; but they may be said to be made known to God, when a sinner makes a sincere and hearty acknowledgment of them before him, and expresses his own sense of them; how that they are with him, and ever before him, what knowledge rather he has of them, how much he is affected with them, and concerned for the commission of them; and such an acknowledgment the Lord expects and requires of his people, (^{<248D>}Jeremiah 3:12,13);

and mine iniquity have I not hid; by retaining it as a sweet morsel under his tongue; for he not only acknowledged it, but forsook it; or by not confessing it, as Achan; for not confessing sin is the of hiding it; or by denying it, as Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira; or by palliating and extenuating it; or by casting the blame on others, as did Adam and his wife; (see ^{<481E>}Job 31:33); or by covering it with a guise of sanctify and religion;

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; not unto men, though in some cases confession of sin is to be made to men; a confession of it in general is to be made to the churches, and administrators of ordinances, in order to admission into a church state, and to the ordinances of Christ, (^{<408E>}Matthew 3:6 ^{<40E7>}Acts 2:37,41); and in case of private offences, faults are to be confessed one to another, and forgiveness granted; and in case of public offences, a confession should be made to a church publicly; partly for the satisfaction of the church, and partly for the glory of divine grace; but confession is not to be made to a priest, or to a

person in a ministerial character, in order for absolution; but to the Lord only, against whom sin is committed, and who only can pardon it: and this the psalmist saith in his heart he would do, and did do it; he not only confessed facts, but the fault of them, with their evil circumstances, and that he justly deserved punishment for them; and this he did from his heart, with abhorrence of the sins committed by him, and in faith, with a view to the pardoning mercy of God in Christ;

and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. That is, either the guilt of his sin, which he took away from him; or the punishment of it, which he delivered him from: moreover, this phrase may denote the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and so may both express the sense which the psalmist had of it, and exalt the grace of God in the forgiveness of it; by which must be meant a fresh manifestation and application of pardon to his soul: now, when confession of sin, and remission of it, are thus put together, the sense is not that confession of sin is the cause of pardon; it is not the moving cause of it, that is the grace and mercy of God; nor the procuring and meritorious cause of it, that is the blood of Christ: it is not for the sake of a sinner's confession of sin, but for Christ's sake, that sin is forgiven; but this is the way in which it is enjoyed; and such as truly repent of sin, and sincerely confess it, are the persons to whom the Lord manifests his forgiving love; such may expect it, (²¹⁸³Proverbs 28:13 ⁶¹⁰⁹1 John 1:9).

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on "⁴⁰⁸⁰Psalm 3:2").

Ver. 6. *For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee,* etc.] Meaning either that the success he had met with, in acknowledging his sin, would encourage others also to take a like step, and make their supplications to the Lord also; or that every godly person should pray to God for the same blessing of pardoning grace likewise. Pardon of sin is to be prayed for; not only Moses, David, Daniel, and other Old Testament saints, prayed for it; but Christ has directed his disciples and followers, under the Gospel dispensation, to do the same, (²¹⁰⁴Luke 11:4); and which must be understood of praying for the manifestation of it to their consciences; for God has by one eternal act forgiven all trespasses at once, for Christ's sake; nor can any new act of pardon arise in the mind of God, or a fresh one pass in the court of heaven, nor the blood of Christ be shed again for the remission of it. Moreover, godly men will, in this sense, pray for it, as they have daily occasion to do: a godly man is a man that is created after the image of God, is born of him, and is possessed of internal powerful

godliness, and has all things pertaining to it; and particularly has a godly sorrow for sin, and the fear of God in his heart, and before his eyes: and such a man is a praying one; having the spirit of grace, he has the spirit of supplication, and prays with the Spirit and with the understanding; and his praying for the pardon of sin shows that he is not without it, but daily commits it, and so needs fresh discoveries of forgiving love: and which he prays for

in a time when thou mayest be found; which is to be understood, not of any particular stated times of prayer, as morning, noon, and night; for the throne of grace is always open, and God is to be found, and grace and mercy with him at all times; and much less does this respect a day of grace for particular persons, which, if improved, and the opportunity taken, they may have pardon; but if neglected till it is over, then there is no pardon for them; for there is no such day of grace: the whole Gospel dispensation is a day of grace; and that will not be over until all the elect of God are gathered in; and until then it is, and will be; now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; but it designs a time of need, of soul distress, in which, when persons call upon God in truth, and seek him with their whole heart, he is found by them, and they find grace and mercy with him to relieve them in their distress; the Targum is,

“in an acceptable time;”

surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him; that is, unto the godly man; not but that afflictions, which are comparable to great floods of waters, do reach godly persons; but not so as to overwhelm them and destroy them; they are delivered out of them. The phrase seems to denote safety in the greatest calamities; that though even a deluge of vengeance and awful judgments should come upon the world, yet the godly man is safe; his place is the munition of rocks; he is in the hands of Christ, and is enclosed in the arms of everlasting love, from whence he can never be taken by men or devils: the Targum interprets these “waters of many people”; and adds, so as “to do any evil”, or “hurt”.

Ver. 7. *Thou [art] my hiding place*, etc.] In time of trouble; (see ^{1927b}Psalm 27:5); so Christ is said to be, (^{2331b}Isaiah 32:2). “Thou shall preserve me from trouble”; not from having it; for in this world the saints must have tribulation, and through it enter the kingdom, but from being swallowed up with it; the Lord will bring them safe out of it, and of them it shall be said, “these are they that came out of great tribulation”, (⁶¹⁷⁴Revelation 7:14);

thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance; or gird with gladness, as in (^{<49811>}Psalm 30:11); the meaning is, that God would give him abundant reason for praise and thankfulness; and an opportunity of attending him with songs of praise for deliverance out of the hands of his enemies, and from trouble; and that both in his house below, where the saints, his loving people and faithful subjects, would join with him, in the midst of whom he should stand encompassed with their songs of praise; or in heaven above, where he should sing the song of Moses, and of the Lamb, and be surrounded with the hallelujahs of angels and glorified saints; Aben Ebra interprets these songs of the voices of angels.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<49812>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 8. *I will instruct thee*, etc.] Or “cause thee to understand”^{f474}. These are by many thought to be the words of the Lord, who gives to a man an understanding of spiritual things; he instructs by his providence, and even by afflictive dispensations of providence; and by his word, which is written for the learning of men, and is profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness, and by the ministers of it, who are therefore called instructors in Christ; and by his Spirit, when he instructs effectually and to purpose; by him he instructs men in the knowledge of themselves, and of himself in Christ, and of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and leads into all truth as it is in Jesus; and opens the understanding to understand the Scriptures, and the doctrines contained in them;

and teach thee in the way which shall go; the path of duty, from whence men are apt to wander; when the Lord hedges up the way they would go with thorny providences, and by his ministers, word, and Spirit, directs them in the right way; saying, this is the way, walk in it; and the way of truth, which is clearly pointed to in the Scriptures of truth, and by the Spirit of truth; and also the way of life and salvation by Christ, revealed in the Gospel and which the preachers of it show to the sons of men;

I will guide thee with mine eye; as a master guides his scholar; or as “mine eye”^{f475}: with as much care and tenderness as if thou wert the apple of mine eye; (see ^{<49820>}Deuteronomy 32:10 ^{<49821>}Zechariah 2:8); or the words may be rendered, “I will counsel”, or “give counsel”; as he does, who is wonderful in counsel, and that by his Son, who is the wonderful Counsellor; and by his word and testimonies, which are the delight of his people, and the men of their counsel: “mine eye [is] upon thee”^{f476}; as the eye of the Lord is upon the righteous, to watch over them for good, to

provide for them, guide and direct them. These words may very well be considered as the words of David, in which he determines to act a part, agreeable to the title of the psalm, “Maschil”; which signifies instructing, or causing to understand; and as he thought himself bound in duty to do, under the influence of the grace and mercy he had received from the Lord, in the forgiveness of his sins; and which he elsewhere resolved to do in a like case, and which is an instance parallel to this, (³⁵¹³Psalm 51:13); he here promises to “instruct” men in the way of attaining to the blessedness he had been speaking of, by directing them to take the steps he did; namely, to go to the, Lord, and acknowledge and confess their sins before him, when they might expect to find pardoning mercy and grace, as he did; and to “teach” them the way of their duty upon this, to fear the Lord and his goodness, and to serve him in righteousness and holiness all the days of their lives; and to “guide [them] with his eye”; by declaring to them the gracious experiences he had been favoured with, by telling them what he himself had seen and known.

Ver. 9. *Be ye not as the horse, [or] as the mule, [which] have no understanding,* etc.] The design of this exhortation is to direct men how to behave under the instructions given; not as brutes, which have no rational faculties, but as men; that they should not show themselves thoughtless, stupid, and unteachable, as these animals, or worse than they; nor stubborn and obstinate, refractory and untractable, resolving not to be taught, stopping the ear, and pulling away the shoulder; nor ill natured and mischievous; not only hating instruction, casting away the law of the Lord, but kicking and spurning at, and persecuting such who undertake to instruct them; as these creatures sometimes attempt to throw their riders, and, when down, kick at them;

whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee; to do mischief, bite or kick; or “because they do not come near to thee” ^{f477}; and that they may come near, and be brought into subjection, and become obedient; therefore such methods are used; (see ^{318B}James 3:3); there is in the words a tacit intimation, that men are commonly, and for the most part, like these creatures, stupid, stubborn, and mischievous; and therefore severe methods are used by the Lord, sore chastenings, to humble and instruct them; (see ²⁶¹⁸Jeremiah 31:18,19); the mule, more especially, is remarkable for its stupidity ^{f478}; and though the horse is docile, yet he is sometimes stubborn and refractory.

Ver. 10. *Many sorrows [shall be] to the wicked*, etc.] Who will not be instructed and reformed, but are like the horse and mule, without understanding; many outward sorrows or afflictions attend them; loathsome and consuming diseases come upon their bodies by intemperance and debauchery; and they and their families are brought to a piece of bread, through their vicious courses; and inward sorrows, horror and terror of mind, seize them when their consciences are at any time awakened, and are open to conviction; when a load of guilt lies on them, what remorse of conscience they feel! and what severe reflections do they make! and how are they pierced through with many sorrows! And though indeed, for the most part, wicked men have their good things in this life, and are in prosperous circumstances, and are not in trouble, as other men; yet what they have is with a curse; and they have no true peace, pleasure, and satisfaction in what they enjoy; and the curses of a righteous law; and everlasting destruction is prepared for them in the other world, when they will have many sorrows indeed; their worm will not die, and the fire of divine fury will not be quenched; there will be for ever indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil;

but he that trusteth in the Lord; not in his wealth and riches, in his wisdom and strength, in himself, and his own righteousness; for such are wicked persons; but in the Lord; in his righteousness to justify him, in his blood to pardon him, in his strength to support him, and in his grace to supply him with everything necessary for him;

mercy shall compass him about; not only follow him and overtake him, but surround him; he shall be crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies: the phrase denotes the abundance of mercies that shall be bestowed upon him here and hereafter, as both grace and glory.

Ver. 11. *Be glad in the Lord*, etc.] The Targum renders it, “in the Word of the Lord”; in Christ the essential Word; in him as the Lord their righteousness, and because of his righteousness imputed to them, by which they become righteous; and in him as their Saviour and Redeemer, and because of the salvation which he has wrought out for them; (see ²⁸¹⁰ Isaiah 61:10);

and rejoice, ye righteous; in the Lord, as before; for this is not a carnal, but spiritual joy, which is here exhorted to, the same as in (²⁸⁰⁸ Philippians 4:4); and “righteous” ones, who are excited to it, are such who are not righteous in appearance only, or in their own conceit, or by the deeds of the law, or

in and of themselves; for there is none righteous this way: but who are made righteous by the obedience of Christ, and are righteousness itself in him; under a sense of which grace they live soberly, righteously, and godly; and these have great reason to rejoice and be glad;

and shout for joy all [ye that are] upright in heart: who have the truth of grace, and the root of the matter in them, oil in the vessels of their hearts, with their lamps; whose faith is unfeigned, whose hope is without hypocrisy, and whose love is without dissimulation; and who worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, and draw nigh to him with true hearts, and call upon him in the simplicity of them; these ought to rejoice, and even shout for joy, because of the grace that is wrought in them, and bestowed upon them, and the glory they shall be partakers of; for both grace and glory are given to these, and no good thing is withheld from them; the end of these upright souls is peace; and when they have done their work, they shall lie down and rest in their beds, and each one shall walk in his uprightness, (^{<198411>}Psalm 84:11 ^{<2570>}37:37 ^{<2570>}Isaiah 57:2).