

# Forgiveness

Jim Wood\*

**P**SALM 32 is entitled, "A psalm of David, Maschil", which means 'giving instruction'. It opens with comment on the great blessing of forgiveness: "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" (vv. 1,2). David, a man after God's own heart, had tasted deeply of the goodness and severity of God. The sin he committed in taking the wife of Uriah, and being responsible for the death of Uriah, displeased God. For this sin the Lord told him: "the sword shall never depart from thine house . . . Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (2 Sam. 12:10,11). This was the severity of God, but, when David acknowledged his sin, Nathan told him: "The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (v. 13).

This great sin caused "the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (v. 14). There is a lesson here for us. When we commit sin we can be the cause of others turning against the Truth. People with whom we come into contact day by day notice our conduct and whether we truly live as we believe. It would be sad to think that we might be the cause of others speaking irreverently about the God Whom we know, love and serve.

The psalm goes on to describe the misery of David when the full consciousness of his sin weighed heavily upon him: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (vv. 3,4). He was being physically affected by the guilt which remained unconfessed. Then we learn how he felt when, after acknowledging his sin, he turned to God and found forgiveness: "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (v. 5). With confession and his belief in forgiveness given, his great burden was lifted. In Psalm 51 he cries: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin . . . my sin is ever before me" (vv. 2,3). He had learned that to acknowledge his sin and ask to be cleansed brought welcome relief.

He would never forget that sin, and we know that David suffered greatly through those of his own house. Absalom, his own son, through cunning and subtilty tried to take his father's kingdom, and David had to flee from him. When Absalom died in his wickedness David mourned deeply for him, despite the difficulties there had been between them, and cried: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee" (2 Sam. 18:33).

His thoughts in the psalm then turn to deliverance: "Thou art my hiding place . . . Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance" (v. 7). How often was David delivered from the hands of jealous Saul! Yet when David could have slain Saul as he slept, he spared him. His desire is that now others might benefit from his experiences and the wisdom derived from them: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (v. 8). These words echo those used by Samuel in speaking to the people when Saul was made king: "I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart" (1 Sam. 12:23, 24). This was David's own desire.

Reference to the horse and the mule in verse 9 of the psalm then reminds us we must have control over our minds and bodies, letting nothing hinder our walk in the Truth, and keeping a watch on our lips: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee". Was this a personal assessment of how he believed he had once been?

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (vv. 10,11). So concludes a beautiful psalm, which has taken us through the stages of sin, remorse and forgiveness.

What are the lessons about forgiveness from this psalm for us? Since all Scripture is written by inspiration of God, it is written for an exam-

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\* Based on notes of a disciple now fallen on sleep in Christ Jesus.

ple to those who read, those with a sincere mind and in whose hearts there is no guile. As God forgave David so great a sin, how great is His forgiveness to all men if they truly repent! When David numbered the people (1 Chron. 21) God was displeased, and, because of this sin, seventy thousand men fell through pestilence. David and the elders clothed themselves in sackcloth, and David confessed his sin and pleaded that the blame be put on himself and on his father's house. To the prophet Gad he says: "I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are His mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man" (v. 13).

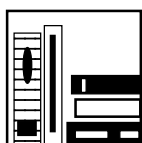
How well David knew that from man he would have received no mercy! Only with God is there true forgiveness. In the Lord's prayer we pray, "forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4). As we forgive so shall we be forgiven. We usually find that those who suffer most wrong forgive the most. There is no place for bitterness in the hearts of those who are true followers of Christ.

David was forgiven much, and he himself forgave those who wronged him. He had many

enemies; indeed, his life was a troubled one on all sides. However, those troubles kept him close to God. He was a lovable man. We remember the lovely friendship with Jonathan, his love for his children, and his deep, abiding love for God, which earned him the title of 'a man after God's own heart'. We can go forward with hope and faith that, no matter how many times we fall, God knows how frail we are; and, if we truly repent, He will cast our sins for ever behind His back, to be remembered no more.

May this short poem (by Hilda Murton) help us to meditate on the measure of our weakness and the magnitude of His grace:

"Just how bereft of good we are, how prone to sin,  
Thou knowest even better than ourselves.  
If we should know our sin in its entirety  
We must abandon hope, must cease to strive.  
We cannot comprehend Thy love or know  
the magnitude  
Of mercy and of pardon at Thy hand;  
But, limitations freed and in a holier sphere,  
E'en in Thy Kingdom, we shall understand".



## Reviews

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# Combating error on the atonement\*

Russell Ebbs

**T**HE BOOKLET entitled *The Slain Lamb* is an amended transcript of a lecture given by Brother Roberts on 29 July 1873. It was a reply to a lecture given the previous evening by Brother Edward Turney, in which he had set forth the 'renunciationist' heresy, which was having a serious and adverse effect on the Brotherhood at this time, only some two years after the falling asleep of Brother Thomas. Brother Roberts' strenuous efforts to contend against this doctrine had caused his health to suffer. He had intended to take questions after the lecture, but was unable so to do after his exertions, offering to return another evening, health permitting, to fulfil that commitment.

### The origin of the heresy

The 'renunciationist' teaching originated most likely from a Pentecostalist sect. Brother David Handley, a former elder of that sect, held the view that Jesus did not share the condemned nature of Adam's descendants because God had

\* *The Slain Lamb: an exposition on the true nature of the sacrifice of Christ*, Robert Roberts. Published by Menorah Publications, South Australia, and obtainable from Brother Peter and Sister Wendy Talbot, 6 Ridge Lane, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham, NG12 1BD. Tel./fax 0115 9333683; e-mail TalbotPJ@aol.com. Price £1.70, including postage and packing.