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## **DAVID'S CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS.**

– AUGUST 16. – Psa. 32:1-11. –

**Golden Text – "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." – Psa. 51:10.**

IT is with a good degree of satisfaction that we write as the heading of this lesson, David's confession and forgiveness, when we consider that, had not the good that was in the man reasserted itself, we might have had to write, "David's unrepented fall and its fearful recompense." Thus far, in considering this notable character in Jewish history, we have been calling attention to those noble traits which marked him as a righteous, just, godly man – a man of high attainments, both morally and intellectually, and one whom God was pleased to honor and bless and to make a chosen instrument in his service.

But with all his attainments, with all his wisdom, and skill, and sound judgment, and with all his humility and godly reverence, the poor fallen nature of even this great and good man succumbed to the temptations of abundant prosperity. It is hard to account for the fall of such a good man and of a character so strong in many respects as that of David; but one writer, we think, reasons on it very correctly, saying, – "In some natures, especially strong natures, both the old man and the new possess unusual vehemence; the rebellious energizings of the old are held in check by the still more resolute vigor of the new; but if it so happen that the opposition of the new man to the old is relaxed or abated, then the outbreak of corruption will be on a fearful scale."

Evidently this fall of David into gross sin was not altogether sudden. There had been missteps leading up to it; and the process being gradual and each wrong thing searing the conscience more and more, the climax was reached almost imperceptibly, so that two, even of the basest crimes, were at length committed, apparently without any

compunctions of conscience; and the sin was concealed unrepented of, although it was yielding its bitter fruit of restless remorse (Psa. 32:3,4), until Nathan the prophet was sent to awaken and arouse the man to a deep sense of his guilt and of the necessity of immediate repentance, confession and reformation. David had become so intoxicated with the spirit which generally attends power, popularity and great success that he evidently did not recognize his gradual moral decline. As a king his word was supreme among the people; all Israel waited to do his bidding; the greatest men in the nation were at his service; success had everywhere attended his energies on the field of battle; his kingdom was extended and very prosperous; but in the midst of all this success and exaltation lurked temptations subtle and dangerous which should have been guarded against with scrupulous care, and perseveringly resisted.

As the chief magistrate of the nation few indeed were bold enough to be true to the king as to a brother in pointing out his errors and dangers: on the other hand, the tendency was, as it always is toward those in power, rather to endorse and imitate, than to wisely, kindly and respectfully reprove, remembering the highest interests of such a one in preference to any desire for his favor at the expense of those interests. While we mark with pleasure the noble traits in David's character, we must deplore the steps of his decline. He got to looking upon the privileges claimed by other kings about him as his privileges also, in a measure at least, and, contrary to the divine law (See Lev. 18:1-4,18 margin; Deut. 17:14,17-20), he multiplied wives to himself. Then in his war with the Ammonites he resorted to unnecessary cruelty, not alone contented to conquer, but desiring thus ignobly to triumph over his foes. (Compare 1 Chron. 20:1-3; 2 Sam. 11.) Then his numbering of the people, contrary to the law of God and the counsel of his wisest men and the religious sense of the nation (See 1 Chron. 21:1), showed that a decline of piety was leading him to doubt the divine favor, and consequently to put his trust in numbers and equipments for defence, etc. (Jer. 17:5), rather than in God, whose favor and help could

be experienced only while he continued to walk in the paths of righteousness.

It was in the midst of this season of outward prosperity, yet decline of inward piety, that David succumbed to temptation and to the dreadful crime he committed against God and man. (2 Sam. 11:1-27.) Poor, fallen human nature! how weak it is, and how prone to sin, even at its best state! Truly, there is no safety from the power of sin except in a close and constant walk with God, and a resolute purpose to continually avoid and resist the intoxicating influences of the spirit of the world. To allow its pride or vain glory or desire for self-gratification to actuate us in any measure is to bring our moral perceptions to that extent under its stupefying influence. And when any one is intoxicated with the spirit of the world (which in large measure is the spirit of Satan), he will blindly do many things which in his sober senses he would shun and despise. So it was with David, a great and wise man, and, until this intoxication came upon him, a good man, and therefore beloved and highly honored of God, yet even he fell; and the previous height of his moral character makes all the more sad his decline and fall.

Well indeed would it have been for David had he remembered the command of the Lord, – "And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, **[R2016 : page 183]** that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book. ...And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes to do them; that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left." (Deut. 17:18-20.) If in this matter even such a man as David failed, and therefore was overcome by the power of temptation, let every child of God take heed and profit by the lesson of his folly. The Word of God must be the daily companion, instructor and guide to every one who would be kept in the paths of righteousness, be he little or great. It is not enough that we read it, nor even that we study it, for the sake of

mere information or for argument: it is given us to ponder and to feed upon, that its principles may be incorporated into our being, moulding our thoughts and guiding all our actions. This is what it is to have the word of the Lord dwelling in us as an energizing and moving power; and if we thus have fellowship with God through his Word and the privilege of prayer, we shall not be beguiled into sin, nor partake of the intoxicating spirit of the world.

It has been suggested by some, by way of excuse for David, that a man's life should be judged as a whole, and not by the failures in it, the intimation being that if in such a view of his life the good predominates, then it should be considered a righteous life, or *vice versa*. And so, it is suggested, we should estimate the character of David and numerous others, among them the inquisitors of times past, who burned and tormented those who differed from them. Many of these, it is suggested, were good, but mistaken men.

From this line of reasoning we are obliged to differ, because it is at variance with the judgment of God, as clearly expressed by the Prophet Ezekiel, as follows, – "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth,... all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.... But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes [which implies also the pondering and study of them], and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.... When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them [unrepentant], **[R2017 : page 183]** for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."\* – Ezek. 18:24,21,22,26-28. See also 2 Pet. 2:20-22.

\*This eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel relates specially to the time when the Adamic transgression will be offset by the New Covenant as a result of the ransom, so that naught will remain against believers but their own misconduct. The same principle applies to some extent to those of this Gospel age who are justified by faith; and to the Israelites justified by the typical sacrifices.

It would be a great mistake to presume that the blindness and spiritual stupor that result from intoxication with the spirit of the world constitute a proper excuse for the sins committed while in that state. God did not so judge in the case of David. The beginning of any sin is the first yielding to its intoxicating influence; and therefore we are faithfully warned to abstain from the very appearance of evil. (1 Thes. 5:22.) David's sin, like that of all other sinners, began in giving heed to the first suggestions of evil, and having done this the subsequent steps were easily taken. – Compare James 1:14,15.

But, thank God, there is such a thing as repentance and remission of sins. And although David had sinned grievously, and God was very angry with him, yet in his wrath he remembered mercy, and sent Nathan the prophet to reprove him. It was doubtless a difficult task for Nathan to approach the king on such an errand, but he did not hesitate when the Lord commanded, nor did he go about the duty in any other way than that of straight-forward, yet respectful simplicity. He did not first endeavor to offset in David's mind his present evil course with a rehearsal of his past good deeds – of faith and valor and justice and humility, thereby intimating that the latter balanced the former, but, remembering that in God's reckoning all former good deeds would count for nothing unless present sins were repented of, he came straight to the point, and with skill he presented the case in a parable which David mistook for an actual case, and hastily pronounced the sentence of death upon the offender. He probably desired to show the man of God how zealous he would be for righteousness, little surmising that the prophet knew of his unrighteous course until, with heroic fortitude which waved every other consideration but the doing of the will of God, Nathan brought the lesson home to his conscience, saying, "*Thou art the man....* Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the

Lord to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah, the Hittite, with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house....Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will raise up evil+ against thee out of thine own house." – 2 Sam. 12:7-12.

+Evil here is not used in the sense of sin, but as signifying trouble or calamity. This was a feature of God's covenant with Israel as a nation. Their obedience was to have earthly recognition and reward – their disobedience and sins were to receive earthly punishments. No such covenant was ever made with any other nation. See our issue of March 1, '95.

It was a critical moment for David, and probably for a time silence reigned. What would he do? Would he proudly resist the power of the truth, thus calmly but kindly pressed home by his old and trusted friend, the humble man of God? Probably this was the first impulse of the pride engendered by his thus far successful career; but there was the truth so plainly set before him: how could he deny it? how could he excuse it, or in any sense or degree justify it? Even to his own mind there was evidently no excuse, no palliation. Conscience, which had been more or less restless and even at times remorseful, ever since the crime, was now thoroughly awakened, and a crisis was reached. There were but two courses before the king: one was repentance, confession and reformation; and the other was to plunge deeper into sin by angrily denouncing the [R2017 : page 184] prophet and wickedly misusing his power as a king to punish the man of God for presuming to reprove him, and then proudly declaring it to be *the right of kings*, as exceptional individuals, to do as they please, such being the generally acceded custom of kings in all the nations. Thus he would have been claiming that the *customs of the world*, instead of *the law of God*, were to him the standard of privilege. "What king," he might truly have said, "considers the rights of his fellow-men in preference to his own desires?"

But we are glad that David did not take this latter evil course. On the contrary, he allowed his better nature to reassert itself; and David

said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said unto David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" – although in the judgment of the parable David had unconsciously condemned himself to death. How gracious is God, how ready to pardon when true repentance is manifest! "Howbeit," said Nathan, "because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." David in his contrition meekly accepted both the reproof and the penalties pronounced against him; and realizing that his sin was very grievous, and that his example before the nation was very detrimental to the moral and religious interests of the people, he resolved, and carried out his resolve, to make the example of his deep contrition and repentance as far-reaching in its effects for good, as his sin had been for evil.

This was a noble resolution, and in nothing does the nobility of the man shine out more clearly than in his humble and public confession of his sin, his efforts to undo, as far as possible, the wrong he had done, and his meek submission to the penalties which God in his wisdom and mercy saw fit to inflict upon him, that thus his wrath against sin might be manifest to all, and that king and people might so be warned against it. "Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." (Prov. 16:32.) So in overcoming the pride and selfishness that had taken deep root in his heart, David proved himself a greater hero than even in his youthful conflict with the giant of Gath, or in any subsequent encounter.

That the divine forgiveness does not of necessity imply the remitting of all the penal consequences of sin is manifest in this case and in thousands of others. According to the divine law, the full penalty of David's sin was death. And, judged by the rigor of that law, this sentence was due under two indictments (See Lev. 20:10; 25:17); but in view of his repentance the Lord remitted the death penalty (2 Sam. 12:13) and inflicted only such punishment as was necessary for the full correction of the offender and the warning and instruction of the nation,

showing that he was no respecter of persons, and that king and people were on a common level before the divine law. It should also be observed that the penalties inflicted were to a large extent the outgrowth of former sins. The severest troubles came from his polygamous household, and the sons who gave him most trouble were the children of heathen wives; and the child of Bathsheba died.

In Psalm 51 David makes public confession of his sin and of God's mercy in forgiveness. In Psalm 32 he gratefully records the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile – no deceit, no hypocrisy, but all of whose doings are open and transparent, and manifestly wrought in righteousness. Here he declares, "I acknowledge my sin," and he testifies to the Lord's forgiveness (vs. 5); and for this divine forgiveness he exhorts all sinners to pray to God in a time when he may be found (vs. 6); *i.e.*, before their hearts become calloused and set in an evil course.

Then, even in the midst of the troubles consequent upon his sin, which he meekly and patiently bore, David learned by faith to rejoice in the Lord, saying, "Thou art my hiding place: thou wilt preserve me from trouble, thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance;" for he will not suffer any tribulation to overwhelm his trusting saints upon whom he has set the seal of his pardoning love.

Then David voices the Lord's sentiments toward all his trusting obedient children thus, as though the Lord were answering back to his expressions of humble confidence and trust, saying, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee, mine eye shall be upon thee [margin]. Be not as the horse or the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, else they will not come near unto thee" – [R.V.] will not submit to control.

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked [as long as they remain wicked. David had proved that by sad experience – vss. 3,4.]; but he



that trusteth in the Lord [which necessitates also the departing from iniquity], mercy shall compass him about." Therefore, said the confident faith of this repentant one to whom had been restored the joys of salvation, "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart."

If God thus restored to his penitent and believing servant the joys of his salvation, and made the bones which he had broken to rejoice (Psa. 51:8); if he created in him a clean heart, and renewed a right spirit within him (Psa. 51:8,10), who then shall lay any thing to the charge of his beloved? As freely as God forgave, so must all his people; and therefore we rejoice to recognize David as one of the ancient worthies – worthy of our love, our confidence and a noble example for our imitation of the many graces that adorned his character. And in nothing did the king give us a more worthy example than in the victory over himself to which attention has just been called. Especially in considering his exalted station, his prominence before the **[R2018 : page 184]** nation, the deeply disgraceful crimes of which he was guilty, the acknowledgment of which would be so humiliating, and the consequent loss of esteem and confidence he must expect from the whole nation, and the appreciation which he doubtless had of the esteem he had so worthily held for so many years, and the keen sense of the disgrace which such a nature must have when brought again to his sober senses – when we consider all these things, the victory gained by David over himself in humbling himself and repenting, is one of the greatest and grandest achievements on the pages of history; and his course is one to be commended to every child of God who realizes that he has to any degree departed from the right ways of the Lord.

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