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A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

- PSALM 32. - OCTOBER 25. -

Golden Text: – "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

AFTER a most prosperous career, about thirty years from the time of his anointing and when he was somewhere about fifty years of age, King David fell into most grievous sins. In quick succession he violently broke three of the ten commandments. He coveted Uriah's wife; he committed adultery with her, and he indirectly murdered her husband. Dividing the ten commandments into two parts, the one appertaining to the Lord and the other to humanity, King David certainly violated the second portion about as grievously as could be possible. A fouler record than this of man's inhumanity to man can scarcely be imagined. The Scriptures offer no apology, nor do they in any degree shield the offender or justify his course. In view of these admitted facts skeptics sometimes inquire, "How is it that such a man is regarded as a great prophet of the Lord? How is it that of him it is said that 'He was a man after God's own heart'? Does God approve of such a course as his, represented by those sins?"

We reply: Those transgressions do not represent David's course of life. They were exceptions; they were contrary to his heart; they were repented of; they were punished; David was forgiven. Today's lesson is intended to bring this matter fully and clearly before our attention; to show us the underlying principles connected with what God approves and disapproves in his creatures. There is a philosophy connected with all of the divine dealings, the appreciation of which is helpful to such as desire to be in harmony with the Lord, because it will enable them the better

to govern their course of life, that we may also be as was David, men and women after "God's own heart" – such as please him.

ONE PECULIARITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible holds up before us the naked facts of its heroes as no other religious book does, and in this particular it commends itself as truthful testimony of the Lord. It tells not only of Samson's strength, but also of his weaknesses. It tells of Rahab's favor and of her previous immorality. It tells of Peter's denying the Lord with cursings, as well as his noble traits and faithfulness to death. It tells us that amongst the early Church was a Judas as well as an Ananias and Sapphira. It tells of Adam's disobedience and condemnation to death, as well as of Christ's obedience and his voluntary sacrifice for the redemption of Adam and incidentally his race. So, then, the mention of David and his experiences in sin, sharply contrasted with the majority of his experiences as a faithful servant of God, is not our keeping, but the Scriptural usage, though it is out of accord with the custom of men and of other religious writings. Instead of upsetting our trust in the Lord and his Word, these facts only strengthen our faith and give us assurance of the truthfulness of the narrative and the good intentions of their writer, and of the wisdom and power of God in **[R4271 : page 327]** respect to the use of all these weak servants in connection with the ministry of the Truth.

It might be said in extenuation of King David's course that in ancient times kings were accorded despotic powers and esteemed to be above the laws of their realm. This, however, is no real excuse, for King David understood well that he was not superior to the divine Law, but on the contrary amenable to it. We find even amongst heathen kings a much higher standard of morality, a more close approach to the requirements of the divine law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." [Note the attitude of King Pharaoh

towards Abraham's wife. (Gen. 12:18,19.) Similarly the conduct of King Abimelech. – Gen. 20:2-5,9-11.]

COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS, SIN-COVERING

Another peculiarity in respect to the Bible is that the God which it reveals is a merciful one. The gods of the heathen are cold, merciless, terrible – deficient of [R4271 : page 328] any attribute of love and compassion. The God of the Bible commends himself to us in that "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly," and made it possible for God to be just and yet be also the justifier of repentant sinners believing in Jesus and returning to his favor through faith in and obedience to Jesus. This is the essence of the lesson, and we have no hesitancy in saying that David's sincere repentance for his sins and the declaration of God's forgiveness and the continuance with David of divine favor have been a lesson of great value to many poor, weak, fallen members of our race, as they have attempted to come into the presence of the holy Jehovah and have realized their own blemishes and unworthiness of his favor. Well do the Scriptures declare, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mightest be feared," revered. Moreover it is this quality of the divine character that calls forth more than fear, more than reverence from those who appreciate it; it calls forth love; as it is written, "We love him because he first loved us, and sent his Son to be a satisfaction for our sins." Well has the poet declared that this is

"LOVE DIVINE, ALL LOVE EXCELLING"

This love of God, as we come to appreciate it, becomes a constraining, drawing, influencing power in the hearts and lives of his people. Thus the Apostle declares, "The love of Christ constraineth us," for if one died for all, then all were dead (under dying conditions): and we who live (we who through faith in Jesus' sacrifice have passed from death into life – justification)

should henceforth live not unto ourselves (selfishly), but unto him who died for us.

The Psalm which constitutes our lesson is supposed to have been composed by the Prophet after his heart had returned to peace with God through assurance of divine forgiveness of his sins. Its opening sentence takes this standpoint. David was the blessed man who had experienced divine forgiveness and covering of his transgression, his sin. He was the man to whom the Lord no longer imputed iniquity and in whose heart was no deception, no secret longing for sin, with merely the restraints of fear, but who had a heart and mind fully turned away from sin and in absolute accord with divine justice and all of its righteous requirements.

Instead of rebelling against the laws of God as hindrances to wilfulness and wickedness, the King delighted in the law of the Lord and meditated therein by day and by night. He was pleased henceforth to measure all of his conduct, yea, his thoughts also, by the divine standard, realizing that these were not only righteous altogether, but that every contrary course would surely meet out to him discomfort, trouble.

GROANING ALL THE DAY LONG

Verses 3 and 4 briefly rehearse the King's unhappy experiences during nearly a year. The King's transgression began in his mind, as do all sins. It is on this account that the Scriptures urge the Lord's people to "Keep their hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life." The King coveted his neighbor's wife, and in the language of our God, "He committed adultery with her in his heart." The first step of sin having been taken the King's conscience was hushed to sleep in some unaccountable manner, while the strength of his vigorous mind was turned aside to the gratification of unholy desires. These accomplished, his case seemed to him hopeless except in one direction. Regret and

remorse, already begun in his mind, brought terrors as he realized that under the Jewish Law both parties were to be stoned to death at the instance of the wronged person. Hence his command to his chief general, Joab, that Uriah, the wronged husband, be placed in the front of the battle and then be deserted by the remainder of the corps, that he might be slain by his enemies. Joab understood the situation. Indeed, the whole matter probably leaked out, and poor David was in serious trouble every way. Not only had Uriah been one of his prominent, valued men, but the grandfather of Bathsheba, Ahithophel, was King David's chief counsellor in State. That the incident did lead to an estrangement between this man and his sovereign is quite evident; later on in Absalom's rebellion he joined his cause as against the king. Apparently, too, these various burdens upon David's mind and heart brought upon the king a spell of sickness.

Sin is always a disturbing element under all conditions, and more particularly as the sinner has light and responsibility and therefore condemnation of conscience. Indeed, we may well suppose, as the Psalmist intimated, that the chiefest of his troubles consisted in his separation from the Lord; his realization that the Lord's favor was justly turned from him, and that in a certain sense he was forsaken of the Lord as an intelligent transgressor of his Law. It may, indeed, be generally recognized as a principle of the divine government that anything which separates the Lord and his people brings upon them the deepest melancholy, and incidentally is sure to affect their health. On the contrary, we may well realize it as a fixed principle that "the peace of God" is sure to be favorable to physical health and happiness. Thus continually we find amongst the Lord's people that as they grow strong in the Lord there is very apt to be a measure of physical rejuvenation also.

THE PROPHET'S PARABLE

Apparently for a time the King had smothered his conscience; had, perhaps, come to think of himself as a sovereign to some extent exempted from the laws governing others, and had this condition been allowed to progress it might have meant a complete estrangement of the King from the Lord. But because he had made a covenant with the Lord and the Lord had accepted him and warranted unto him "the sure mercies of David," therefore he was not allowed to pass into a comatose condition morally, but the Lord sent the Prophet Nathan, who, by a parable of the wealthy man stealing a sheep from a poor man, aroused in the King a sense of justice and a demand that the thief should be severely punished. It was then that the Prophet declared, "Thou art the man," explaining to him that he had not only stolen Uriah's wife, but had sinned still more grievously, and that he must expect chastisements from the Lord for his wrong doing.

Honest at heart the matter appealed to the King immediately, and he saw himself a grievous sinner. He went to the Lord and said, "Against thee and thee alone have I sinned and done this great evil in thy sight." True, he had sinned against Uriah, but since the latter's death there was no means of making amends for his misdeeds; no restitution was possible. To the Lord only could he go asking forgiveness. Although the Lord is very gracious and very merciful, he apparently permitted David to lie under the lashings of his conscience for a considerable time before he restored unto him the joys of his countenance. This should not intimate **[R4271 : page 329]** an unwillingness on the divine part to forgive, but the wisdom of divine grace which will permit the lesson as a means of blessing and as a safeguarding against the future.

Wonder is often expressed that some of the most notorious evil-doers in the world appear to have no conscience, no

realization of their own wickedness; and still more wonder is expressed that these often pass through life with no chastisements, no punishments for sins such as came upon King David for his sins. The explanation of the situation is given by the Apostle, saying, "Some men's sins go before unto judgment, and some follow afterward." The world in general will find that transgressions in the present life, violations of conscience, have a degrading influence upon them which will make their climbing from sin and imperfection to righteousness and perfection during the Millennium all the longer and more difficult. Thus the judgment or penalty for their sins will follow after and they will be obliged to reckon with them during the Millennium. On the contrary, the Lord's consecrated people of the Gospel Age, and his specially consecrated people of the Jewish Age, shall have had their stripes in the present life, because they are not to share with the world in the experiences of stripes, disciplines, etc., during the Millennium, but to do so now that they will be ready for a share in the resurrection of life; to come forth from death perfect beings in full harmony with God. This constitutes an ample explanation as to why the following is true, That the Lord's true followers receive chastisements, stripes, for their correction while the world in general escapes, except in so far as human laws and nature's laws may chastise them; or in a case such as the Amalekites and Amorites; their iniquities came to the full, reaching the point where to have allowed them to go further would have been inconsistent with the divine program, and they were cut off from life [R4272 : page 329] to hinder them from greater degradation.

THE LORD'S CHASTENING HAND

In one of the Psalms David wrote, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Verses 3 and 4 tell us something of the King's experiences under the rod of chastisement, which the pride of the Lord's favor calls elsewhere, "The light of thy countenance." At first the King kept silence. He was ashamed of himself and knew

of nothing he could say to the Lord in extenuation of his conduct. But the burden grew heavier and heavier for both mind and body. He seemed to age rapidly that year. His "bones waxed old"; he became enfeebled prematurely. Day and night the Lord's chastening hand was heavy upon him, so that all the freshness, vigor and joy were consumed as by a drouth. What a poetic picture of a child of God under the ban of divine displeasure – mourning after a manner that the world could not understand! The result, however, was joyous, because when the Lord restored to David the light of his face, and again, when David's cup ran over with divine favor and blessing, he was able more than ever to appreciate the value of the Lord's smile. All of the Lord's people must learn the value of the blessing of the Lord in the fellowship divine. Here they can sing,

"O, let no earth-born cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes."

Fortunately not all of God's dear people need such severe discipline. Nevertheless, for all there is the comforting thought that even if any should be taken in grievous sin, there is still mercy with the Lord, which is to be sought for. But still more are the blessings for those children who possess more of the Lord's character, so that from their hearts they can say, "I delight to do thy will, O God; thy law is written in my heart." These also require lessons, chastisements, for even our dear Redeemer himself "learned obedience from the things which he suffered." He learned the cost of obedience, as he has since learned the value thereof in the Father's estimation – who raised him to glory and immortality. Similarly all his followers must learn in his school. Each one whom the Father will receive must be an under-study of the great Chief Shepherd. Each one must by experiences learn the value of the Father's smile and fellowship and gracious promises for the present and the eternal life.

THOU FORGAVEST THE INIQUITY

Various erroneous views are entertained respecting the forgiveness of sins and the stripes which sometimes follow after the sins have been forgiven. King David's experiences demonstrate the truth on this subject. After he sinned there was a period in which he seemed to appreciate the facts – their enormity. Then came all the force of awakening and self-abasement and contrition of heart and humbling before the Lord in acknowledging the sin, in confessing the transgression before the Lord. Then came in due course the Lord's forgiveness and by and by the King's appreciation of the fact that he had been forgiven, and, as a result, the restoration of the joys in life's experiences. Nevertheless we find that the end was not yet; that years afterwards the Lord allowed a very severe, heavy discipline to come upon the King and his family, apparently as a retribution. Absalom's rebellion against his father, King David, and all the train of evil experiences which followed as a part of the same, were recognized by David himself as permitted of the Lord as a chastisement on account of his transgression which had been forgiven.

How can this be understood? How can a sin be forgiven and yet punishment be inflicted on its account? The right thought on this question is that divine forgiveness signifies that God gives over or relinquishes his indignation against the sin and the sinner and deals with the sinner henceforth from the standpoint of favor. Justice, however, still maintains a hold and must be satisfied. Justice knows no forgiveness. It requires a full payment, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Applying the matter to ourselves, to Christians of this Gospel Age, we remark that Justice has been satisfied so far as "believers" are concerned by the death of our Lord Jesus. His merit has been appropriated to us. Is this only a part of the demands of justice? We reply that it was for all of our wrong-doing or short-coming or such proportion of it as

was unwilful. In a word, God's provision in Christ for our forgiveness does not cover a wilful sin, of which the Apostle says, "He that sinneth wilfully is of the devil." It merely covers the unwilful sins, or in the case of sins that are partly of weakness, partly a temptation and partly of wilfulness, it covers all the unwilful features, but leaves us responsible for whatever portion of wrong-doing on our part was wilful; hence the Apostle said to the Church, "If we sin wilfully after we have received a knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." – Heb. 10:26,27. [R4272 : page 330]

As a matter of fact, it is safe to presume that, surrounded by the weaknesses of others and beset by the weaknesses of our own flesh, very few of the Lord's people reach this point of full, complete, deliberate, intentional sin, the penalty of which is the Second Death. In nearly all sin, therefore, there is room for a measure of divine forgiveness, proportionate to the willingness or weakness. The sins of the Lord's people repented of are graciously forgiven in the sense that divine disfavor and withholding of the Lord's countenance are no more in evidence and the individual is restored. Still there hangs over him a responsibility for whatever measure of wilfulness is connected with the misdeed. And the Lord will see to it that he receives the necessary stripes. We are not to think of this as vindictive, but rather as a measure of justice, that thus is learned something of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, its undesirability, and that good always brings its reward.

In harmony with this thought there are numerous Christians today who have come into full harmony with the Lord Jesus and every blessing of fellowship with God's children, who are, nevertheless, suffering physically the penalty for indiscretion, sins of their earlier life. The sin has been forgiven in the sense that it is not held against them so as to bar their fellowship with the Lord. It is covered, but it has left its mark upon their flesh and causes

them distress in various ways. Indeed, a general blight is upon the whole human family, which is covered in some respect to those who have accepted Christ. The scars and weaknesses of the present persist in our mortal flesh, and we have no hope even to get rid of these. They belong, however, to the mortal, which having been reckonedly justified through faith in Christ and consecration to God's service, will not be gotten rid of until the "change" in the First Resurrection, when we shall be granted new bodies. Then the sins which are now covered or hidden in the Lord's sight will be absolutely effaced, and we shall know them no more. This seems to be the Apostle Peter's thought when he says, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19.) In a word, our sins may be covered, but, at the second coming of our Lord, they will be blotted out completely and forever.

WHEN THOU MAYEST BE FOUND

Thinking of the Lord's favor to himself, the Prophet by inspiration sets forth a principle applicable to all of the Lord's – to all people at all times, saying, For this [cause – because of God's mercy], everyone that is godly may pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely, when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach unto him. In other words, there is a time limit to divine mercies. The Lord will not always chide, neither will he keep (restrain) his anger forever. There came a limit to his merciful dealing with natural Israel. When that point had been reached a separation took place between those who were Israelites (the wheat) and the remainder (the chaff). The former were received into the Gospel dispensation, the others being scattered in the destruction of Israel's national polity in A.D. 70.

Similarly in dealing with the Gospel Church, a reasonable period seems to be allowed to each individual to make his calling

and election sure, who, if he fails to do so, may drop into the Great Company, but whose only hope of attaining this place is through fiery trials in which, if still unfaithful, the end will be destruction in the Second Death. Similarly in the end of this Gospel Age comes the testings of the nominal systems, with the Lord's declaration that some will stumble and fall and be overwhelmed in the anarchy impending as Babylon is cast down, while the faithful will be "changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Similarly during the Millennial Age, when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth and every member of the race shall be privileged to see the "true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," everyone will be obliged to make a start in righteousness by obedience to God's laws; and those who refuse will, as the Prophet says, die the Second Death: "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die an hundred years old, and the sinner an hundred years old shall be accursed." – Isa. 65:20.

David seems to speak prophetically for those in the end of this Gospel Age, saying, "Thou art my hiding place; thou wilt preserve me from trouble; thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance." As the faithful were delivered in the great trouble that came upon the Jewish nation, so the faithful will be **[R4273 : page 330]** delivered from the great trouble impending upon Christendom. This does not necessarily imply that they will be taken away before the trouble. It is "Through much tribulation we shall enter the Kingdom." As of old the three Hebrews who were cast into the fiery furnace were uninjured, while those who threw them in were slain by the heat, smitten to death, so in the coming trouble the Lord's faithful will not be injured by the fiery trials through which they will pass.

GUIDED BY GOD'S EYE

The last four verses of our lesson represent our Lord as speaking to his people, "Ye righteous." In view of the context this is not to be understood to represent any absolutely faultless. "There is none righteous; no, not one." The righteous here addressed are such as the Lord reckons righteous, because of their heart attitude of faith and desire to be obedient to his will. To these he says, "I will instruct them and teach them in the way in which they shall go; I will guide them with mine eye."

This may be understood to signify that the Lord's eye will watch over us that he may give us the necessary, proper counsel. Another way in which it may be viewed, is represented by an exhibition which some of us have seen of a horse driven without reins or bridle, simply directed by the eye and watching for the master's will, the animal being without restraint. But this is true of only those who have had exceptional training. A horse and a mule, as the next verse tells us, are without understanding and require bit and bridle to make them serve us properly. We are exhorted not to be driven in this manner, because such is not acceptable to the Lord. "He seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth."

Those of God's children who fail to learn this lesson will never constitute the members of the Elect class, will not be "fit for the Kingdom of heaven." True, the Lord will deal with the world in general along these lines during the Millennium. With bit and bridle they will be restrained. Nevertheless, even the restitution class must advance beyond this place else they will never be fit for eternal life at the close of the Millennial Age. Whoever sees the principle here involved, **[R4273 : page 331]** that if he has any hope or desire for joint-heirship with Christ in his Kingdom, must learn the lesson of serving the Father and his cause of

righteousness gladly, willingly; must be guided by his eye; must follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

SORROWS TO THE WICKED

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." Those who trust in the Lord, to all outward appearances, have as many sorrows as their less pious neighbors. Nevertheless God's promise is sure, his grace is sufficient for them. They may rest assured that "All things work together for good" to those who rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope, which maketh not ashamed those in whose hearts the love of God is shed abroad.

BE GLAD IN THE LORD, AND REJOICE AND SHOUT FOR JOY, ALL YE THAT ARE UPRIGHT AND HONEST IN HEART

We trust that all of our readers are coming to appreciate this blessed message more and more – to be glad in the Lord – a very different thing from being glad in the trifling things of this world. He whose affections are set upon this earth will continually find tribulations which hinder his rejoicing. But he who has set his affections upon things above, on the Lord and the glorious things which he has promised us, may indeed rejoice, for our Lord changes not. "Not one of his good promises shall fail." Let all who are honest in hope, in intention, in endeavor, speak forth the Lord's praise and shout for joy, not merely that their unintentional imperfections according to the flesh are covered, but also in the thought that the reign of righteousness, the Millennial Kingdom, is now at hand, and that under its domination all the families of the earth shall be blessed after the great Adversary, Satan, shall have been bound.

"'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up,

Whose golden rounds are our calamities;
Whereon our firm feet planting, nearer God,
The spirit climbs and hath its eye unsealed."
