

The Other Side of Forgiveness

Psal^m 32 is a beautiful testimony to the power and scope of God's forgiveness. In fact, to emphasize the scope of divine grace, David uses three different words to describe the various ways in which we assault the fellowship that God desires with us. He speaks of our "transgressions" (verse 1). This word refers to our specific acts of rebellion against or disloyalty toward God. David writes of our "sins" (verse 1). This word is the most general term for sin in that it refers to any way by which we miss God's expressed will. He speaks of "iniquity" (verse 5), which refers to a crooked way that usually involves an intentional choice to do wrong.

The psalmist goes on to describe the painful discipline that God might impose on us to compel us to come clean before Him. David describes those periods when he refused to call his sin, "sin" in terms of sapped strength, bones wasting away and spiritual groaning. There can be little vibrancy between any man and his Creator while he is harboring sin in his heart. But, then, David describes the assurance of God's forgiveness as an assurance that comes to him quite quickly once he does choose to be honest before God.

So, what keeps this transaction of confession followed by the assurance of God's forgiveness from slipping into something cheap, like the effect of a drug fix? That is what David addresses in the final stanza of this remarkable little psalm. On the other side of forgiveness, God desires a relationship with a man that is real, intimate and informed as to God's desires. At some point, our Creator wants us to begin to stand and walk like true children who know His mind as well as the nature of their Father's business.

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.
⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit
and bridle or they will not come to you. – Psalm 32:8, 9

Eventually, God wants us to come to Him in loving obedience and like-mindedness rather than to be driven to Him in remorse and repentance. A dumb animal may have to be harnessed, beaten and driven before it will do what it is supposed to do. God doesn't want to spend all of His time with us disciplining us; bending our wills and breaking our spirits. He desires rather that the strong wills and tenacious spirits within us will become redirected toward those matters that are in perfect harmony with His mind. That is the real definition of meekness that Jesus introduced to the New Testament believer; not that our strength and will are broken, but rather, that they are intact, only surrendered to the values and the agendas of His kingdom.

That is what makes us useful servants to God. It is not simply that we are forgiven over and over again. It is that we learn to take advantage of the new beginnings He so graciously provides in order to become more useful vessels for Him.