

# Guilt Free

Psalm 32:1-5

## Intro

Do you want to make the act of confessing your sin as healthy as possible? Then make a full not a partial confession. That's the message from a recent study conducted by researchers in the U.S. and Israel titled "*I Cheated but Only a Little.*" Based on a series of studies involving over 4,000 people, the researchers found that people who only partially confessed a transgression felt worse than those who do not confess at all.

Dr. Eyal Pe'er, the study's lead author, had a surprisingly biblical angle on the results. He said, "*Confessing to only part of the guilt of one's transgression is attractive to a lot of people because they expect the confession to be more believable and guilt-relieving than not confessing. But our findings show the exact opposite ... People seeking redemption by partially admitting their big lies feel guiltier because they do not take complete responsibility for their behaviors.*"

The Harvard Business Review summarized the research this way: "*Confession is a powerful way to relieve guilt, but it works only if you tell the whole truth.*" (Source: "*Telling the Whole Truth May Ease Feelings of Guilt,*" American Psychological Association Jan. 23, 2014)

That is a very interesting result. So what we deduce from that research is that a full truthful confession – not a partial confession - helps the person take complete responsibility for their actions and alleviates guilt. Thus a full confession is a powerful way to relieve guilt and helps people seek redemption and restoration.

That's exactly what King David did. Through Psalms 51 and 32 David makes a full confession of his transgression, his iniquity and his sin. He wants to be relieved from his guilt and seeks redemption and restoration. Through these psalms David expresses a strong desire to be free from guilt and for a clean start on life.

## The Damage of Sin

You see, David sat upon a throne. He had autocratic power, servants by the hundreds, armies to command. He had wealth, power and influence. He had all that he wanted! But he could not cope with the consequences of sin, neither can we.

Sin causes suffering. It brings guilt, worry, fear, and anxiety. It harms and destroys relationships, families, one's reputation, one's profession and it affects our health – emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and physically. The consequence of sin is very damaging. That's why we need to make a full confession. Don't hide behind the lies; especially the lies we tell ourselves when we try to rationalize sin away. Be truthful not only to others and God but to yourself.

We were not created to sin but to live for God and in the purity of His love. That is the healing and restoration that so many people need today!

Let's look at Psalm 32 again and look at how we can be free from guilt and sin. This message is a sequel to last Sunday's message.

## **Psalm 32:3-5 "The Heaviness of Sin and Guilt"**

<sup>3</sup> *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

<sup>4</sup> *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*  
*Selah*

<sup>5</sup> *Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah*

Look at verse 3: “*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*” David is reflecting upon those times when he chose to keep quiet about his sins. When he tried to cover up and ignore his iniquities his bones felt like they were decaying. For a year David kept silent about his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and being responsible for the murder of her husband Uriah.

When we don’t own up to our sins, our bodies revolt. Instead of joy, we experience heartache. When we keep our mouths shut, our conscience screams. When we bottle up evil our bones waste away.

Proverbs 28:13: “*He who conceals his sins does not prosper.*”

When you hide your sins you will be unhealthy and when you share your secret with God and with someone you trust, you’ll stop feeling sick. The secret you most want to conceal is the one you most need to reveal to God and to someone – especially a godly and wise believer.

Verse 4 continues, “*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.*” Even at night David could not rest from the cries of his conscience and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The word “heavy” means, “to grievously afflict.” God’s hand can bring blessings but can also bear down on us. It’s because He cares so much for us. He loves us but loves us too much to let us keep living the way we are.

As Hebrews 12:10 says, “*God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness.*”

David recalls feeling like his strength was sapped, his energy evaporated as in the heat of the summer. Listen to how he described this time in his life in Psalm 38:2-8: “*For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me...my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly...I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.*” Guilt is really a divine implant graciously designed to bring the sinner back to God in confession and repentance.

These verses remind us that when we don’t fully confess we will experience emotional and physical distress. Anger and bitterness can come as a result of unconfessed sin and will eat your insides out. Ulcers, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, and lower back pain can come from concealing our sins.

Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in the psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, about 75% of them could walk out the next day!

### Selah

After describing his spiritual drought and distress, David then writes the word, “*Selah*” immediately following this verse. This is a word that beckons us to pause and think about what has just been said. David doesn’t want us to miss the point. Only confession will bring restoration. [Pause & mediate]. David expresses this in Psalm 4:4 “*...Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah.*”

It’s not easy for us to admit our sins, is it? It’s like the guy who went into the Hallmark store and asked the clerk, “Do you have a card that stops short of saying ‘I’m sorry’ yet vaguely hints of some wrongdoing?” Many of us do this with God when we’re not specific about our sins. We need to fall down on our knees in real full confession and repentance before Him.

Verse 5 gives us the right approach. When David could find relief in no other way, he said, “*Then, I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’ -- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*” Instead of concealing, David is now confessing. He first acknowledged his sin by stating the obvious. Then he stopped trying to cover it up. By the way, we can’t expect God to cover what we’re not willing to uncover.

Finally, David confessed to the Lord. In a sense, he's like the prodigal son who had grown tired of living in sin and with the pigs. He admits his sin and doesn't make any excuses. To "confess" literally means, "to say the same" thing that God says about your sin. Until we can say, "God, you're right, it's wrong," we haven't really confessed.

Notice that David takes personal responsibility by the use of personal pronouns "my sin, my iniquity, my transgressions." Notice that he doesn't deny, minimize, or blame someone else. He simply calls his sin, "sin." It's not an error, a mistake, or a lapse in judgment. The greatest holdup to the healing of my hang-ups is me. We need to make a full confession of our sin and wrong doing.

### Get Real

We would be much better off if we would stop using other words and phrases to excuse our behaviour and begin using biblical terms. Sin loves to hide behind euphemisms. Here are some that come to mind.

- Instead of saying, "I stretched the truth," it's better to say; "I just sinned by lying to you."
- Instead of saying, "I just have a bad temper," it's more accurate to say, "I just sinned against you with my words and anger. Please forgive me."
- Instead of saying, "I had an affair," it's more biblical to say, "I committed adultery."

The smug soul that comes before God and says that sin is no big deal can never know the living God. John Piper puts it this way: "Until we fear sin and its consequences more keenly, we will not prize our pardon very highly." This may sound blunt but actually it's much better to call sin what it is.

Confession is more than merely informing God that we've sinned. It also involves a turning away. It's only when we stop being quiet about our specific sins, when we refuse to hide our transgressions and admit to God what we can barely admit to ourselves, that we will experience the fruit of forgiveness. Instead of just confessing our sins wholesale, it's time to own up to the specifics. Here's a helpful phrase to keep in mind: when you make a mess, confess! When you recognize your sin and reject it, God will remove it: "And you forgave the guilt of my sin."

We don't have to beg God to forgive us because He wants to forgive more than we want to be forgiven. We don't have to bargain with Him and we don't have to bribe Him by promising to do a bunch of good things, and we don't have to abuse our bodies for the bad things we've done. Another pause is needed here – *Selah* – so that we don't rush past the beauty of having all of our sins forgiven. Take some time right now to specifically confess any sins that you've been concealing. Remember it needs to be a full confession and not a partial one.

### **Conclusion**

Christianity and modern psychology—agree on at least one thing: keeping dark secrets can destroy us, and confessing them can set us free. The fifth century Christian spiritual leader John Cassian claimed that "*as soon as a wicked thought has been revealed to God and at least one other Christian it loses its power. The demonic stronghold of sin is drawn out as it were into the light from its dark and deep cave by the power of the confession ... For [Satan's] harmful counsels hold sway in us as they lie concealed in our heart.*"

Nearly 1,500 years later, a contemporary textbook on psychology reached a similar conclusion (although note Cassian's emphasis on sin and demonic strongholds is not mentioned). The book *Coping with Stress* claims that "*people who tend to keep secrets have more physical and mental complaints, on average, than people who do not ... [including] greater anxiety, depression, and bodily symptoms, such as back pain and headaches.*" Like Cassian, this book also argues that finding healthy places to share our secrets leads to freedom: "*The initial embarrassment of confessing is frequently outweighed by the relief that comes with the verbalization of the darker, secretive aspects of the self.*" (Source: John Cassian, *The Conferences* Newman Press, 1997, p. 91; C.R. Snyder, *Coping With Stress* Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 196).

It's true, confession is good not only for the soul but also for our holistic health. Learn from David.