

worse than that. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib"; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." The prophet's message, spoken centuries ago, would apply to many people to-day. God has given us a freedom which has been denied to the beasts. We can decide whether we shall please God or disobey Him. But we try to excuse ourselves for doing evil by saying that we are not to blame, that circumstances or companions were too much for us. When we talk like that we are lowering ourselves to the level of the brutes who must act always under compulsion.

6. The way of the transgressor is hard.

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked. That is a mighty law from which there is no escape. It is true that the punishment for sin does not always come soon. Often it seems to be long delayed. But it always does come. Sin always cheats us. It shows us at first only its attractive side, hiding the other side in the background. But at last its real character cannot be hid. An accusing conscience begins to do its work. The consciousness of having lost the best that God has had for us, the sense of wasted years, the knowledge that others have sinned because we showed them how, and led them into it,—these all appear at last. It is true that sin pays wages, but the wages of sin is death.

THE LESSON GRADED

This section embraces teaching material for the various grades in the School.

For Teachers of Bible Classes

This psalm, whether originally composed about it, or not, follows appropriately David's penitence, after a year of callous indifference to his gross sin.

The introduction, vs. 1, 2, exalts the peculiar happiness of those who, having done wrong, are made right. The description of that happiness is intensified in vivid synonyms for evil, and its removal. Bring out the meaning of "transgression" (v. 1), which conveys the idea that evil in its nature is a disloyal attempt to destroy God, who stands for good, and good only; "sin" (v. 1), which has the force of a tragic missing of life's real mark and destroys the ideal of humanity in respect to character; and "iniquity" (v. 2), which is a species of crookedness or distortion, and destroys morality, by leading a man to wear his eyes upside down in the discernment of right and wrong. The psalm falls into two parts:

1. *The personal experience of forgiveness*, vs. 3-5. Go back on vs. 1, 2, and explain "forgiven" as the "lifting off" of a burden, as in the case of Bunyan's pilgrim; "covered" as the hiding away of a foul thing, never to be seen again; and "imputeth not," or "reckoneth not" as the canceling of a debt. Then show how, in personal experience, the happiness of all this follows the misery of

impenitence described as a dumb sullen consciousness of metaphorical (or literal) suffering in rotting bones (v. 3); the pressure of a heavy unseen hand upon the wrong-doer (v. 4); the drying up of life's saps, as in a scorching drought, v. 4. This is a truly pathetic picture of "a soul gnawing itself." But this oppressive silence ceases. Was it through Nathan's parable? Voice is at last found in frank acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and divine pardon is granted, v. 5. Dumb remorse gives way to gratitude for the remission of sins, 1 John 1:9.

2. *The universal scope of the divine goodness*, vs. 6-11. David's personal experience may be construed as a song of hope for the hopeless. The blackness of his character is whitened (not "whitewashed") by the alchemy of God's forgiving grace. A hypocrite, who falls, is content to stay down. A true man rises. His personal experience has at once taught him the joy of turning over a new leaf (vs. 6-8), and the sorrow of implacable brutish persistence in evil, vs. 9, 10.

The psalm ends in a summons to rejoicing on the part of those who honestly appeal to the divine goodness in its broadest scope, and readiness to meet sincere approaches, v. 11. (See Acts 3:26). "The blacker the sin, the brighter the Christ."

For Teachers of the Senior Scholars

Some one has said that in the passage which we studied last week we have the tragedy of