

## ***Psalm 51 – Confession and Repentance***

Paul admonished the Corinthian brethren to examine themselves..

**1 Corinthians 11:28-29**— But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Psalm 51 is a very good mirror to examine our hearts. What is the nature of sin? John explains:

**1 John 2:8-10**— If we say that we have *no sin*, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us . . . If we say that we have *not sinned*, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. What is the solution?

**1 John 2:7-9**— But if we *walk in the light* as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we *confess our sins*, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So, if we walk in the light and confess our sins, God will forgive us because He is faithful and just. There are three Hebrew words translated "forgive" or "forgiveness".

- Hebrew word "salah": Used 46 times in the OT and translated into English as "forgive" or as "pardon" or as "spare". The most important thing for us to understand is that this word is used *exclusively for God!* Never does the OT describe anything done by human beings as "salah," it is always applied to something that God does. Here is an example:

**Jeremiah 31:34**— No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they all shall know Me, . . . says the LORD. For I will forgive [*salah*] their iniquity [*avon*], and their sin [*chatta'ah*] I will remember no more.

- Hebrew word "nasa' ": Used 654 times in the OT, and 16 times it is translated as "forgive". This word literally means: to lift up (a burden), to carry, to bear up.

**Genesis 50:17**— Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive [*nasa'*] the trespass [*pesha'*] of your brothers and their sin [*chatta'ah*]; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass [*pesha'*] of the servants of the God of your father." . . .

- Hebrew word "kaphar": Used 102 times in the OT. Its basic meaning is "to cover over". This is the word that is translated as "atonement". Also translated as: reconcile, appease, pardon, purge, and 3 times as "forgive".

**Deuteronomy 21:8**— "Be merciful, (provide atonement [*kaphar*]), O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel." And the blood shall be forgiven [*kaphar*] them.

**Psalm 78:38-39**— But He, *being* full of compassion, forgave [*kaphar*] their iniquity [*avon*], and did not destroy them: yea, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.

The expression "it shall be forgiven" literally means "it shall be covered over."

The distinction between the two Hebrew words "salah" and "nasa'" is lost when both words are translated into English as "forgive." Now we can understand what David was really saying in Psalm 51. David was first and foremost focusing on "salah", asking God to remove *his guilt* in these matters. David was accountable to God, and *to God only*. This Psalm bears the mark of David's deep inner guilt, and it shows the character of true confession. Jesus Christ payment for our sins occurred at the cross.

**1 John 2:12**— I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

There is no such thing in the life of a believer as an uncovered sin. All our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ which He shed at the cross. What is confession then? Confession (word in the Greek is *homologeō*, to say the same thing) is agreeing with God that you sinned and it is our

turning from it. It isn't asking to be forgiven. It is saying, "God, I've sinned. I thank You for already forgiving me, and I will turn away from it." Confession involves repentance. And repentance towards God means changing your mind.

**2 Corinthians 7:8-10**— "Though I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. . . . Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a *godly* manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For *godly* sorrow (towards God) produces repentance (towards God) leading to salvation . . ."

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In the totality of the Psalm, David prays for four things:

- Sin has made him dirty, and he asks to be clean.
- Guilt has made him physically sick, and he asks to be forgiven and healed.
- Iniquity has broken his friendship with God, and he asks to be restored.
- But mostly, mostly, he asks for pardon and mercy. Not justice.

A true confession demands a correct view of sin. This is what David recognizes:

- Sin *deserves* judgment. A right view of sin means that recognize that sin deserves judgment.

**Psalm 51:1**— "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgression."

David pleads for mercy, this plea is an admission that he does not deserve to be acquitted, or he would've pled for justice . . . Mercy, tender mercies, "Please God, don't give me what I deserve." Sin deserves judgment. We do not deserve to be forgiven.

Insight from another familiar Psalm:

**Psalm 103:10-11**— He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; . . .

We ought to praise God for His mercy. His mercy never fails. David appeals to mercy.

**Psalm 130:3-4**— If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.

**Ezra 9:13-14**— And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have *punished us less than our iniquities deserve*, and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?

Ezra tells God, "because of all the mercy You gave us in the past, You did not punish us according to our iniquities, because of your mercy and grace should we sin again?" Of course not.

- Sin *appeals* to mercy. Sin has to appeal to mercy. There is no other appeal that it can make. And that's exactly what David does in Psalm 51. He cries out to God's lovingkindness.
- Sin *demand*s cleansing. Because God, according to Habakkuk 1, is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity. God demands that sin be cleansed. David again:

**Psalm 51:2-3**— Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

True confession accepts total acknowledgment and responsibility for sin. Sin proceeds from our nature. David says, "For I was shaped in iniquity, I was brought forth into iniquity and in, or *into*, sin did my mother conceive me." We were born into a nature of sin.

**Psalm 58:3**— The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

You are a sinner, some people aren't willing to recognize this fact. Jeremiah tells us:

**Jeremiah 17:9-10**— "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings."

We know what we are, having recognized the sin that is in our life, we need a *right view of God*. We need to recognize God and His holiness. David admits the holiness of God, "You desire truth in the inward parts." God is not concerned with external behavior. He is concerned with what's going on inside you. God is concerned with how you use your mind. Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart. Confession begins by taking stock of the absolute holiness of God and what He requires in the inward parts. David considers also God's power. He says, "God, if You clean me, I'll be clean." That's power. "You wash me, and I'll be fairly white." David is saying, "God, I recognize not only Your holiness, You want the inside, but I recognize Your power. You can change me." God, I want a new creation. I want a new attitude, new heart."

This sin in the life of David was the great catalyst of his holiness. It was a time of reformation for him. "Make me hear joy and gladness again, that the bones which You've broken may rejoice." You sin against God, and He chastises you. What does chastisement in your life do? You develop a right view of God by *recognizing His holiness*. He expects inward holiness from you. With His power, He can change your life if you commit it to Him. Even as a Christian, you can change your sin habits. A right view of God *recognizes His forgiveness*. So you'll know He is a merciful God, because it reveals His nature. Consider this passage,

**Micah 7:18-19**— Who is a God like You, pardoning [*nasa'*] iniquity [*'avon*] and passing over the transgression [*pasha'*] of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy [*hesed*]. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities [*'avon*]. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

God is merciful. David sees that the view that he must have of himself is this: "I must be holy. I must be godly. I must live for God. For the sake of sinners. To teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted unto You."

David writes, "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, then my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise." So we must be holy for the sake of sinners who need to hear, because then will sinners be converted. You must be holy for the sake of God, not only for sinners' sake, but for God's sake. David says, "I must be holy because it pleases You. God, You're not concerned with externals. You're concerned with inside, inward holiness." Do you want to bring joy to God? Do you want to make God happy? Do you want to make the God's heart glad? Be holy. Yes, God desires that: a broken spirit, a broken and a penitent heart, a heart broken over sin, a heart that mourns over sin, a heart grieving over sin pleases God. We must also be holy for the sake of the saints. In this psalm David is praying for others. "Rebuild all of Jerusalem, God. Restore all of it. Bring them all back to righteousness." Your prayers are not effective unless there's true holiness. David says, "I have to confess my sin, Lord" and then he pours out his heart. David sets a pattern for us. He sets a pattern for all time, even regarding the ministry we have to other people.

**Psalms 66:18**— If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

My prayer is that we might go before God with a broken and a contrite spirit. A broken and contrite heart pleases God. David is saying, "I want a life that pleases You. I want my life to have an effect on sinners, lead them to conversion. I want my life to have a positive effect on You. I want You to delight in my life to please You. I want You to find pleasure in my life."

The point being that David now feels that he can pray for His people. If our lives are not pure, then we can't bring delight to God and we can't be useful to intercede on behalf of the saints. The prayers of a righteous man produce much: You become useful to the lost, useful to the church and very useful to God. God can use a broken and contrite spirit.

The theme of this Psalm is about David's confession of his sins and true repentance towards God.

### **Outline of Psalm 51:**

A. David's realization of what he has done — Psalm 51:1-4.

**Psalm 51—** « To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. »

a. David's plea for mercy, forgiveness, washing and cleansing.

**Psalm 51:1-2—** Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness [*hesed*]; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions [*pasha'*]. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity [*'avon*], and cleanse me from my sin [*chatta'ah*].

b. David's confession of sinful conduct, shows godly sorrow after having done evil.

**Psalm 51:3-4—** For I acknowledge my transgressions [*pasha'*], and my sin [*chatta'ah*] is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil [*ra'rah*] in Your sight — That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

B. David's godly sorrow and acknowledgment of God's desire — Psalm 51:5-6.

**Psalm 51:5-6—** Behold, I was brought forth (shaped) *into* iniquity [*'avon*], and *into* sin [*chet'*] my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

C. David's prayer seeking purging, washing and restoration — Psalm 51:7-12.

a. David's prays for God to purge him, wash him, hide His face and blotting.

**Psalm 51:7-10—** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Hide Your face from my sins [*chet'*], and blot out all my iniquities [*'avon*].

b. David's prays for God for joy, restoration of broken bones, for a clean heart, renewal, not be cast away, to keep the Holy Spirit, restore the lost joy God's salvation and uphold David.

**Psalm 51:10-12—** Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins [*chet'*], and blot out all my iniquities [*'avon*]. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

D. David's promise and commitment— Psalm 51:13-17.

a. David's promise to teach God's ways to others.

**Psalm 51:13—** Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.

b. David's promise to offer praise, if delivered from his guilt.

**Psalm 51:14-15—** Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

c. David know in what God delights.

**Psalm 51:16-17—** For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken [*shabar*] and a contrite [*dakah*] heart - These, O God, You will not despise.

E. David's prayer for Zion and Jerusalem — Psalm 51:18-19.

a. For God to do good to Zion and to build the walls of Jerusalem.

**Psalm 51:18—** Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem.

b. For God to be pleased.

**Psalm 51:19—** Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness [*tsedeq*] , with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.