

## THE CONFESSION

Psalm 51:1-17

Have you noticed how creative kids are when something gets broken and they are responsible? The first inclination is to just keep quiet about it and hope no one will notice. What happens when the broken window is discovered and the question is asked, “Who broke the window?” the typical response is “Not me!” This is somewhat expected of children. Why? Because children are typically irresponsible. We have confidence that as they mature that responsibility comes along also.

If you watch the news on TV or read the newspaper you will come across stories of people who have done something wrong and when it comes to light, the typical response is to deny that it happened or to blame it on someone else or make some crazy claim that their rights were violated because a hidden camera was used to catch them. Irresponsibility is a problem with some supposedly mature people, apparently.

How should we react if we do something wrong? Ideally, when a wrong is realized, then it should be confessed and the wrong corrected. If that opportunity is missed because of fear of the consequences, then the possibility of being discovered hangs around as an anxiety producer and misery follows (assuming the person has a conscience). When discovery is made and the wrong is exposed, then the way a person responds tells a lot about the character of the person.

### Guilty As Charged – 51:1-5

<sup>1</sup>For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup>For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup>Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. <sup>5</sup>Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Psalm 51:1-5 (NASB95)

We have a built-in sense of judgment in that we know there are cause-and-effect consequences of everything we do. If we jump off or slip from a high place, then we know we will fall. The best we can hope for is a soft landing. The soft landing is mercy. Our wish is that the “jump or the slip” had never occurred and that life could be as it was before it happened.

God does not turn back the clock and allow us to make another choice. However, He has provided a solution for where we are in life. That solution is the blood of His Son that washes away all our sin. We need this cleansing because we know when we have slipped and fallen (or jumped) and the guilt is there and confronting us at every turn.

There seems to be a deepening progression of David’s plea to God for increasing depth of caring from God. Graciousness might be shown to a casual acquaintance, lovingkindness, to a friend, but compassion would be reserved for close members of one’s family. This triad of expressions of God’s love is matched to an equal number of actions that David was asking God to do for him to remedy three levels of faults. The most egregious fault that David sensed was his “transgressions” or rebelliousness against God. The remedy David requested was for God to “blot out” or erase it. The idea expressed by “iniquity” is related to character faults such as perversity or depravity. The remedy, in this case, was “wash me thoroughly” or repeated washing again and again. Such deep-seated character faults lead to learned behaviors that are difficult to remove without intense corrective action. The final fault that David addressed was “sin” or the general condition of missing the mark. The remedy of “cleanse me” sounds very similar to the remedy for iniquity. The “cleansing” is likely a reference to a ceremonial “rite of

purification” as opposed to the serious corrective action that thorough washing implies.

The progressive nature of sin is such that if we ignore “missing the mark,” then that can grow and progress into more serious faults that can be characterized as perversity. Dealing with such things can be very difficult to get rid of in your life. You can probably think of conditions that people wind up needing professional counseling to deal with problems that are serious. The more such things grow and consume a person the more likely it will result in rebellion against God. This is a good argument for an ounce of prevention.

You probably have come across situations when a person was confronted with something they had done that was wrong and the response was “I had no idea that was wrong.” There are cases where that can happen. This was definitely not the case for David. He knew what he had done was not right!

The confrontation from Nathan happened about a year after the initial sin. So, David had been living with the ongoing conviction and guilt for about a year. Hear his words, “my sin is ever before me.” This tells us that he could not stop thinking about what he had done. My guess is that he thought about it all the time. The problem was that he just thought about but he did not do anything about correcting the situation or confessing the sin. He probably felt sorry for what he had done. Remorse is not the same as repentance.

I would guess that many people today are in this same situation. They have done something that was wrong (it may have been years ago) and it continues to come up in their minds and they just can’t shake it off. They do nothing about it for fear that the consequences of “confessing” will be worse than living with the guilt. That is probably what David was dealing with.

David’s confession in verse four is a simple “I have sinned.” David also (at least at this point of the process) realized that what he had done was done with God observing it. It makes you wonder if David did not realize that God was seeing what he was doing when it was all happening? Obviously, he did not think about that! Have we stumbled upon a key bit of information? If people had an awareness that God is seeing everything they do, would they be as likely to do something wrong? Of all the people in the world, who should be most keenly aware that God sees everything they do because God resides in them? If you answered “Christians” then you get a gold star for the right answer. If Christians do something that is obviously wrong, then we can conclude one of two possibilities:

They forgot God was watching

They knew God was watching and did it anyway.

I’ll let you decide for yourself which is the most likely possibility. The bottom line is that neither are acceptable ways to operate.

David did not offer any defense. He did not deny it happened, he did not plead insanity, he did not even say that he was overcome with “passion.” What he did was well thought out as to the execution of the plan but no thought was given to the consequences. He had essentially thrown himself on the “mercy of the court.” He was ready to accept whatever God decided to do. We know from what followed as a consequence of his action that David did not blame or accuse God of being too harsh.

When we sin we sometimes (usually) hurt another person. We have rationalized some bad behavior in that we cannot immediately think of another person who is harmed by what we do. Many think these “victimless crimes” are OK. The error in our logic is that all sin is against God. He is the One to whom we are accountable. It makes no difference what man’s laws may say about an action, our concern must always be “how does God view this?”

How could David say, “against Thee only have I sinned” when Uriah had died because of David’s actions and the people who trusted David as their leader had been deceived? The answer may lie in the type of government that Israel had. In human terms, the king was sovereign. In other words, he (as king) was answerable to no other person. He literally had the power of life and death over his subjects. So, in the eyes of the “law of the land,” what David did was completely within “what was legal.” David was, therefore, answerable only to God. David had not been elected by the people of the nation, but he had been divinely chosen and appointed as king by God. The lesson for us today is that we will find ourselves in a lot of trouble when we have leaders who fail to recognize any human authority over them in what they do. Even in the church (where God has appointed people to various offices), Paul gave us the prescription of how to avoid such excesses when he said, “submit yourselves one to another.” This was not spoken just to the ordinary members but to all in the church regardless of their calling or gift.

So how do we apply this to our lives? We may recognize that the root of sins originates in a lack of submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit and in that sense, sin is against God. However, we have other relationships, responsibilities and accountabilities and when we miss the mark we hurt others and we violate the trust they have in us. You may not want to call that “sin” against them, but we can certainly have negative influence on them.

Some will read the fifth verse and hear David saying, “Hey, I’m only human. Give me a break.” David is not making an excuse for what he did. In addition to admitting the wrong **action** he took, he also is realizing that the root cause of the problem of sin is inherent in human nature. From birth we have a “bent” or a predisposition to sin. If we think that human beings are sinners only because they sin, then we simply don’t understand the problem. The unregenerate human condition is that each person inherits a sinful nature as a result of being a descendant of Adam.

#### Plea for Cleansing – 52:6-13

<sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. <sup>7</sup> Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. <sup>13</sup> *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. Psalm 51:6-13 (NASB95)

David realized that God was and is not satisfied with this sinful nature situation. What God desires is truth or integrity in the essence of who we are. We sometimes call this “essence” the heart. In verse four David showed a realization that the sinful actions he had done were all seen by God. The greater realization is that God sees the innermost being (the heart) as clearly as He sees our actions. The central characteristic of our actions lies in the motives that reside in our hearts.

The RSV renders verse six as

*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*

Since it is God’s will that we have truth (*reality, sincerity, true holiness, heart fidelity*) in our inmost being, our prayer should be for God to teach us wisdom in our heart so that we will embrace truth or integrity.

In verses 7-9 we see words that are very similar to the start of this prayer in verses one and two. I think the difference is that in the initial part of the psalm David is asking for purging, washing and erasing the sinful **actions** that he committed. This second plea is asking for

purging, washing and blotting out the sinful **condition** that he had.

Notice that the specifics of the process that are in David's request. In particular we see the mention of hyssop. Hyssop was a plant that was first mentioned in conjunction with the application of blood on the doorpost and lintel during the Passover. It was later used in ceremonial cleansing of the altar, buildings, tents and people by sprinkling blood or water upon them. The use of blood in a cleansing ritual pointed to the cross where Christ shed His blood and died for our sins. It was at the cross that God dealt with the sinful condition of man. The second part of verse seven describes the extent of the cleansing power of being "purged with hyssop." The blood of Jesus Christ washes us whiter than snow.

Here, in the midst of the remedies of "purge, wash and blot out," we find verse eight which appears to address a different issue than these other things. It may be that David realized that the purging and washing that he requested were prerequisites to his being able to experience joy and gladness and to having the crushing weight of guilt lifted off himself. The term "bone" is not to be taken literally. It is somewhat like our saying that someone is "bad to the bone." We are not referring to the actual skeleton but to the "substance" of the person. David felt broken and crushed in the very substance of who he was by the situation in which he found himself.

We notice in the extensive list of all the requests David was making that each one is something that only God could do for David. We are powerless to save ourselves, it is something that only God can do for us. For example, we cannot hide our sins from God's face (or His sight), so the only remedy is for God to hide His face from our sins. Additionally, David requested that the iniquities or perverse frailties that were part of his human nature be eradicated or blotted out.

How can that happen? The answer lies in God's provision of renewal and restoration. We need a clean start. The Adamic nature is flawed and it really can't be fixed. We need a new nature and that is what God has accomplished by the work of the cross.

The two requests in verse 11 appear to be parallel expressions of the same idea. We enjoy the presence of God by His Holy Spirit being with and in us. Under the Old Covenant, God would grant and remove the presence of His Spirit. David saw what had happened to Saul when God removed His Spirit from him because of his pride and continued disobedience. Under the New Covenant, we have the assurance of the words of Jesus in John 14:16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever."

When we realize that we are out of fellowship with God, then there is no joy in our lives. The sense of guilt and the sense of things not being right are all there and these should be driving us to repent and appeal to God to restore us to a right relationship with Himself. We need to be aware that is exactly what God desires and to be alert to the dangers that come when we are not willing to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Notice that David wanted help in this area by praying for a willing spirit.

In verse thirteen we see a promise from David that reminds us of the outcome of being obedient to the Great Commission that Christ gave the church. When we have experienced the graciousness, the lovingkindness and tender mercies of God and He has renewed and restored us, then we are able and should be eager to share this good news with others who are struggling under the crushing load of sin and guilt in their lives. Many may not know that God has already provided a remedy for purging our sins and erasing our iniquity.

#### Deliverance through Brokenness – 51:14-17

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; *Then* my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. <sup>16</sup> For You do not delight in

sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Psalm 51:14-17 (NASB95)

The joy of sins forgiven is more than the heart can tell. When the realization of what our salvation means floods in upon us, then the outflow is worshipful praise.

The outward practices of rites and rituals have no power within themselves and must be representative of spiritual reality because God looks upon the heart.