

COME CLEAN

Psalm 51

INTRODUCTION

I hate sin.

And I hate it when I sin. I look forward to the time when I step into eternity and experience the final part of my salvation, the total and complete transformation of my soul and the complete eradication of my sin nature. Then, I will never sin again. I can't wait.

Until then, I will still sin. But I hate it when I do.

I want us to look at another prayer this morning as we continue in our series on prayers of the O.T. It's the prayer that King David prayed after his great and grievous sins against Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. This is a prayer that, unfortunately, we will need to use often, hopefully not out of the same deeply immoral circumstances as King David, but because we still sin—in many ways.

The story of King David's sin of adultery against Bathsheba, and then plotting to murder her husband, Uriah, to try to cover up his sin, is a well-known story. For a year, David tried to cover over his sin and avoid facing it. It finally took God sending Nathan the prophet to confront David and get David to face his sins.

At some point, David wrote two psalms about confession, relating to this episode with Bathsheba: Ps 32 and Ps 51. I want us to look at Ps 51 to learn how to pray when we have sinned.

This is a very practical prayer, unfortunately, because we will continue to sin until we get to heaven. But the good news is that when we sin, we can experience total and complete forgiveness by God.

The backdrop of this psalm of forgiveness for us today is what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

If we want our sins forgiven, we need to begin with:

1. A RIGHT VIEW OF GOD

David begins his prayer:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.*

Psalms 51:1^{NIV}

David begins his prayer by appealing to God based on the character of God. In v. 4, he says:

Against you, you only, have I sinned

*and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.*

Psalms 51:4 NIV

David knows that God is right and just. But he doesn't appeal to God as the just God because if God gave David justice, he would have killed David immediately. That would have been justice for not only God, but also Bathsheba and Uriah. What David needed was not justice, but mercy and grace. And that is how David approached God. David knew that God is merciful. David deserved death, but he appealed to God's mercy to not get what he deserved.

Furthermore, David appealed to God's unfailing love. The words, *unfailing love*, are often translated as *lovingkindness* or *steadfast love*. It is a strong word for love that reflects the commitment that God has made with us to love us unconditionally. Some translations call it "covenant love." God had made an unconditional commitment to David, a covenant of love and David is relying on God's faithfulness to keep that commitment of love to him.

The basis of God's forgiving us is his love for us. We need to have an understanding of all of God's character to comprehend how great and wonderful he is, but one of the most important aspects of God that we need to understand and experience is that of his love for us. It makes such a difference in our lives.

Then secondly, if we are going to have our sins completely forgiven, we need to have:

2. A RIGHT VIEW OF OUR SIN

When Nathan the prophet confronted David with his sin, David said to Nathan: *Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."* 2 Samuel 12:13 ^{NIV}

He finally owned up to his sin and called it for what it was: sin.

David had broken 4 of the last 5 Ten Commandments: he had coveted his neighbor's wife, stolen her, committed adultery with her, and murdered her husband. And he finally admitted it. He confesses:

*For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.*

Psalms 51:3-4 NIV

David acknowledged his sin. That's what confess means. He knows his transgression. He doesn't try to blame Bathsheba for taking a bath on the roof of her home, knowing that someone could have seen her. He didn't blame Uriah for not

sleeping with his wife when David called him back to Jerusalem to try to cover his sin. David didn't blame God for his mid-life crisis. David had no one to blame but himself. And he acknowledged his sin.

We are never going to experience God's forgiveness unless we face our sin and take full responsibility for it. We can't blame God, as I've heard some people do, by blaming him for making us the way we are. "You made me with a short temper." "You made me like food too much." "You made me with my same-sex attraction." Every time we sin, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

David also knows that first and foremost, he has sinned against God. He certainly sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, but we need to realize that all sin is first, against God himself.

This personalizes sin. One of the best ways to keep a husband or wife from committing adultery is to think about your relationship with your spouse or your children and what's going to happen with your relationship when they find out you've committed adultery? Sin gets personalized because of the relationships we have. And then realize that your relationship with God is even more personal. Sin is not just an impersonal act. Every sin is a sin against God, whether or not another person is involved.

The apostle Paul gives us the best definition of sin in:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 NIV

God is the standard. His glory, that is, his absolute perfection is the standard. That means any even little deviation from God's perfection is a sin. It includes everything I do, everything I say, and even everything I think.

I don't know about you, but when I have this understanding of sin it often is not a question of whether I sin, it is more about how often I sin. This is very humbling, isn't it! But it also magnifies the grace and love of God, and constantly drives us to the cross.

For our sins to be completely forgiven, a third response we need to make is:

3. A plea for total forgiveness

David wanted total forgiveness. But this forgiveness must come from a heart of sorrow, a contrite heart, as David refers to it.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Psalms 51:17 ESV

The word for contrite means deep sorrow. You can't fake contrition. David expresses this contrition by appealing to God to completely deal with his sin.

blot out my transgressions.

² *Wash away all my iniquity*

and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalms 51:1-2 NIV

David uses three terms for the forgiveness he is seeking.

blot out my transgressions, Wash away all my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

In other words, David wants his sin completely gone from the record.

Today we might express it like deleting something from our computer. When you are writing on your computer and want to delete something, you highlight it and hit delete, and it's gone. That's what David wants God to do. He has highlighted his sin; now he wants God to hit the delete button and forever erase it.

E.g. There are times when my memory brings up something that I have done in the past that is sinful. I believe it is the Holy Spirit bringing up that memory so I can confess it. I have even had memories of when I was as young as 4 years old. When that happens, I immediately acknowledge that it was a sin, and then I confess it to God. I know that when I confess it, God will forgive it and forget it, and any time that memory may come up again, I know that I have dealt with it.

When we experience complete forgiveness by God, we can then experience:

4. An assurance of our forgiveness

As hard as it is to admit to our sin and to confess it, what makes it easier to do is the truth that God will forgive us.

David prays,

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

Psalms 51:7

This is the same truth as in:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 NIV

God will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness. This is the promise of God.

David understands that the results of God's forgiveness is joy: He asks God to:

⁸ *Let me hear joy and gladness;*

let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ...

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Psalms 51:8, 12 NIV*

David knows that when God forgives him, he will be clean, whiter than snow. He will have the joy of God's salvation restored to him. That's what we want, isn't it! We don't want guilt to continue to be our constant companion. We don't want to be weighed down with our sin. We want to be free and experience the joy of God's forgiveness.

Finally, in dealing with our sin, we should offer:

5. A plea for the future

It is wonderful to have our sins forgiven. But David also has a realistic view of himself. He makes the statement:

*Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Psalms 51:5 NIV*

David recognizes that his sin originated internally, within him, proceeding from a long-standing sinful nature. What this refers to is the fact that we are born with a sin nature, a propensity to sin from the very beginning of our existence. It is inevitable that we are going to sin, and to keep sinning.

Every parent knows this as they watch their child grow up. From an early age, every child is selfish and disobedient. You don't have to teach your child to sin!

David is concerned now about repeating the sin. He recognizes that his propensity to sin is still within him. Just because we deal with sin one time doesn't mean we won't repeat it.

So he prays:

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Psalms 51:10-12 NIV*

David wants a pure heart, a heart that loves godliness and holiness. And he wants a steadfast spirit. A steadfast spirit is a firm spirit, one that stays strong against sin. And he wants a willing spirit, a spirit that is eager and willing to obey God.

David pleaded with God that God would not take the Holy Spirit away from him. He had seen God do that with King Saul, his predecessor. One of the wonderful aspects of the Christian life is that when a person asks Jesus to come into his life, not only does Jesus come, but also the Holy Spirit. God's promise to us is that the Holy Spirit will never leave us. That's one of the big differences between the O.T. and the N.T.

And we need the Holy Spirit continually within us, because we have a battle raging within us between our old nature and the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit gives us power to not sin.

This is one of the great promises of God:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Galatians 5:16

We are genuine in our confession only when we have the attitude that we don't want to sin again. We don't want to repeat what we have done. We plead with God for the strength and desire to be holy and godly. And with God's Spirit living within us, we have that capability.

David confessed his sin, and the result was not only that God forgave him, but he experienced the freedom and joy of being forgiven.

Next Steps:

1. Confess any past sin if you haven't yet.
2. Use this pattern of confessing sin when you sin in the future.