

SERMONS FROM SELECT PSALMS

THE PSALM OF A SINNING SAINT

PSALM 51

Notice the heading of the Psalm: "To the chief musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."

This Psalm is called a "Penitential Psalm" meaning a Psalm of penitence. There are seven Psalms so designated: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 145. The most well-known is the middle one, Psalm 51. In it we sense the deep sorrow and genuine repentance of David over his moral defection with Bathsheba.

The sad story is recorded in II Samuel chapters 11 and 12. The adulterous actions of David are seen in the following account:

"It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child." (II Samuel 11:1-6)

Then came the cover-up when David had Bathsheba's husband sent to the front-line of the battlefield and he was killed. This is the basic story-line behind Psalm 51. Let us examine this Psalm as follows: **David's Consciousness of Sin; David's Conviction Of Sin; David's Confession Of Sin and David's Cleansing From Sin.** And, as we do so, let us see what we can learn about how we can deal with our sins, any sin, all sin that we commit.

DAVID'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN.

"I acknowledge my transgressions." (II Sam.12:13)

The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront him with his sinful deeds and David responded by saying, *"I acknowledge my transgressions; I have sinned against the LORD."* (II Samuel 12:13) David confessed to Nathan, not to God.

David was painfully conscious of the fact that he had sinned. He said, *"I acknowledge my transgressions."* The Hebrew word translated "acknowledge" means: "to know, to recognize, to be aware, to comprehend." David knew that he had sinned before Nathan the prophet confronted him about it. He acknowledged to Nathan that he had sinned. However, he has yet to confess his sin to God. Only God can forgive sin.

Saints sin. I repeat, saints sin! David sinned and one of the proofs that he was God's child is that he was conscious of his sin and, as we shall see, was convicted in his soul of his sin. Anyone who claims to be a child of God and sins but has no compunctions of conscience afterward, is not one of God's children. *"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."* (Heb.12:5-6)

Chastisement is one of the evidences that one is a child of the heavenly Father. God does not whip the devil's children – the devil does a good job of that. God does chastise His own children.

When God saved us from sinner-hood and converted us to saint-hood, He removed from us the condemnation of being a sinner. (*"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Rom.6:23) But, He did not remove the capacity to sin from us! When we sin we do not lose our position of sonship with the Father, we lose our privilege of fellowship with the Father. When we are "born again" we are eternally in God's family. There is no such thing as being unborn.

No person on earth is "sinless." However, those who are God's children should surely "sin less!" Listen to I John 2:1,2 – *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."*

John says "Don't do it!" – "Don't sin!" However, he goes on to tell us that if we do sin, God has made provision for us to be forgiven in the Person of our Advocate, the Lord Jesus. Thank God for the promise: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (I John 1:9)

I hasten to add that one can be conscious of having sinned and yet continue on in the sin. Knowing that we have sinned and dealing with it before God are two drastically different matters. David was conscious of his sin but it was some time before he settled the account with God. What led to his confession was the heavy conviction of sinning that settled upon his soul.

DAVID'S CONVICTION OF SIN.

"my sin is always before me." (Ps.51:3)

The word "*convict*" means: "to confute, admonish, convict, convince, tell a fault, rebuke, reprove." The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sinners of the sin of "unbelief"; of their status as sinners. He convicts the child of God, who has sinned, of the individual acts of sin.

The word "conviction" is a judicial term. In our human judicial system, to convict means "to judge and find guilty of an offense; to bring to realization one's guilt." This is parallel to biblical terminology. In God's justice system there is no actual courtroom scene; no human jury; no visible judge. There is, however, a Prosecuting Attorney – the Spirit of God, Who prosecutes the sinner (John 16:8-11) convincing the sinning one of the charge of violating God's Holy Law. The Judge, God, pronounces: "Guilty!" The guilty conscience of the sinning one is a

heavy burden to bear unless and until confession is made and forgiveness is thereby obtained.

How long a period of time David was carrying the load of guilt we are not told. From reading Psalm 51 and Psalm 32, it would seem it was an extended period of time. Finally, the burden became too great for him. Conviction is a heavy burden to bear.

Psalm 51 as well as Psalm 32 reveal the conviction that David experienced. First, from Psalm 32 we learn:

- *Sin affected his health – Ps. 32:3 - *“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long.”*
- *Sin affected his energies – Ps.32:4 - *“My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”*
- *Sin affected him day and night – Ps.32:4 - *“...day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.”*
- *Sin affected his conscience – Ps. 51:3 - *“my sin is always before me.”*
- *Sin affected him emotionally – Ps.51:8 & 10 - *“Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.”*
- *Sin affected his spirit – Ps.51:10b - *“renew a steadfast spirit within me.”*
- *Sin affected his fellowship – Ps. 51:12 - *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation....”*
- *Sin affected his witness – Ps.51:13 - *“Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.”*

The Holy Spirit brought to bear upon David’s conscience the weight of the guilt of his sin and it affected his soul, spirit, mind and body. It is the conscience, under the agency of the Holy Spirit, that is pricked when we sin, that sounds the alarm that we have trespassed into unholy territory. The conscience is a vital faculty that God has built into each of us. The conscience of the godly, awakened to the sinfulness of sin at the time of the new birth, is sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s promptings. When we respond positively to those promptings, we will keep short accounts with God.

Scripture speaks about a convicting conscience (John 8:9) and an accusative conscience. (Rom.2:15) David’s conscience was smiting him. There was no relief day or night. He said, *“my sin is always before me.”* This is the cry of a convicting conscience. When David sinned he experienced the darkness that troubles every sinning child of God. In Psalm 51 and Psalm 32 David includes in his songs the deep soul anguish that he experienced when under conviction and expresses the need and desire to be right with God again. This led to his famous confession.

DAVID’S CONFESSION OF SIN.

“Have mercy upon me, O God For I acknowledge my transgressions Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.” (Ps.51:1-4)

David said to the prophet Nathan, when he was confronted with his sin, “I have sinned.” (II Sam.12:13) However, Nathan was but a man. David’s sin was against God and in Psalm 51, David confesses to God. He said, *“I acknowledge my transgressions Against You, You only, have I sinned....”* His confession was wrung out of his soul as the result of his consciousness of his sin and being convicted of his sin. It is possible to be conscious of one’s

sin and even be convicted of one's sin yet not confess sin. I have observed many who carry a vast load of unconfessed sin to their own sorrow and shame.

I read of a man who carried a load of guilt for a long time and finally he decided to deal with his wrong-doing. He had cheated on his income taxes and he wrote a letter to the I.R.S. and included some cash to cover his misdeed. He said, "Sirs, if I can't sleep better after sending the enclosed money, I will send the balance later." Half-hearted and half-way confession is no confession at all.

As a result of David's conviction of sin, he is deeply aware that sin is aimed directly at God. Any sin, every sin, all sin is against God even though others may be wronged by the sin or sins. What does it mean to "confess"? In human courts it is called "a guilty plea." To confess means to admit one's guilt. The Greek word is "*homologeō*." The word "*Logeo*" means "to say; to give assent, confess." Genuine confession is naming the sin or sins of which one is guilty.

In David's confession to God he uses three expressions in identifying his sin: "*Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*" (Ps.51:1,2) Each word has a particular significance:

"Transgression." The word in the Hebrew is "*abar*" and in the Greek: "*parabasis*" meaning "transgression, to overstep set limits, trespass."

"Iniquity." In Hebrew it is "*āvâh*" and the nearest equivalent in Greek is "*anomia*" meaning "perverseness, lawlessness, crookedness."

"Sin." The most frequently occurring biblical words for sin are, in the Hebrew: "*hata*" and in the Greek: "*hamartema*" meaning "to miss the mark."

David was saying, "I have overstepped the bounds of your law, I am crooked, I have missed the mark that you set for Your children." Confession is being honest with God. David did not give fair names to foul sins. He called it what it was.

When does confession of sin effect forgiveness? When it is confessed to a prophet, priest or pastor? No! When confessed to the human person I have wronged? No! Even though that is necessary. Such "confessions" do not remove the stain of sin. A valid confession of sin must be a confession to God.

That will not take place unless and until another confession is made: we must admit to ourselves that we have sinned! Until we genuinely and sincerely admit to ourselves that we have sinned, any conversation that we may have with God or man about it is superficial, artificial and hypocritical. We must take ownership of our sin. None of this, "The Devil made me do it!" No blaming someone else. "It's me, it's me, oh, Lord, standing in the need of forgiveness!"

David said, "**my transgressions**" (Ps.51:1); "**my iniquity**" (v.2); "**cleanse me from my sin**" (v.2); "**I acknowledge my transgressions**" (v.3); "**my sin is always before me**" (v.3); "**Against You, You only, have I sinned.**" (v.4) That is confession!

A church member told me about a sin he had committed and which he had confessed and for which he had received forgiveness. He said that during World War II he had owned a corner grocery store and sugar was hard to get. He devised a scheme whereby he could make more money from the sugar sales. He decided to buy sugar in one-hundred pound bags rather than in pre-packaged amounts such as one and five pound packages. He then weighed out the sugar himself in one pound bags. But, he said, "I did not give 16 ounces to the pound. I put 14 ounces in the bags and marked the packages 16 ounces. It took me about all day to weigh out one-hundred pounds of sugar in 14 ounce bags. I was sure the customer would not know the difference. However, that night, I could not sleep. I tossed and turned all night thinking about my dishonesty. Finally I got up, knelt beside my bed and confessed to God my sin and then went to the store and spent the next day adding 3 ounces of sugar to each bag. I put 3 ounces in to make 17 ounces because I wanted to make sure I slept well the next night!"

If you can sin more and feel it less; if you are becoming calloused about your sin; if unconfessed sin does not bother you, then hope for you is almost gone! Ruin has set in and there is nothing left but sure and certain judgment! However, if you turn from your sin and confess it to God you can be clean again.

DAVID'S CLEANSING FROM SIN.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God." (Psalm 51:10)

David got to the heart of the matter when he asked God to *"Create in me a clean heart"* for, Jesus said that is where sin originates. (Matt. 15:19) Notice the terms that David uses in asking God to remove the sin stain from him:

- *"Blot out my transgressions"* (Ps.51:1);
- *"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity"* (Ps.51:2a);
- *"cleanse me from my sin"* (Ps.51:2b);
- *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean"* (Ps.51:7a);
- *"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Ps.51:7b);
- *"blot out all my iniquities."* (Ps.51:9)

David sensed the dirtiness of his sin; his pollution, impurity and uncleanness before God. He wanted God to do a good job of removing every spot and stain from his soul, as though God could or would do less than a thorough job! And so, he said "blot", "wash", "cleanse", "purge" me.

Cleansing from sin begins with confession. Repression only prolongs the agony of a guilty conscience. Ignoring sin is like ignoring pain; it leaves the basic problem unresolved while the hurt intensifies. David was sick of his sin and not just the consequences of it. The turn-about began when David resolved to confess his sin: *"I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah."* (Ps.32:5)

There is cleansing from the stain of sin: it is full confession to God. From the old Psalter Hymnal comes this verse:

"My transgressions I confess,

*Grief and guilt my soul oppress;
I have sinned against Your grace,
And provoked You to Your face;
Wash me, make me pure within,
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin."*

Thank God for His promise that: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9) Christian, has sin broken your fellowship with God and caused the joy of your salvation to disappear? Then turn to the Lord in true repentance and confession. He will forgive your sins and once again make you clean. David said, *"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."* (Ps.51:7) God did – and he was! We may "whitewash" sin, but only Jesus' blood can wash it white!

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