

## On Sin – Psalm 51 Mt. Freedom Baptist Church 9/4/2022

A few years ago, I heard J. Vernon McGee read this poem written by Phyllis McGinley on his radio program. I shared it with you at our Sunday evening service when I was teaching on the Parable of the Sower, but it's worth sharing again.

*The Reverend Dr. Harcourt, folk agree,  
Nodding their heads in solid satisfaction,  
Is just the man for this community.  
Tall, young, urbane, but capable of action,  
He pleases where he serves. He marshals out  
The younger crowd, lacks trace of clerical unction,  
Cheers the Kiwanis and the Eagle Scout,  
Is popular at every public function,*

*And in the pulpit eloquently speaks  
On divers matters with both wit and clarity:  
Art, Education, God, the Early Greeks,  
Psychiatry, Saint Paul, true Christian charity,  
Vestry repairs that shortly must begin—  
All things but Sin. He seldom mentions Sin.*

Well unlike the Reverend Dr. Harcourt, I'd like to talk to you this morning about sin in the context of Psalm 51 – David's beautiful prayer of repentance.

Let me start by asking a question – Does God judge sin?

Well, it's sort of a trick question. God judges only **unrepented** sin, and that makes all the difference. In fact, God's forgiveness of the sins for which we are truly repentant lies at the very center of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle John put it this way...

*<sup>8</sup>If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

*<sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. <sup>1</sup> John 1:9 [ESV]*

This scripture cuts me to my heart, because of what happened on the night I came to the LORD. I had been traveling all that day, and had visited my father's grave at Arlington. I was tired from the long drive, and tired out mentally and spiritually from wrestling with my mixed emotions about my father, and from the conviction of God's Spirit. A friend had witnessed the Gospel to me the previous evening, and I had politely listened and agreed with her. I did truly believe in my heart the resurrection of Jesus as I had for many years. But up until that evening I hadn't taken the necessary extra step of submitting myself to Jesus' lordship over every aspect of my life. While I was praying that evening about all these things, God clearly whispered to my heart, "How can you expect me to hear your prayer when you continue in your sin."

I wish that I could tell you that was the end of my life of sin, but the fact of the matter is it was just the beginning of my life of sins struggled against and forgiven by God's grace and mercy.

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We know from Genesis 3 that it was mankind's sin that brought death and all manner of other maladies into God's perfect creation. Consequently, all of us are born with a sinful nature. We can't help that.

Unfortunately, all of us are also sinners by our own choice. God knows that, and has made a way for us to be forgiven of the sins we freely choose to commit, but He does expect us to struggle against the temptation to sin by the power of His Spirit.

We're all familiar with the story of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). David was in his palace and saw Bathsheba – the wife of one of his soldiers – bathing. David was overcome with lust for her, and used his power as king to have her brought in to him. When David learned that he had gotten Bathsheba pregnant, he tried to cover up his sin of adultery by making it appear that her husband – Uriah was the father. When that didn't work, David arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle and then quickly married Bathsheba to make it look like she had gotten pregnant after Uriah's death, not before.

David's cover-up worked perfectly and everyone was fooled – everyone except God, of course, who sent Nathan the prophet to David with God's rebuke for these sins of adultery and murder. In fact, the consequences of these great sins eventually brought catastrophe upon the entire nation of Israel. This is a cautionary tale for us. Sin has consequences with rippling effects that extend beyond what we can possibly imagine.

So with that foundation to build on, let's take a closer look at Psalm 51.

Let's read the Psalm together, and then we'll look at it in detail.

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### Psalm 51

*To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

- <sup>1</sup>*Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
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, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.*
- <sup>5</sup>*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
- <sup>6</sup>*Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*
- <sup>7</sup>*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
- <sup>8</sup>*Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that 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 right spirit within me.*
- <sup>11</sup>*Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*
- <sup>12</sup>*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*
- <sup>13</sup>*Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.*
- <sup>14</sup>*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*
- <sup>15</sup>*O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.*
- <sup>16</sup>*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.*
- <sup>17</sup>*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*
- <sup>18</sup>*Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem;*
- <sup>19</sup>*then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

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*<sup>1</sup>Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.*

*<sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!*

The first thing to notice here is that David is truly repentant for these despicable sins. Recall what John said in the passage we looked at earlier. If we deny our sin, then we are lying to ourselves, to everyone else, and to God Almighty Himself. David acknowledges his sin here as the first step along the path to God's forgiveness.

Notice also that David recognizes that our God of mercy is willing and able to forgive our sins in response to our acknowledging them and seeking His mercy.

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*<sup>3</sup>For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.*

This is a really tough verse for me particularly. I've shared with you before that my very favorite passage in all of God's Word is Philippians 3:12-14...

*<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14 [ESV]*

I suspect that many folks are like me. We have no trouble straining forward to what lies ahead, but we have a problem leaving behind the guilt of our past sins. But God tells us that He not only forgives our sins, but forgets them entirely...

*...For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:34b [ESV]*

We too need to leave our past sins behind, not dwelling on them, or even bringing them to our remembrance. But of course, this is much easier said than done.

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*<sup>4</sup>Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.*

David recognizes that when all is said and done, our sins are sins against God. Certainly, we may harm ourselves or other people with our sins. But really, our sins are against God. Why do I say that? Remember what Jesus told His disciples on the night He was betrayed.

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* John 14:15 [ESV]

We struggle against sin, not out of some sense of legalism, but because we love God and desire to please Him. When we fail, our sorrow isn't really due to the inevitable consequences of our sin, but because we have caused sorrow for our Savior whom we love.

David also says here that because we have sinned against God, His judgements against sinners are just. When everyone stands before the Great White Throne of God's final judgement written of in Revelation 19, there will be no “Not Guilty” pleas. Everyone will know in our hearts that God's judgement against our sins is righteous. In fact, His mercy upon us and His punishment of Jesus in our place is what isn't just in our limited human understanding. Yet God in His sovereignty has ordained just that since before the beginning of creation.

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*<sup>5</sup>Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

This is the in-born sin nature which we have all inherited due to the curse after the fall of mankind in the garden of Eden.

**NOTE** – This “original sin” that caused us all to inherit this sinful nature is **not** sexual relations as some puritanical preachers have said. God created, condones, and encourages sexual relations between one man and one woman within the confines of a life-long marriage covenant. Nor does God restrict sexual activity to merely for the purpose of procreation as some have proposed. The iniquity David speaks of here pertains to Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden, not sexual relations.

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*Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

When we seek God in prayer, we must be honest in earnestly seeking after Him. After all, God already knows what's in our hearts. It's senseless to try to run from Him or hide from Him. David is reminding himself of this fact here. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well...

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit  
and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.* John 4:23 [ESV]

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*7Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*8Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.*

*9Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.*

David acknowledges that not only is God willing to cleanse us from our sins, He is also able. He doesn't merely forgive us of our sins, He purges them from our hearts entirely if only we allow Him to do so.



**ASIDE** - The reference to hyssop in verse 8 is significant. In Exodus 12, when the Israelites were about to leave their enslavement in Egypt, and the LORD was about to bring one final plague upon the Egyptians, He commanded the Israelites to slaughter the Passover lamb and use hyssop to paint the blood of the lamb on the lintels and doorposts of their houses so the destroying angel who was coming to kill all the firstborn of Egypt would pass over the houses of the Israelites.

Hyssop was also used in many of the cleansing rituals ordained in God's Law.

Thus, it is not insignificant the when Jesus – our Passover Lamb – cried out in thirst from the cross that a hyssop branch was used to dip the sponge into the jar of sour wine and offer it to Him (John 19:28-30)

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*10Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.*

Mere forgiveness and even complete purging of our sins is not sufficient for our ultimate redemption to God. As Jesus told Nicodemus, we must be born again. God's Spirit must inhabit our hearts and begin the work of sanctification within us. We must become new creations in Christ, and only God can do that.

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*11Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
12Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

Has anyone here ever experienced a season of "dryness" in your relationship with God as I have? Such was the case with David. His hidden sinful acts had caused him to feel abandoned by God, and that terrified him just as it terrifies us when we experience that sense of God's departure. Of course, we know that God will never leave us nor forsake us, no matter how depraved our thoughts, words, and deeds might be. Nevertheless, if we continue in unrepented sin as I did until my miraculous saving encounter with God on that evening long ago, we develop this sense of loneliness and abandonment.

But the fact of the matter is that we have abandoned God. He never abandoned us. If I may be so bold, that feeling might just be due to unconfessed, unrepented, and maybe even unknown sin. If you're going through such a time, I encourage you to seek the LORD diligently, asking Him to reveal to you the sin that you have perhaps hidden even from yourself. God promises that if we honestly draw close to Him, He will draw close to us in response.

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*<sup>13</sup>Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.*

*<sup>14</sup>Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*

*<sup>15</sup>O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

What more powerful witness can we have than praise for God's deliverance out of the sin that so easily ensnares us. Like David, we will sing God's praises for His merciful redemption out of death in our sins.

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*<sup>16</sup>For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.*

*<sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

One of the most blasphemous ideas ever conceived by man is that we can somehow perform some sort of penance to rescue ourselves out of the condemnation of death in our sins. If that were possible, Jesus would not have needed to come and die on the cross in our place for our salvation.

Please don't misunderstand me. Our good works in the Name of Jesus are wonderful things. They are a powerful testimony of our rightful response to God's redemption of us out of death. But our good works are powerless to save anyone – either the one performing them, or the one that they serve. Only the Spirit of God can resurrect us out of death. Paul summarized this fact succinctly in his letter to the Ephesians...

*<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,  
<sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Ephesians 2:8-9 [ESV]

As David reminds us here, it is our hearts God is seeking. When we respond to God's merciful forgiveness with honest humility and gratitude, **that** is what God will honor and bless.

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*<sup>18</sup>Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem;*

*<sup>19</sup>then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Far from being the cause for our salvation, our good works are a proper response to God's grace and mercy. God will certainly honor our service for His Kingdom in response to all that He has done for us.

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Before we leave, I want to remind you very briefly of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the only way that we can be rescued out of death in our sins.

God's unwillingness and inability in His perfect holiness to tolerate and abide with our sin is the very reason He came to Earth as the man Jesus of Nazareth in order to reconcile sinful mankind to Himself. Since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born by the virgin Mary, He came into the world in the flesh without the sinful nature inherent in all other people. He lived the perfectly sinless life in the flesh that we are incapable of living. That way He could become the perfectly spotless Lamb of sacrifice on the cross that is required for the cleansing of our sins. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth...

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:21 [ESV]

Isaiah spoke of Jesus' substitutionary atonement in perhaps the best-known Messianic prophecy in all of God's Word...

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.* Isaiah 53:5 [ESV]

God freely offers everyone this redemption out of death bought for us all by the precious blood of Jesus on the cross. All we need to do is accept it. We must be born again of God's Spirit. If anyone here has never accepted Jesus as LORD, and you feel God's Spirit calling to you this morning, I urge you to make that choice today – even right this very instant. Accepting Christ is simple...

*<sup>9</sup>...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* Romans 10:9-10 [ESV]

If you're still undecided, or have any questions, I'd love to talk with you about it more. And if you made a decision to begin following Jesus this morning, I urge you to tell someone about it immediately. We'd love to celebrate your new life in Christ, and come alongside you and help you to begin the journey of discipleship in the LORD.