

"Renew a Right Spirit Within Me"

Psalm 51

Last week, we focused on David's "Prayer of Great Confession." We saw how he confessed his sin before God without excuses or self-justification. We saw that true repentance begins with owning up to the sin with honesty and humility.

Confession, however, is only the starting point. Psalm 51 doesn't end after verse 3, in a place of sorrow or despair. It continues on toward cleansing, restoration, and a renewed desire to walk with God. In these next verses, we see the prayer of a man who not only wants forgiveness; he wants to be changed. This is the purpose of biblical repentance in the heart and life of a believer.

In this message, we'll look at how David pleads for cleansing, how he seeks a new heart, and how he commits himself fully to the Lord again. This text is a picture of what God can do in any life that comes to Him with true contrition.

I. A PRAYER OF GREAT CONVICTION – VS. 4-6

The definition of conviction according to the OED is "the mental state or condition of being convinced; strong belief on the ground of satisfactory reasons or evidence; settled persuasion." Theologically, "The fact or condition of being convicted or convinced of sin. under conviction: in the state of awakened consciousness of sin."

In the Webster 1828 Dictionary, it is defined as: "The act of convincing, or compelling one to admit the truth of a charge; the act of convincing of sin or sinfulness; the state of being convinced or convicted by conscience; the state of being sensible of guilt; as, the

convictions of a sinner may be temporary, or lasting and efficacious. By *conviction* a sinner is brought to repentance. Men often sin against the *conviction* of their own consciences."

A. Conviction of his sin – vs. 4a

"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight..."

1. David recognizes that the sin he has committed wasn't just against others, but was a personal offense against God.
2. David isn't just saying "against you only" – he's saying something more like "against you, you alone, you in isolation from anyone else." The Hebrew construction creates a verbal spotlight that isolates God as the sole object of David's sin.

This (לְבַדְּךָ) creates what grammarians call an "exclusionary emphasis." David isn't saying that his sin didn't hurt other people – obviously it devastated Bathsheba, Uriah, their families, and the entire kingdom. Instead, he's saying that all those other dimensions of his sin fade into insignificance compared to the central reality that he was rebelling against God.

B. Conviction of the consequences – vs. 4b

"That thou mightiest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest."

David is expressing what theologians call a "consequential purpose" – he's acknowledging that even though his sin was not intended to glorify God, God's righteous response to that sin will indeed demonstrate His perfect justice. David is

saying, "My sin has created a situation where Your justice will be displayed, and when it is, You will be shown to be completely righteous in Your judgment."

When someone has truly grasped the weight of their sin, they often reach a point where they stop trying to defend themselves and instead begin to defend God's right to judge them.

This is quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:4. He is making the argument that some people might think that human unfaithfulness makes God unfaithful too, but that's exactly backwards. Human unfaithfulness actually highlights God's faithfulness by contrast. When God judges sin, He's not being unfair – He's being perfectly just. When God shows mercy, He's not being unjust – He's finding a way to be both just and merciful.

C. Conviction of its root – vs. 5

1. This is not an excuse that is being given to justify his sin; it's an acknowledgment of the depth of his problem.
2. He traces his sin not only to his behavior but to his nature – he was sinful from the start.
3. This points to the doctrine of original sin.

Romans 5:12

¹² Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

D. Conviction that brings change – vs. 6

1. God wants truth (sincerity, integrity) in the "inward parts."

- a) This word (תִּינֻץ) is only used here and in Job 38:36.

Job 38:36

³⁶ Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts?
or who hath given understanding to the heart?

- b) Here, it refers to a person's moral conscience. In Job, it refers to the ability to perceive right and wrong or discern wisely.

2. It's in the mind, in the conscience (the "inward parts" or "the hidden *part*") where the battle with sin is waged first, long before it ever results in action. Conviction is meant to lead to a desire for internal change, not just external consequences to go away.

II. A PRAYER OF GREAT CLEANSING – VS. 7

This verse teaches something crucial about the nature of sin and grace. Sin isn't just a legal problem that needs forgiveness; it's a contamination problem that needs cleansing. David understands that he doesn't just need God to overlook his sin; he needs God to remove sin's corrupting effects from his life.

A. Real conviction has a desire for sin to be cleansed – vs. 7a

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean..."

The ceremonial background also helps people understand that cleansing isn't something we can accomplish through our own efforts. Just as the leper couldn't cleanse himself and the Israelites couldn't protect themselves from the death angel, we can't purify ourselves from sin's effects. We need God to apply the cleansing that only He can provide.

B. Real conviction has a desire for a heart made pure – vs. 7b

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

1. “Wash me” – this goes back to verse 2 (“Wash me thoroughly...”) and forms what Hebrew scholars call an “inclusio” (a literary device where the same word or phrase appears at the beginning and end of a section to show completion or fulfillment).

In verse 2, David is essentially saying, “Please wash me thoroughly because I need intensive cleansing.” In verse 7, he’s saying, “When you wash me (and I know you will), I will be whiter than snow.” The repetition of “wash” (רָבַץ) bridges these two moments, showing how genuine confession leads to confident faith.

2. “Whiter than snow” – It’s said that every snowflake begins around a tiny speck of dust or impurity, which is scientifically accurate. Water vapor in the atmosphere needs a particle to form around, and that impurity becomes the core of the snowflake. So even snow, as pure as it looks, has something unclean at its heart. But when David says, “*wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,*” he’s asking for something even greater – a cleansing that removes not just the stain we see, but the impurity at the core. That’s justification – not sinless perfection, but a heart made clean by the grace of God.

Ephesians 5:26-27

²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having

spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

III. A PRAYER OF GREAT CONTRITION (BROKENNESS) – VS. 8-11

“Contrition” is defined as “penitence; deep sorrow for sin; grief of heart for having offended and infinitely holy and benevolent God. The word is usually understood to mean genuine penitence, accompanied with a deep sense of ingratitude in the sinner, and sincere resolution to live in obedience to the divine law” (Webster’s 1828).

A. Contrition acknowledges lost joy and longs for its return – vs. 8

1. David isn’t just sad because of his sin, he’s spiritually crushed (“the bones *which* thou hast broken”) under conviction.
2. Joy has been silenced by guilt; only God’s voice can bring it back.
3. Contrition feels the cost of sin but also believes that cleansing can restore joy.

B. Contrition appeals to mercy once again – vs. 9

“Hide thy face” shows his longing not just for forgiveness, but for the removal of sin from God’s sight.

C. Contrition desires inner renewal and not just outer relief – vs. 10

1. “Create in me a clean heart, O God” – the word David uses in Psalm 51:10 – “create” (בָּרָא) – is the same word used in Genesis 1:1 when it says, “In the beginning God created the heaven

and the earth.” It’s a word reserved in Scripture for God’s creative power – something only He can do. In Genesis, God created the world out of nothing (ex nihilo); and here in Psalm 51, David is saying, “God, I need You to do something just as miraculous in me – to bring purity where there is corruption; a clean heart where there is none. I don’t need a renovation; I need a creation.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

2. “Renew a right spirit within me” – “renew” (נָתַן) – to restore or make fresh what has been damaged. David longs not only for a clean heart, but a right spirit – a spirit that is steady, faithful, and aligned with God’s will.

D. Contrition longs for restored fellowship – vs. 11

1. “Cast me not away from thy presence” – it seems that David’s greatest fear was more than the punishment he would endure; it was distance from God that concerned him most.
2. “Take not thy holy spirit from me” – In the Old Testament context, the Holy Spirit empowered and anointed for service, but it did not indwell God’s children as it does now. David had seen the Spirit depart from Saul (1 Sam. 16:14) and it is most likely that image and possibility was fresh on his mind as he considered what he had done.

1 Samuel 16:14

¹⁴ But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul,

| and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

IV. A PRAYER OF GREAT CONSECRATION – VS. 12-19

Consecration is the act of surrendering oneself to God in worship, obedience, and service as the fruit of restored fellowship.

A. Consecration begins with restored joy and strength – vs. 12

1. David asks for what was once there but no longer is – “the joy of [his] salvation.” This speaks to closeness to the Lord spoken of in the previous two verses.
2. “Uphold me” (שָׁמַרְךָ) suggests the need for spiritual strength from the Lord to live rightly going forward.
3. “With thy free spirit” (רוּחַ נְדִיבָה)
 - a) David has already referred to his “right spirit” (vs. 10) and will refer to a “broken spirit” in verse 17. This is part of that thread of his inner spirit.
 - b) He has just referenced “thy holy spirit,” which in lower case in the KJV would indicate the translators had both the Holy Spirit of God in view as well as David’s inner spirit.
 - c) David understands that he needs God’s power to maintain a willing heart (hence the “uphold” language), but he also understands that this divine power works by transforming his own inner nature. The Holy Spirit doesn’t replace his human spirit but rather transforms it.
 - d) “Thy free spirit” refers to a God-given, willing, and faithful spirit – the kind of inner spirit that delights in obedience and perseveres in

righteousness. It is a prayer for God to not only cleanse the heart but to uphold it in joyful, willing service.

B. Consecration results in a desire to serve others – vs. 13

1. *"Then will I teach transgressors thy ways"* – once he's been restored to fellowship with God, he wants to teach others, especially those where he once was.
2. Consecration means not keeping forgiveness to ourselves, but pointing others to the same mercy.

C. Consecration renews our worship – vs. 14-15

1. David longs to praise God openly and freely, no longer burdened by guilt – vs. 14a.
2. His singing and speaking are now dedicated to declaring God's righteousness – vs. 14b-15
3. Consecration gives the mouth a new message: worship and witness.

D. Consecration restores true sacrifice – vs. 16-17

1. David realizes God is not looking for external religion ("sacrifice," "burnt offering"), but "right spirit," a changed heart – vs. 16
2. A broken and contrite heart becomes the offering that pleases God.

The word for "contrite" here (נָדָּוָה) is the same Hebrew word as "broken" in verse 8. As we saw in verse 8, the word means to be "crushed." We

won't walk with the Lord if we don't "sacrifice" to God our all.

3. True consecration isn't about the ritual, but about the right heart and the right spirit behind the action.

E. Consecration seeks the good of God's people – vs. 18-19

1. David's prayer expands to the rest of God's people – he wants Zion to be built up.
2. He sees his restoration as part of a greater desire: the blessing of God's people and the return of true worship.
3. True consecration moves from the individual to the corporate, to the greater "body of Christ," using New Testament terms – to the church. David's longing, as should be ours, was to see the people of God grow in their spiritual lives.

Conclusion: This psalm is the heartfelt cry of a man broken by sin, yet hopeful in the mercy of God. David doesn't hide his guilt – he makes full confession, seeks deep cleansing, and desires not only forgiveness but transformation. His prayer moves from conviction to cleansing, from contrition to consecration. He's not just sorry for "getting caught" so to speak ("thou art the man") – he's truly repentant and wants a true restoration to the God he loves.

The same God who restored David still restores today. No matter how deep the stain ("wash me thoroughly"), His mercy runs deeper. We need to come to Him with that same spirit David had – broken, honest, and willing – and find that He still creates clean hearts and renews right spirits in those who truly seek Him.