

**Introduction** – To fan into a flame our gratitude to God for His saving grace, we remember that, “If the Lord had not been on our side, we would have been swallowed up alive!” (Psalm 124:3). Nor would it be merely our foes who threaten our demise in this way. It is the rebel nature of our own hearts as believers. Were it not for the intercessions of God’s Son, our Mediator, the consequences of our own foolish sin and deep character flaws would just as rapidly swallow our Christian professions as any physical enemy could do!

To have this lesson imprinted on our hearts and minds, so that we never forget our helplessness apart from the continual intervention of God’s rescuing grace, we turn this week to Psalm 51 and its teaching on what sin and forgiveness really mean. Inspired by Nathan’s confrontation of David, to which the title alludes when it says, *A Psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David committed adultery with Bathsheba*, this Psalm is the fruit of all the Gospel work which God accomplished in David’s life and fulfills the purpose for which it was written – “to instruct sinners in God’s ways,” (Psalm 51:13). May God indeed instruct us in His saving ways through it.

**Monday: read Psalm 51:1; 2 Samuel 12:7-13 and Acts 20:20, 31.** Nathan is not the author of this Psalm, but it was his faithful ministry of confronting David which planted all the seeds of confession that come to full bloom in this, David’s greatest penitential Psalm. Only because Nathan was willing to go into David’s palace to speak to him face-to-face about his sin did David return to the Lord and eventually to the writing of this Psalm. Just as Paul showed himself to be a faithful apostle by his warning the church in Ephesus, not only publicly but “night and day and from house to house” (Acts 20:20-31), so Nathan shows his faithfulness by the same kind of personal ministry to David. In earlier days as a shepherd, David had known what it cost to rescue the flock from the mouths of bears and lions. Thankfully, God sent Nathan to rescue David the king from the mouth of Satan himself.

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask the Lord to continually provide to our church and family leaders the courage and ability to be “lions” in order to confront and defeat soul-destroying sin in the lives of the saints. Nathan never wrote a prophetic book in the Bible; he never is depicted in Scripture as a mighty preacher, holding audience with thousands of worshippers in Jerusalem. But he did do what God called him to do, in *personally confronting* David. May the Lord give your church leaders access “from house to house” to lovingly shepherd God’s flock, and deliver His people from temptation and sin, as Nathan delivered David!

**Tuesday: read Psalm 51:1-4 and 2 Samuel 12:13.** Though David piles up terms of confession, such as “transgressions, iniquity, sin and evil” (verses 1-4), we could easily think that David gets off lightly considering the enormity of what he did in causing the death of his mighty man, Uriah, in order to adulterously seize Uriah’s wife Bathsheba. The historical account in 2 Samuel 12:13 also puts it just as simply: Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin.” Is it just and proper for David to escape from his crime this easily? Well, in terms of chastisement, this was not the end of David’s sin. Until the days just before his death, David would see the sword raised up from within his own house because of what he had done. In terms of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. 17, David is proof of what paragraph three there says: *Nevertheless, believers may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit... and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.*

Moreover, Psalm 51 was given to be used in the public praise of God, which shows that David was willing to live with the shameful memory of what he had done, written down in Scripture for all ages to see! But in terms of eternal life, and the wiping clean of David's sin from God's memory, so that David even now in Heaven rejoices with all the other triumphant saints who have gone before – there was nothing David could do to bring about His forgiveness except to trust in God's unconditional grace. As Ps. 51:1 puts it, David's only hope was that God would blot out his transgressions... not according to David's sorrow, reformation, penance or good works, but according to His unfailing love and motherly compassion! By Grace alone!

Meditate and Pray: "Lord, help us to learn here in Psalm 51 once again the all-important lesson of the enormity of our sin, and the enormity of your grace. Do not allow us to be self-confident in our righteousness. Help us to always remember that our standing before you is only through the righteous garments of another, our Lord Jesus Christ. Make us to be a people who makes much of this crowning attribute of your character, your forgiving grace, with the words of Hymn # 451. Amen."

*God, be merciful to me,  
On thy grace I rest my plea;  
Plenteous in compassion thou,  
Blot out my transgressions now;  
Wash me, make me pure within,  
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.*

*Broken, humbled to the dust  
By thy wrath and judgment just,  
Let my contrite heart rejoice  
And in gladness hear thy voice;  
From my sins O hide thy face,  
Blot them out in boundless grace.*

**Wednesday: read Psalm 51:1-6.** David's words in Psalm 51, by which he describes his sin, expand upon his brief confession before Nathan in 2 Samuel 12, as they show how deeply repentance worked itself into David's heart. Look again at these words: "Transgression, iniquity, sin, evil" B.B. Warfield well sums up David's deep conviction of sin, in these words from his article, Old Testament Religion, in Faith and Life:

*I have been in rebellion against God, I have distorted my life, I have missed the mark; I have, to express it all, done what is evil in your sight – in the sight of You, the Standard of holiness, the embodiment of the Law of Conduct. And these acts are but the expression of an inner nature of corruption, inherited from those who have gone before me, (verse 5); it was in iniquity that I was born, in sin that my mother conceived me.*

Meditate and Pray: Lord, as we ponder David's deep sense of sin, and his description of his own tendency to sin in all his members, help us to see that it is impossible for anything pure to be brought out of our impure natural state as sinners. There is nothing that can be done with our "old man," our Adamic nature - any more than could be done with David's. As Psalm 51:6 puts it, "You desire truth in the inward parts." Not only do our actions condemn us, but our inward sin nature – it too must be crucified before we can be declared to be God's sons and daughters, and before we can be changed to live lives of inward holiness! How does Paul put it in Romans 7? "Woe is me! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" The answer in the Gospel is that our sin must be crucified with Christ on the Cross, and we raised with Him to newness of life. Thank God for the grace of Union with our Savior, by which we find a new life, in which "sin shall no longer be our master!"

**Thursday: read Psalm 51:7-10.** David continues to press us to see the radical nature of what must be done for our salvation if not only the outward actions of sin, but the inward depravity of the sin nature, is to be defeated in our lives. He says in Ps. 51:10 that God must do nothing less than “create a pure heart” in him! David here uses a word only used in the Bible of Divine creation, “out of nothing,” even as God performed at the beginning of the world. B.B. Warfield, once again, brings out what God must do to answer David’s prayer in verse 10:

*Hence the passionate cry: Create – it requires nothing less than a creative act – create in me a clean heart – the heart is the totality of the inner life – and make new within me a constant spirit – a spirit which will no more turn away from God. Nothing less than this will suffice – a total regeneration as the New Testament would put it; an entire making over again can alone suffice to make such an one as the Psalmist knows himself to be... acceptable to Him who desires truth in the inward part...”*

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask the Lord to continue this deep work of inward renovation in our lives, using the words of hymn # 334 in our Trinity Hymnals:

1) Breathe on me, breath of God,  
Fill me with life anew,  
That I may love what Thou dost  
love,  
And do what Thou wouldst do.

2) Breathe on me, breath of God,  
Until my heart is pure,  
Until with Thee I will one will,  
To do and to endure.

3) Breathe on me, breath of God,  
Blend all my soul with Thine,  
Until this earthly part of me  
Glows with Thy fire divine.

4) Breathe on me, breath of God,  
So shall I never die,  
But live with Thee the perfect life  
Of Thine eternity.

**Friday: read Psalm 51:11-19.** For David to plead in verses 11-12 that God not withdraw from his life is to ask that God not take from him the comforting sense of the Spirit’s presence. This is NOT to imply that God abandons believers. God’s covenant is one of persevering grace, which, even in the Old Testament, assures us that “God’s Spirit who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children... from this time on and forever” (Isaiah 59:21). Rather, this is David acknowledging that He has indeed *grieved the Spirit of God* (Eph. 4:30) and longs for the felt sense of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, to be fully restored. How does David dare to pray for a full restoration of his life of faith and all its fruits after such a deeply regrettable period of rebellion, murder, lust and adultery? Well, David knows, according to Ps. 51:16, that, though there are no Old Testament sacrifices which could possibly pay for his sin, he can look by faith into the future to the coming of Christ Jesus to be that sacrifice. It is the future prospect of a great Savior and a great Sacrifice to come, which enables David to believe he shall be forgiven and restored. Therefore, with that sure hope, he eagerly looks forward to teaching fellow sinners God’s ways (Ps. 51:13) by pointing them to the very same Cross which we look back on by faith as our source of forgiveness and restoration.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that he made David a prophet, (Acts 2:30), who, inspired by the Spirit, could write not only of Jesus' resurrection but also of His perfect sacrifice for sin. May the Lord in the same way give us a fresh view of the Cross where Jesus died for our sins, with the words of Hymn # 251:

*Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,  
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;  
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,  
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day.*

*Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see  
The very dying form of One Who suffered there for me;  
And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess;  
The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.*

**Saturday and Sunday:** Further Meditation on Psalm 51 (B.B. Warfield, Faith & Life)

*It was by a hard pathway that David came to know God and himself so intimately. But he came thus to know both his own heart and the God of grace with a fullness and profundity of apprehension that it will be hard to parallel elsewhere. And it was no merely external knowledge that he acquired in this way. It was the knowledge of experience. David knew sin because he had touched the unclean thing and sounded the depths of iniquity. He knew himself because he had gone his own way and had learned through what thickets and morasses that pathway led, and what was its end. And he knew God, because he had tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious. Yes, David had tasted and seen God's preciousness. David had experience of salvation. He knew what salvation was, and he knew its joy. But never had he known the joy of salvation as he knew it after he had lost it. And it is just here that the special poignancy of David's repentance comes in: it was not the repentance of a sinner merely, it was the repentance of a sinning saint.*