

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **How to Confess Your Sins**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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#### How to Confess Your Sins

That high time in our service when we read the Scripture is upon us. Will you stand with me? I want to read Psalm 51, the Psalm of Confession, proper for us to consider as we come to the Lord's Table.

Psalm 51, "Be gracious to me, oh God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the greatness of thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only I have sinned and done what is evil in thy sight so that thou art justified when thou doest speak and blameless when thou doest judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, thou doest desire truth in the innermost being and in the hidden part, thou wilt make me no wisdom. Purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which thou has broken rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from thy presence and do not take thy holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors thy ways and sinners will be converted to thee. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, oh God, thou God of my salvation. Then my tongue will joyfully sing of thy righteousness. Oh, Lord, open my lips that my mouth may declare thy praise for thou doest not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it. Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart, oh God, thou wilt not despise. By thy favor do good to Zion. Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offering. Then young bulls will be offered on thine altar."

I have found, in my own life, as a Christian, not particularly as a pastor or a preacher, but in my own life before the Lord as a Christian that Psalm 51 is a place where you go very frequently because once you understand the scope, the intent, the content of this Psalm, it provides a pattern for confession, for repentance, for penitence.

You go back to it again and again and flow through the marvelous, marvelous truths of this great psalm. And if I can deliver enough of it to you to make it the point of contact for your own confession in times of repentance, then it will serve you in a marvelous and blessed way. By way of introduction, the church, the true church, the church of Jesus Christ is the one and only organization where

members meet regularly together to acknowledge themselves as miserable sinners. That's certainly a very important part of our church life.

The true church of Jesus Christ, in a sense, is obsessed with sin. In fact, I believe the more mature a Christian is, the more mature a church is, the more obsessed with sin it is. I don't believe you grow spiritually out of that obsession. I believe you grow spiritually into it.

Churches which talk of good things only and never or rarely speak about sin or confess sin are not mature. They're immature. Individuals that talk little about sin, talk mostly about good things are not filled with the attitude of confession and repentance, are not mature Christians, they are immature. Not holy but usually unholy.

You go back to the Old Testament, you meet a man by the name of Isaiah who was the best man in his nation, the spokesman for God, a truly holy man. And when he worshiped God, he said of himself, "I am a man with a dirty mouth. I dwell amidst a people of dirty mouths."

In other words, here was the most mature man, the best of men, who saw himself as a wretched sinner. He said, "Woe is me. Curse me. Condemn me. Punish me for my sin, oh God." You come to the New Testament, the best of men again is the apostle Paul, and you find Paul crying out, saying, "I am chief of sinners and there is in my flesh a law or a principle of sin that runs contrary to everything I know and love and believe to be right and good." He always acknowledged his sin. This is that mark of maturity. This is the mark of spiritual virtue. This is the mark of Godliness. This is the mark of holiness, a shallow, insensitive, immature person would never be able to write Psalm 51. It flows out of the life and pen of one who loves God deeply and hates sin fiercely, even the sin that he sees in his own life.

So any person who really knows God in a deep way, who genuinely communes with God, who is truly filled with the Holy Spirit, who spends time in the word of God is deeply troubled about his or her sin. And there is a certain obsession about it. He longs to confess, longs to repent, longs to enjoy forgiveness, longs to enjoy restoration.

Such a man was David. Not a spiritual novice, but spiritually mature. A man, it says, after God's own heart. A man who pursued the heart of God, who pursued the will of God. A man who hated sin, even his own sin. That's the kind of man we want to lead us into confession - a man who did sin, but hated it, a man who was obsessed with his own guilt and wanted deliverance from it. He is the man who can teach us about matters of confession.

This Psalm then, Psalm 51, which is before us, bears the mark of deep guilt. It bears the mark of severe remorse over sin. And it reveals the nature of true penitence, true repentance and true confession. True confession is, if it is to be a part of our lives, to be carefully understood. And so if

we are to understand what it means to confess our sins, we come to a Psalm like this in order that we might learn.

Now let me give you a little bit of the background, if I might. David had problems with his own simple flesh. They showed up in a number of ways and because there is probably more written about him in the Old Testament than anybody else, we know more about his sin. It isn't that he was worse than anybody else, it's just that the record is so full that we have much to read about his sinfulness. But among the categories of David's sinfulness was a certain propensity toward lusting after women. He had a problem with that. When he wanted a woman, he usually took her, whoever she belonged to, and he was usually in a position to take what he wanted.

Behind Psalm 51, we find David at the Apex of his kingdom. He is at the height of his power and popularity, prestige, prominence. He is at the height of God's blessing on his life. And it was at that time of the greatest blessing, the greatest personal glory, that he became infatuated with a beautiful woman by the name of Bathsheba. She was the wife of one of his military officers by the name of Uriah. And he was so enamored with her that he determined, first of all, that he would indulge his eyes by gazing upon her from the roof of his kingly palace, watching her bathing in the sun. And then he wanted her to the degree that he made sure he got her and he made her pregnant. He sought to somehow solve the unbelievable complexity of his problem now that he had engaged himself in sexual activity with a woman not his wife, made her pregnant by arranging to have her husband lead a suicide squad into battle, have everybody around him retreat and then he would lose his life. And that is, in effect, exactly what happened. Uriah led a suicide squad into battle. He was cut off from his support and he was killed. Conveniently wanting to carry the charade on further and somehow forget his intrigue, he proceeded to marry his widow who was already pregnant with his child.

Some historians, who study Old Testament history would say that that is the point at which the beginning of the dissolution of the kingdom of Israel began. The seeds of the breakup of the kingdom are often dated from that very event. Not only that, but God was offended and God took action. God took the life of that little baby born of that union. And from David and Bathsheba were born four other sons, heart wrenching, heartbreaking sons, troublesome sons who brought immense grief to the heart of David.

But beyond the terrible tragedy in his nation, the death of the child, the heartbreaking experience with the four sons born of that union was the tremendous trauma and obsession with his own sin that plagued David, literally plagued him. In fact, it so plagued him that it oozes out of his pen as the Psalmist again and again going back for example into Psalm 31:10 we read from David, "For my life is spent with sorrow, my years with sighing, my strength has failed because of my iniquity and my body has wasted away." Whenever David was going through difficulties, suffering deeply and greatly, he went back to this moment of sin with Bathsheba and the terrible pain and grief that it brought his life.

If you go to Psalm 32 and you look at verse 3, he says, "When I kept silent about my sin, when I didn't confess, when I didn't acknowledge it, my body wasted away." Physical effects of guilt. "Through my groaning all day long, all day in sorrow, all day in groaning out of guilt. Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me. God was pressing down the guilt. "My life juices," he's talking here about saliva. It's left his mouth dry. He's talking about blood, another one of the life fluids, which of course the whole circulatory system would be affected by sin. It affects the heart, how it pumps. The very fluid that causes us to be able to send nerve signals through the body was affected as well. All his life fluids were drained away as with a fever, heat of summer. It was a terrible guilt that he felt.

In Psalm 38 we find again the cry of his heart over his sin. "Oh Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath. Chasten me not in thy burning anger. Thine arrows have sunk deep into me. Thy hand has pressed down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine indignation. There is no health in my bones because of my sin. My iniquities are gone over my head. I'm drowning in them. A heavy burden, they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my folly. I'm bent over and greatly bowed down. I go mourning all day long. My loins are filled with burning. There's no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed and badly crushed. I groan because of the agitation of my heart." This is a man in deep pain. It just comes out over and over, the confession of a man who loves God, hates sin and has become obsessed with his iniquity.

Now when you come to Psalm 51, it's the most penitent of all, the most expressive of the pain of his sin and the most clearly a plea for forgiveness. There are four things he pleads for. Four things, you might want to note them for future reference. Four things: one, sin has made him dirty and he wants to be clean. Sin has made him dirty and he wants to be clean. Two, guilt has made him ill and he wants to be healed. Guilt has made him ill and he wants to be healed. Three, disobedience has broken friendship with God and he wants to be restored. Disobedience has broken friendship with God and he wants to be restored. Fourthly, rebellion has put him under judgment and he wants to be pardoned. Sin has made him dirty and he wants to be clean. Guilt has made him ill and he wants to be healed. Disobedience has broken friendship with God and he wants to be restored. And rebellion has put him under chastening and he wants to be pardoned. These are what he pursues in the Psalm.

Now, if we're going to properly confess our sins and we believe, follow the pattern of David, we have to view confession in three ways. We have to look at sin, we have to look at God and we have to look at ourselves. And that's what he does. Threefold view. He views his sin properly, he views his God properly and he views himself properly.

Let's first of all look at his view of sin in the first five verses, noting in verse 1, "Be gracious to me, oh God." Stop at that point briefly. What they says is the first thing you need to recognize about sin is it deserved judgment. It deserves judgment. Sin deserves judgment. If you're going to truly confess your sin to God and be penitent and repentant, you have to acknowledge that you deserve to be

judged and that's what that prayer implies. "Be gracious to me, oh God," simply means don't give me what I deserve. Don't give me what I deserve. Give me grace overlook what I deserve. Sin deserved judgment by God who is holy and just and righteous. Sin deserves its wages, death and hell. David is admitting, "I know what I deserve. I know what my sin calls for. But God, be gracious to me." Grace means I don't get what I deserve.

Even now, when in Christ, you and I as Christians are forgiven our sin still deserves judgment even though we've received full forgiveness in Christ, we don't deserve it. When we come to the Lord to confess our sin, we have to acknowledge that what we ask for is grace. What we ask for is mercy because we deserve judgment. You must recognize it. You must recognize that any sin you commit is worthy of the judgment of God unto death and eternal hell. David understood it and he pleaded for grace.

Secondly, if we are to have a proper view of sin, we realize it deserves judgment. Secondly, we also realize it appeals to love. It appeals to love. We have to plead for love. We have to appeal to the love of God to overlook our sin and give us grace. And so he says, "Be gracious to me, oh God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the greatness of thy compassion." He's pleading for tenderness. He's pleading for kindness. He's pleading for compassion. He's pleading for sympathy, great sympathy that will flow out of the love of God. There's no other appeal we can make but to God's love. We remember, don't we, the Scripture says God is love. God so loved the world. God who is rich in mercy loved us. Herein is the love of God that while we were yet sinners, and so forth. God loves us and it is to that that he appeals. Oh God, according to thy loving kindness, thy compassion, tenderness, gentleness. That's the appeal.

It's reminiscent of Lamentations 3:22. "For the Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for his compassions never fail." How wonderful it is that God is a God of love. The sinner comes. He knows his sin deserves judgment. He knows his sin must appeal to love, to God's love.

Third thing - in having a proper view of sin, you must recognize that sin produces guilt. Sin produces guilt. He feels it. Look what he says in verse 1 at the end. "Blot out my transgressions." That's one way to say it. Here's another way. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity." Here's another way. "And cleanse me from my sin." Three ways he said the same thing. "Blot out my transgressions." That's one word for evil. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity." That's a second word for evil. "Cleanse me from my sin." That's a third word for evil. He uses all the words for evil. And he is implying the comprehensive problem that has fouled his life from which he desperately wants deliverance because it has made him blood guilty. He is really guilty before God. The one whose sin leaves such a deep, deep stain is the one who feels that only a total cleansing will suffice.

So, as you come to confess your sin, you recognize that it deserves judgment, that it requires love and that it alleviates guilt.

There's a fourth element that I see in his view of sin, and this equally important to the others. Verse 3 and 4 tells us that he realizes that sin must acknowledge full responsibility. True confession realizes I deserve judgment, realizes I can appeal only to God's great love, realizes that I bear guilt from which I need relief and realizes that I am fully responsible for my sin.

Look at verse 3. "For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Here is the proper attitude of a penitent, nobody to blame but me, the personal pronoun twice, my sin, my transgressions. Not your fault, God, not the fault of the people around me, God, not the fault of the system in which I live, God, not the fault of demons and Satan, God. My sin, my transgressions. And there is true penitence.

If you come to God and you say, "I know my sin deserves judgment. I appeal to love and I need relief from guilt, but God, I mean, after all, look at the people around me who made me do this." Or, "Look at Satan and how powerful, or the world system", or "God why did you ever let me get into that situation?" Then there's no true penitence.

True penitence embraces the fact that this sin is nobody's fault but mine. Mine. Furthermore, in verse 4, he takes it to its logical conclusion. "Against thee, thee only, I have sinned." Not only are you not responsible for it, but I have done it against you. I have defiled you. I have blighted you, blasphemed you and done what is evil in your sight. You hate sin. You're never responsible for it. And no circumstance which you allow ever brings blame on you for it. So I've sinned against you. And when I've done what is evil in your sight, notice the end of verse 4. "So that," and this is what he's driving at, "you are justified when you speak and blameless when you judge." What is he saying? He's saying, "Look God. I have done it. It is my responsibility and my responsibility alone and totally, so that if you react against it with certain words or with certain judgment, you have no blame for such is a holy reaction." That's his \_\_\_\_\_. He's exonerating God from any culpability when God strikes against him in chastening. This is a true penitent. This is a true penitent. Adultery, murder, he has committed. Yes, it's against men in some sense, but that pales into non-importance when he sees it for what it really. It's my sin against God. Violence against his holy majesty, rebellion against his will, disobedience against his word, blasphemy against his holy name. It's an affront to God. It's an attack on God.

2 Samuel 12:13, David went to Nathan after the sin and he said, "Nathan." He said, "I have sinned against the Lord." That's right. And Nathan says to him, "Yes, and God will forgive you, but God took it personally. And so he's gonna kill your son. Yes, God took it personally, your baby will die." David immediately went into fasting and prayer and prayed for the sparing of the life of the son. The son died anyway. David washed his face, came out and said, "I prayed, God didn't say yes, it's over and done, God has punished me, I accept it. I accept it." God bears no blame for David's sin and therefore, God bears no culpability when he strikes out in chastening against the sinner.

We cannot blame anyone else for our sin. We cannot blame Satan for our sin. And we cannot minimize our own responsibility to any degree and still have an honest confession. When you truly confess and acknowledge your sin, then you say to God, in effect, "Go ahead and chasten me. You have every right to do it. And I cannot impugn your holy character. You've only done what I deserve." That gives glory to God.

One final and fifth concept is in David's mind as he assesses sin. He looks at sin in true repentance and he - he says that the right view of sin, the true view of sin, includes the knowledge that fifthly, it proceeds from your nature. It proceeds from your nature. Verse 5, "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me." What's he saying? He's saying, "Look, I'm a sinner from the start." He's not coming to God with this kind of confession, "Lord I've sinned, but you have to understand, this is not typical of me, Lord. I'm really a wonderful guy. This is very abnormal. This is a very unusual experience. I don't know that I'll ever have to come back and do this again, Lord, if you'll just cover this one, I may not be here again." No, no, no. He's not trying to convince the Lord that he's something better than the way he behaves, he comes to the Lord and says, "Lord, I'm doing this because I have a disease called congenital depravity. It started at my conception and I've been this way since then. And I'll be back, Lord, probably later today with this whole deal 'cause I got a fouled up nature." And who can make the clean out of the unclean and a leopard can any more change his spots than you are able to do good who are accustomed to doing evil. You can't change your nature. Admission that you're congenitally wicked. "In my flesh dwells no good thing," said Paul. I war with it all the time. I have no capacity to change my nature. Now this is a truthful assessment David has made about sin.

This is exactly where true confession starts. I deserve judgment, point one. Two, I plead for love. I need deliverance from my guilt. I accept full responsibility and I can't help it. I can't change myself, oh God. That's a broken and a contrite heart isn't it. That's the stuff that a broken and a contrite heart is made of. That's where confession starts - the proper understanding of sin. Secondly, proper understanding of God. You have to also understand God.

Look at verse 6. Several attributes of God are in David's mind. "Behold, thou doest desire truth in the innermost being and in the hidden part thou will make me no wisdom." What's this? He says, "God you're holy. You're holy. You're not interested in external ceremonies. You're not interested in religious ritual. You're interested in the heart, the innermost being, the hidden part. You're concerned about the inside."

As the Old Testament and the New both say, "Be ye holy, even as I am holy." True confession, see, recognizes God isn't after some external behavior. God isn't concerned that you just look good on the outside. God is after pure desires, a pure heart, holiness on the inside, only that pleases him. True confession acknowledges God's high standard of holiness, that God wants holy longings, holy

motives, holy desires, a pure inside.

Second attribute of God is God's power and I love this. I just love it. He acknowledges the power of God to do what he can't do, that God is powerful enough to change him, to cleanse him. Look at verse 7, "Purify me with hyssop." That was a bush used to sprinkle blood and water in purification ceremonies. "Purify me with hyssop." Now notice this confidence. "And if you do that, I'll be clean. Purify me." Then he says, "Wash me and if you do that, I'll be whiter than snow." That's right. In other words, "God, I know you are powerful enough to change me, to cleanse me, to wash me." I mean if you come to God and you say, "Lord, I need cleansing and I need forgiveness and I'm not too sure you can handle it. This sin is more, maybe, than you can handle. Lord, I don't know if you've got the power to clean up this mess. This is a major mess. I'm not sure you can handle this one." No. The Psalm, it says, "Look, if you purify me, I'll be clean. And if you wash me, I will be whiter than snow. That's how powerful you are." Some doubt God's power to cleanse and change their sinful habits. David didn't doubt it at all.

Third thing about God that he affirms is God's goodness, just God's goodness. In verse 8, "Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice." He knew God wanted him happy. God is a good God and God receives pleasure when his children rejoice. That's his goodness. That's his goodness. He had received God's chastening for his sin, but he knew that God wanted to relieve the burden. Hebrews 12 says that God chastens us for awhile in order that he might give us a peaceable fruit of righteousness. But God is good and he wants his children happy and thankful and joyful, rejoicing. David knew that. "Lord, I want you to give me joy. I want you to give me gladness. I want you to make me rejoice."

Do you believe in that kind of God? When you go to confess your sin you go to a holy God, you go to a powerful God who can make you clean. You go to a God who is so good he wants you to be restored because he wants you to be rejoicing.

There was another attribute of God that David knew about and that was God's forgiveness. Verse 9, "Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities." He knew that God was a forgiving God. Who is a pardoning God like thee? None, the prophet Micah says. He is confident that God forgives the true confessor. He knows that if you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive your sins. He knows that. That's not just a New Testament truth. That's the character of God. "For thou, Lord," he says in Psalm 86:5, "art good and ready to forgive." He knew God was good and wanted him rejoicing and God was ready and eager and able to forgive him. He also knew that God was faithful. God was faithful.

Verse 10, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from thy presence. And do not take thy holy spirit from me." He's confident in God's faithfulness. If you ask God for something, he'll give it. If he promises he'll be with you, he won't



leave. If he gives you his spirit, he won't take him back. Here is his trust in what I love to call the sovereign faithfulness of God. Not only is he faithful to what he promises, but he is sovereignly able to complete and accomplish what that faithfulness demands. He knew God was faithful, that God would give him a clean heart if he asked, that God would renew that steadfast spirit and not take away his presence and not remove his spirit. God had made a covenant with him. God had said, "I'm going to make you one of my own. I'm going to give you my spirit. We're going to have a relationship. And if you come to me, I'll reaffirm that relationship, I'll be faithful to it. You might not always be, but when you come back, I'll be there. I'll be there."

What is it that we need to understand about God when we come to confess our sins? That God is holy, that God is powerful, that he's good, that he's forgiving, that he's faithful.

Lastly, the penitent sinner needs to understand something about himself - something about himself. He needs to understand that he's significant to God. That's right, significant. You say, "You mean us?" That's right. You're significant to God. He saved you for a purpose. The reason you're alive is so that he can find some purpose for you, use you. Otherwise he could just take you to heaven.

And what is that purpose? Well, go back to verse 12. "Restore to me the joy of thy salvation. And sustain me with a willing spirit." Lord make me like you want me, "A spirit that's willing to do your will, full of the joy of my salvation." That's what happens when you get cleansed. Why? "Then I will teach transgressors thy ways and sinners will be converted to thee."

Number one, Lord I gotta take a look at myself because I'm important for the sake of sinners. That's point one. For the sake of sinners, I have to teach them your ways and I have to see them converted to you and I can't do that unless I have the joy of my salvation and a willing and obedient spirit. Lord, you have to do your work in me so that I'm useful for sinners. God wants you to confess your sin, your friend for the sake of sinners so that you can be useful to sinners.

Secondly, not only for the sake of sinners, but are you ready for this - for the sake of God himself. You say for the sake of God, what do you mean by that? Look at verse 14. "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, oh God, thou God of my salvation." Why? "Then my tongue will not only teach transgressors and convert sinners, but then my tongue will joyfully sing of thy righteousness." What does this mean? Then I could worship you. Then I can adore you. Then I can praise you. Then I can glorify you. So he says in verse 15, "Oh Lord, open my lips that my mouth may declare thy praise." Thy praise. For you - you don't delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. That's just external. You're not pleased with a burnt offering that's just on the outside. What you want is a broken spirit, a broken - a contrite heart, oh God, you won't despise.

And the second point is this, "I've got to get my life right so my relationship to you is right, so I can praise you and so that you'll receive me and you'll delight in me and you'll respond to me and I'll be

giving you what I want and our fellowship will be sweet." So we might say confess your sin for the sinner's sake and for God's sake and thirdly, for the sake of the saints. Where's that? Verse 18 and 19, here he begins to intercede, "By thy favor, do good to Zion. Build the walls of Jerusalem." He's praying. He's praying here.

Then - then you will delight in righteous sacrifices, not just external ones. And then burnt offering and whole burnt offering will please you and then young bulls will really be offered on your alter. In other words, revive your people, build your city, build your nation. Lord, restore it all, the walls of Jerusalem, Zion, your people, the righteous sacrifices, oh God, bring a revival. That's what he's saying.

And Psalm 66:18 says if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not what? Hear me. So David says, "I gotta get my life together for sinner's sake so I can teach transgressors your ways. I gotta get my life together for God's sake so that I can praise and adore him and enjoy communion with him. And I gotta get my life together for the saints' sake so that I can intercede for their spiritual good," the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much.

When I come to confession at the Lord's table to confess my sins so I don't participate unworthily, it means I have to see my sin as worthy of judgment, desperately in need of love, producing painful guilt, being my own responsibility and flowing out of my fallen flesh.

I have to see my God as holy, powerful enough to cleanse me, good so that he wants my joy and rejoicing, forgiving so that he will not look on my iniquities and absolutely faithful to the promise of the relationship which we have had since I came to know him. And then I look at myself and see the importance of recognizing that my life needs to be right, my sin confessed for the sake of sinners, for the sake of God, for the sake of saints who need my prayers.

This is a comprehensive view of God's plan for the confession of sin.

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