

Psalm 51 Repentance (part 2)

Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance, especially after his sins with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. And there is so much we can learn about what it means to repent. Last week we saw 3 truths: 1) Repentance is possible. It is possible because of the character of God. 2) Repentance involves confession of sin. 3) Repentance is a matter of the heart. Today, I would like to continue from last week and look at 4 more truths from this Psalm.

1. Repentance is a gift from God. You might say, "*Jon, I thought repentance is something WE do. It is OUR part. How can it be a gift?*" Have you ever thought about this? So why do I say repentance is a gift? I believe repentance is a gift for several reasons.

i. The context is one of ASKING for something David did not have. Now, he IS asking God to forgive him and to restore his relationship. Verse 1: "**blot out my transgressions.**" Verse 2: "**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!**" Verse 7: "**Purge me, with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**" Verse 9: "**Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.**" BUT, he is also asking that God give him a HEART that is broken over sin; a REPENTANT heart. And this kind of heart (attitude) can only come from God, as a gift! We get a hint of this in v. 6: "**Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.**" Verse 10: "**Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.**" And then in v. 17 David says, "**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart . . .**" Now, you might say, "*Jon, this is a stretch. This doesn't REALLY show us that repentance is a gift.*" But, there are other reasons.

ii. The NT refers to repentance as a gift. In Acts 5:31, speaking of why Jesus came, he says, "**God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.**" Also in the Book of Acts we see repentance as something that is given to the Gentiles. After preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, Peter goes back to Jerusalem and reports to the church what happened. In 11:17 he says, "**If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?**" And then notice what happens. Verse 18: "**When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God saying, Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance.**" And, one more verse. 2 Tim. 2:25. In the context of sharing the truth of the Gospel, Paul tells Timothy, As you correct your opponents, "**God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth . . .**"

iii. Repentance is bound up with the gift of salvation in the New Covenant. Let me ask, "*Is salvation a gift from God?*" OF COURSE it is a gift! And, can someone be saved without repentance? NO! There must be a turning from sin to God. And this takes place both in actions and in the heart. Therefore, since salvation is a gift and no one will be saved without repentance, repentance must also be a gift. Repentance is simply a PART of the gifts that accompany salvation. And this gift of repentance which accompanies salvation is a gift found in the New Covenant. Do you remember Jeremiah's words of prophecy concerning the NC? He says in Jer. 31:31: "**Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.**" And then in vv. 33-34: "**For this is the**

covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Throughout this prophecy, we see that salvation is a gift from God that flows down to his people through the person and work of Christ. In Acts 5:31 we read: **“God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”** Jesus came to give the gift of repentance.

Application: No matter how hard we try, we cannot cause a person to repent. We cannot argue someone into true repentance. Only God can grant repentance. As preachers and teachers of the Word, only God can change the heart. All we can do is “plant” and “water” praying that God will give the increase. This means there is no pressure, only the pressing command of Christ to go and make disciples as we spread the seed of God’s word.

2. Repentance is based upon principles of righteousness. Let me explain. Repentance can not take place without the righteousness of God, without the justice of God. In other words, no one came simply come to God and ask for forgiveness with a repentant heart unless God makes a way that is consistent with his holiness. The world says, *“God loves me. God will forgive my sins. All I have to do is come to him and ask.”* *“God grades on the curve. I’ve failed the test of morality. But you know, I’ve done my best and God will forgive me.”* Do you think this is true? Well, IT IS TRUE that God will forgive sinners. But, his forgiveness, which accompanies repentance, is not possible unless his righteousness is upheld. It would not have been just for God merely to forgive sins . . . unless there be some kind of just punishment. David understood that God couldn’t simply let him off the hook without some kind of justice.

Look at v. 4 **“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.”** In v. 14 we also read: **“Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your RIGHTEOUSNESS.”** In these words, David is surely considering the righteousness of God as he confesses his sins. And then in v. 16 he mentions the word “sacrifice.” And then again in v. 18 he says, **“Do good to Zion in your good pleasure build up the walls of Jerusalem: then will you delight in right sacrifices in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.”** Now, I know David is simply saying that Israel was offering sacrifices, but their hearts were far from God. But, there is more. David lived under the Old Covenant, during the time of animal sacrifices. Since the time of Adam’s sin, God required sacrifices. And these sacrifices were fully developed after the time of Moses. So, why the sacrifices?

You see, Israel (and David) knew that God did not SIMPLY forgive their sins. God required the death of an animal. What did God say to Adam and Eve when they sinned? **“On the day you eat of it, you will surely DIE.”** The righteous requirement for sin against God is death, both physically and spiritually. I believe David understood the purpose of those sacrifices. As those animals were sacrificed, he was saying, *“God, I deserve to be on that altar of death. But, with a repentant heart, please accept those sacrifices.”* This is what I mean by saying that repentance is based on principles of righteousness; the righteousness of God. The problem was this: **THE BLOOD OF BULLS AND GOATS COULD NOT ATONE FOR SIN.** That is why they had to continually be offered.

So let me ask, “*How could God forgive David’s sins, even if they were from a repentant heart?*” The answer is the Gospel of Christ. Turn to Rom. 3. Look at vv. 21-26. **“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”** Today, repentance is not only possible, but is sure, for those who believe in Jesus. Repentance comes through the person and work of Christ. Repentance is based on principles of righteousness. This is what Jesus means when he says: *“This is my body, broken for you.”*

3. Repentance is necessary for growth in godliness. Look at v. 13: **“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”** David knows that only when He is right with God can he effectively lead his people. Only when he is right with God can he teach God’s truth to sinners. Only when he is right with God will sinners come into the Kingdom. I think there is much that can be said about leadership, especially as leaders practice what they preach. But, the underlying truth is this: A REPENTANT HEART IS NECESSARY FOR GROWTH IN GODLINESS. The process of sanctification depends on a repentant heart. This is why we must say that repentance isn’t something you do ONCE when you become a Christian. Repentance is an ongoing attitude of the heart. And without it, there will be NO GROWTH in godliness. As repentance goes, so goes maturity in godliness.

Look at your own life, your own heart. Does repentance, (what I am talking about) find a welcome place in your heart? Do you come to God as a sinner by nature and confess your sins, trusting the person and work of Christ who says, *“This is my body broken for you?”* Do the words of this Psalm often flow from your heart and your lips? **“Have mercy on me, O God . . . blot out my transgressions . . . Wash me . . . Cleanse me . . . My sin is ever before me . . . Against YOU have I sinned . . . Purge me and I shall be clean . . . Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow . . . Hide your face from my sins . . . Blot out my iniquities . . . Create in me a clean heart . . . Renew the spirit within me . . . Restore the joy of your salvation . . .** These are the thoughts and the words that flow from a repentant heart. And only through repentance do we grow in godliness!

Maybe you look at your life and you wonder why you see little, if no growth in godliness. Maybe your heart is not repentant. Only you (and God) knows if this is true. If you desire this attitude, look to Christ! His body was broken on the cross so that you might find repentance, now and until he comes back.

4. Repentance is necessary for joy in this life. Look at v. 8: **“Let me hear joy and gladness.”** And then in v. 10: **“Create in me a heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”** Then in v. 12: **“Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”** Now, after everything we’ve seen so far about repentance, it simply follows that great joy will come from a heart of repentance! I know

of NO ONE who truly repents and does not find joy. I think of the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray. One man, rich, dressed in good clothes, with status in the community, stood for everyone to see and he prayed, "***I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all I get. Thank you God, I am not thief. I am not an adulterer. I am not a liar. And, Thank you, I am not like this man.***" But, the tax collector stood off by myself and beat his breast and said, "***God be merciful to me a sinner***" (Luke 18). Which man had the repentant heart? And which man will find joy in this life and the one to come.

And what about the two thieves on the cross beside Jesus. One of them ridiculed and insulted Jesus. The other rebuked him and said, "***We deserve to die on these crosses. But this man has done nothing wrong.***" And then he said to Jesus, "***Remember me when you come into your kingdom***" (Luke 23). Which of these men had the repentant heart?

And again, it isn't just a one-time event. It did begin at one time. I remember Jimmy coming to me after a church soft ball game and saying, "*Jon, you need to get your life right.*" He was really telling me to repent. And by God's grace I did. But, by the grace of God this attitude has continued. And joy has been in my heart since that time. OH God, Thank you for your grace in the gift of repentance through the beautiful person and work of Christ!

With these things in mind, I think we can say with confidence that ALL blessings from God come through the means of repentance. This is really the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. Repentance is a Christian word. With this in mind, do non-Christians have repentance? True repentance is impossible outside of faith in Christ! Therefore, non-Christians (outside of Christ) cannot repent in the biblical sense. If repentance is found in Christ, it is true repentance. Therefore, we must communicate to the world what we have heard today in order for repentance and forgiveness of sins.

As we preach Christ and as we take the Lord's Supper month after month as a church, we remember the death of Jesus. And we remember that his death is the occasion for the gift of repentance. In Christ, repentance is possible. In Christ, confession of sins and forgiveness of sins is a reality. In Christ, God gives us a new heart (a heart of repentance) by the Spirit. In Christ the wrath of God has been appeased. His righteousness has been upheld. In Christ, He has given us the Spirit that we might grow in godliness. In Christ, joy is ours. In Christ, All the blessings of life come down to us. Oh, how beautiful the person and work of Christ! Oh, how we need Him!