

The Psalm of Repentance

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[0:00] Good morning. Well, as we're continuing through Philip's book, *Walking with God*, we come to Psalm 51, and so I would ask you to turn there with me. How important is repentance?

Phillips observes, we are eager to talk about grace, forgiveness, and other supposedly more positive themes. The idea of repentance, however, is frowned upon in much of the church today, isn't it?

It's often seen as a vestige of Old Testament law. Is repentance a legalistic requirement or an indispensable aspect of the gospel?

The Westminster Confession says, Repentance, quote, is of such necessity to all sinners that none may expect pardon without it.

Sinclair Ferguson adds, Faith cannot exist where there is no repentance. I cannot come to Christ in faith without turning from sin in repentance. They are two sides of the same coin of belonging to Jesus.

[1:24] Well, the word repentance, as I'm sure we all know, basically means a change of mind. Another way of thinking of it is turning from one thing in order to pursue another.

And in the context of the gospel, we're implored to change our mind about sin. To pursue God, we must turn from sin, which is why Ferguson states they're two sides of the same coin.

Rebellion or sin and obedience are opposites. They can't coexist. So as such, repentance, I hope we all would understand and agree this morning, is integral to the gospel message.

Jesus said, The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. As I prepared this lesson, one of the fears I have had is how to present this in a way, very frankly, so that we're not falling asleep.

Because we've heard this subject so many times. We've heard these terms and these words so many times. That I fear we yawn through it instead of seeing the vital aspect.

[2:38] So I would ask you, stick with me. Because I know for my own personal life, I have made tremendous application of this lesson through the past two weeks. As I have daily, hourly, minute by minute, needed to repent to God for my sin.

And this has been a fresh reminder of the way in which that repentance is to occur. And an exposure of some of my false acts of repentance.

Well, very simply, this lesson divides repentance up into six vital aspects of repentance.

And we're going to study it under these six heads. Repentance requires confession of sin, relies on God's mercy, finds cleansing through Christ's blood, flows from brokenness, produces new obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit, and creates an outward focus.

So first, repentance requires confession of sin. Follow with me as I read the first five verses of Psalm 51. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.

[3:51] According to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Repentance starts with recognition and confession of sin, of my sin. True repentance is not being sorry that I was caught, but rather feeling sorrow for sin itself and the sinful nature from which that sin sprang.

David uses three Hebrew terms to describe his sinful guilt in these verses. And I'm not going to attempt to massacre the Hebrew words, so I will simply give you what they were translated into.

First, transgression. Two, iniquity. And three, sin. Transgression carries the idea to cross a boundary, to break a rule. Iniquity is perversion or corruptions, and sin is to fall short or miss the mark.

[5:09] So the first one we want to look at is repenting or confessing of one's transgressions. One's transgressions. It's found in verses 1 and 3.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. And then in verse 3. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Sin is rebellion against God's law. Phillips writes, A spiritual understanding of the Ten Commandments will make us realize that, like David, we are rebels, lawbreakers, and transgressors.

Confession recognizes the specific ways in which one is transgressed against God's law. In David's case, it was coveting, adultery, and murder.

Verse 4 shows David's Godward focus in addition to any human violations involved. First and foremost, he understands that he transgressed against God's law.

[6:10] Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. He has dishonored God.

He's violated his law. He has angered God. So that is what allows him to say this in this verse. The result of such confession is that he sides with God and recognizes that God is right in his anger and judgment.

The last half of verse 4, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Allow me to illustrate this type of sin, transgression with a little incident that occurred on our first day of our vacation a couple weeks ago.

But before I do, you have to understand something a little bit about our boat. We basically own a rowboat. We put a motor on the back, but it's a glorified rowboat.

My dad and I built a false floor in it many years ago, put a few seats on it, added a power motor, an electric motor, fish finder, fish pole holders.

[7:26] I mean, you'd think we were real fishermen if you didn't know we only went once every couple years. Well, anyway, on our way to the cabin, we were talking, and some rumors surfaced about a couple of members in our church, namely the Bars and the Clocos.

It seems that the Bars bought a motorboat a few years ago, and they dubbed it the big deal. Now, I also understand by rumor, and none of this has been verified, by the way, but if any of you have seen the Clocos boat, they sometimes vacation with the Bars, and Chuck has been heard to say that he thinks he should dub his boat the bigger deal.

Well, I think I should dub mine the biggest deal. But anyway, you have a picture of our boat. So during our first day on our little vacation lake, my wife and daughter wanted to go out boating. So neither one of them knew how to use either of our... We had a little electric trolling motor, which we needed to do to get out of the shallows, and then our big motor, which would take us faster, at least than the trolling motor.

And so I got in the boat with them to show Rachel how to use it. And as we were zigzagging through the shallows, and I'm trying to teach her, I'm realizing this is going to take a little bit longer than I thought.

[8:50] And then we went by my youngest daughter, who wanted to join the boat ride. So she jumps in the boat from swimming, and a short time later, Jonathan jumps in the boat.

And so you've got to have this picture. We're zigzagging through these shallows. There are now five grown adults in this rowboat. And sure enough, right on cue, here comes a boat headed straight towards us.

And it was the sheriff. And so the sheriff started asking us some questions. First questions. How many life preservers do you have on board?

Well, it was just my wife and daughter who were going out, so we had two. Second question. Do you know what the capacity limit of your boat is? Capacity limit.

Hmm. No, I didn't know there was such a thing. Do you have your registration on board?

Registration. Think that might be in the van?

[9:48] He graciously read it off the side of the boat. Do you have your driver's license? Now that one, I didn't know you were supposed to have your driver's license. No, I don't have my driver's

license. That would be back in my wallet in the cottage.

I noticed this boat has a false floor. Did you know that classifies it as a boat needing to have a fire extinguisher? No, I really didn't know that.

Well, needless to say, we received a citation. And I hope you all appreciated this story because it cost me a lot in order to be able to use it in this lesson. And for your sake, Ed, maybe Michigan isn't the promised land.

The moral of the story is that transgressing against a law makes one guilty before the maker of that law. If our boat had sunk due to our stupidity, we might have suffered personal loss.

But there was a bigger issue at stake, and that issue was that Michigan had certain voting regulations, which we had violated. And we had transgressed against their law. And this is why David was able to say, against you and you only have I sinned.

[11:03] And it was God's law that he was transgressing against. A few years ago, one of my children was rear-ended while turning left off of 106. Damage was done to both vehicles.

My child suffered a little whiplash. But when the police came, even though obviously, I would hope, they were concerned about the physical well-being of those involved, the questioning revolved around determining who had violated a law here, Indiana's driving laws.

And so, because it's the transgression against the law that is important. And that is where the penalty lies, is when we transgress against those laws.

We've transgressed against God's law. While there may be consequences to our sins with which others must suffer, and we don't want to minimize those consequences, still, ultimately, any so-called repentance is inadequate until it comes to grips with the personal offense of our actions against our personal God.

Surely I was sinful. I'm sorry. Skip the second point.

[12:22] So the second type of sin is iniquity. We're to repent of our iniquity. And that's found in verses 2 and 5. Verse 2 says, Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

And then verse 5 says, Surely I was sinful, brought forth in iniquity, at birth sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Iniquity is explained in verse 5 as part of the fallen humanity, even from our birth.

David understood he was corrupt at the core. This is an aspect of my confession that, frankly, up until the last couple of weeks, I have not thought much about.

To confess of individual sins, yes. To confess of the fact that I sin because I'm a sinner. To confess that I am a sinner.

I am corrupt at the core. This is what David is confessing of here. For all its fancy terms, David understood the doctrine of original sin. Phillips writes, Original sin does not refer to the sinful action of our first parents, Adam and Eve, but rather to the effect of their sin, the fallen state unto which our race was plunged, and the corruption that is now an inherent characteristic of our nature.

[13:47] David brings a sin to God, not as a small or fleeting problem that can easily be brushed aside. Rather, he presents sin as a colossal problem, brewing within his very nature.

This is something that is a part of me that I am that I need to confess of, and then repent that I am of that way, and seek God's grace to change what I am from the inside out.

Thirdly, we need to confess of, and the word is used, sin here, and that's found in verses 2 and 3. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

Here we contemplate the fact that we have fallen short or missed the mark. The familiar verse, Romans 3.23, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Full repentance acknowledges that I'm not all that God intended me to be, that I fall far short of his glory and expectations. You know, often we like to use the phrase, you know, give him a break.

[14:56] Give me a break. Well, I don't deserve a break. I am way short of where God says I should be, what he intended for me to be, and I need to confess that shortness.

When you combine this with repentance, it leads to a response that's no longer satisfied with our wicked, depraved condition. I'm not satisfied with where I am.

I become sorrowful over the fact that I'm not living up to his glory. And I now desire to begin fulfilling this obligation. Is that not something to be confessed of?

Well, the second aspect of repentance that we want to consider this morning is that repentance relies on God's mercy. It relies on God's mercy. God-pleasing repentance doesn't rely on one's own

work, on moral self-reformation, or turning one's life around.

The reason that repentance does not rely on these things is that sin is far too strong for us. We're in bondage. We are in deep bondage to our flesh and to our sin.

[16:07] We are by nature sinners again, as we've just said. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. When we attempt self-reformation, we end up becoming discouraged and depressed.

We begin resenting God and making him out to be the problem rather than the answer. Don't be deceived. An unsaved person can actually hate their sin without experiencing salvation.

Isn't Martin Luther a classic case of this? He was terrified by his guilt, which led him to enter the monastery. Remember, he exasperated his confessors by his endless sessions in the confessional booth.

He was very sorry, repentant, some would say, of his sin. But when asked if he loved God, Martin Luther replied, Love God? I hate him.

Repentance that relies on self-reformation ultimately leads to hatred towards God for demand and repentance that cannot be performed. I can't do it.

[17:13] And so I begin to hate the one who's expecting so much of me. True repentance casts itself on mercy. The very beginning of the psalm, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.

Which of God's attributes would embolden me as a sinner to approach him, to approach this thrice holy God? Would it be his justice? Would it be his wisdom?

His omniscience? His omnipotence? His omnipresence? The only reason I could possibly consider approaching a just, wise, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God is because he also is merciful and gracious.

Phillips says, Sin is far stronger than our strength of will. But it is only the second greatest power in the world. There is a greater power, and on it we must rely.

The mighty grace of God extended to sinners, who cry to him as David did, Have mercy on me, O God. Repentance does not mean begrudgingly giving up sins that we love and cherish, but rather, seeing our sin as the evil slave master it truly is, and turning in faith to God, to the God of mercy, who alone can set us free.

[18:34] Well, if it's true that we must look outside of ourselves for mercy, it's equally true that cleansing only comes from outside of ourselves as well.

And this is another one that we could yawn through, but again, there is much here, much personal application. Repentance finds cleansing through Christ's blood. Repentance finds cleansing through Christ's blood.

And let me add that we might yawn through this, not because this isn't an incredible, marvelous fact, but because we're so cold so often.

To think upon Christ and the cross and what he did for us and the cleansing that he provides us is certainly nothing to yawn through. We cannot wash ourselves.

True repentance recognizes this reality and embraces the one who cleanses us. For the Jew, this verse would have brought to remembrance the ceremonial cleansing prescribed for the diseased person who was healed.

[19:37] I was going to turn there in Leviticus, but we don't have time this morning. But basically, in this ceremony, the diseased person who was healed came and went through this ceremony, and part of it was the taking of two birds, and one was killed, and the blood put in a basin.

And then they used hyssop to sprinkle the blood on the person who was healed, and the other bird was dipped in the blood and then released to allow to fly away. And Phillips writes on this, this symbolized the complete removal of sin and guilt.

The red stain flew upward until it could no longer be seen and finally went completely away. And we read in Psalm 103, As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

This ceremony provided a picture of the ultimate cleansing that would be performed by the Son of God on behalf of his people. Again, Phillips writes, Like the first bird, Jesus was put to death for our sin.

He died in our place, bearing our sin and guilt. David prays for sprinkling with sacrificial blood, and when we rest in Christ, his blood is spiritually applied to us so that we are made clean.

[20:51] Jesus has completely removed our guilt. Just as the live bird flew away, Jesus washes us clean and clothes us with his perfect righteousness. Therefore, the Apostle John wrote, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Just how thorough is the cleansing of which David prays, and I will be whiter than snow. The cleansing produces complete purity.

This is an overwhelming declaration for the one who has become conscious, at least to some degree, of his own sinfulness. 1 John 1.7, But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

The blood of Jesus doesn't just purify us from some sin, but from all. Isaiah 1.18, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Why is this point made to be part of repentance rather than just the result of repentance?

[22:08] Well, because it is. And this is where the application comes in. True repentance must look to Christ for cleansing. We've heard this blessed truth so many times that we could say it in our sleep.

But there's something profound here, something for which we need fresh appreciation. In a crowd this size, there's undoubtedly some who have difficulty seeing their own sin, let alone admitting it. But for many others, you are frequently overwhelmed with the weight of your sin and corruption. Your own sin has become so big in your eyes that you inwardly begin to doubt that you can really be cleansed from it.

From all of it. Oh, intellectually we know better. We'd never say such a thing out loud, but our attitudes betray where our focus and true heart belief is.

When I come out of the other side of a sin, what is it that I focus on? Is it my own wickedness? Or is it Christ's righteousness and his cleansing?

[23:19] Do I wallow in the slime of my filthiness? Or do I immediately flee to my Savior to again be washed whiter than snow? With the emphasis on the word immediately.

Repentance is not only turning from sin to God, but also involves a turning from my wrong methods for finding cleansing from that sin. Methods that try to clean myself up through good works.

We might define good works as something out there that we do of helping the lady across the street. And I trust that those who have been attending here for years would know that that is not going to give us any right standing before God.

But how often practically do we still attempt to clean ourselves up first through good works?

Through some type of internal penance of wallowing in sorrow and self-afflicted anguish until I feel that I've somehow washed away some of the filth so that I can now come and rest in Christ to remove the rest.

No confession and repentance turns from these self-sufficient means of cleansing to throw oneself wholly on the cleansing power and work of Christ. It looks completely outside of oneself.

[24:39] It embraces the purity produced by Christ's work immediately at the point of conviction. When reminded of past sin rather than sulking and shame and sorrow it glories in the righteousness and grace and cleansing power of Christ.

Well, Scripture tells us that many are called but few are chosen. And while many may come to God for mercy He grants His mercy and cleansing to only a few who are chosen.

And those few can be distinguished by the state of mind in which they approach Him. Which is our fourth point. Repentance flows from brokenness.

Repentance flows from brokenness. Look at verses 16 and 17 in Psalm 51. You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it.

You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

[25:45] Our God's never changed in Old or New Testament times. He has never been interested in ritualistic legalism. And David understood this well.

David understood that it wasn't the acts of sacrifices and legalistic obedience with which God found pleasure. Rather, God delighted in a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

Phillips comments, the same is true today. The highest and best thing we can offer God is a heart that has been broken on account of sin and is responsive to His grace.

The proper and appropriate fruit of repentance is nothing less than that. Would you please hold your place here and turn to Mark 1, verse 40.

Mark 1, verse 40. A good student understands that hard work alone is usually not enough to be successful in a class.

[26 : 43] He must also know the teacher. What's important to that teacher? What does he expect? What will he reward? And what will he count off? So it is with the one who wishes to stand with confidence before his God someday.

That's why we're exhorted to study His word, to get to know Him. We're exhorted to learn what pleases Him. What is important to God? What answers and attitudes please Him?

And what incites His anger? Well, look at Mark 1, 40-42. Of course, we could turn anywhere to answer some of these questions, but just very briefly this morning.

One of the best places to look is in the life of our Savior, is it not? And here we have Jesus. And a man with leprosy came to Him and begged Him on his knees, If you are willing, you can make me clean.

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. I am willing, He said. Be clean. Immediately, the leprosy left Him and He was cured.

[27 : 51] Now we know that those that approached Jesus did not always cause Him to be filled with compassion toward them. All you have to do is think of those that came to question Him and tried to trick Him or the Pharisees.

And He surely was not filled with compassion in the way He was here for them. What is it that resulted in this response from Jesus where He responded with compassion to this man and He was willing to heal him?

What was it about the leper that solicited such a response? That's open for question or answer. Okay, He was on His knees. His position demonstrated a hard attitude.

When you're on your knees, you're not looking to anything in yourself, are you? He had completely abandoned self-effort.

His physical and verbal position speaks of a great broken spirit, a lowliness of mind. He begged Him on His knees.

[28 : 59] Matthew 11, 28, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. To whom does Jesus promise rest?

Well, those who come to Him. But not just anyone who comes to Him. They must already be weary and burdened. They must be in a state and a mind and a spirit in which they can approach Him, humble of heart.

The repentant one comes to God for mercy and cleansing because they are wearied and burdened. But only by the penalty, not only, I'm sorry, not only by the penalty of their sin, but by its power over them.

God responds with grace that produces new obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance produces new obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is our fifth point. Repentance produces new obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Again, as we've said, repentance has a from and a to side.

[30 : 04] It's turning from one thing to another. Rather than embracing sin and hating righteousness, the truly repentant one is brought to hate his sin and to desire righteousness, to despise his acts of disobedience, and to desire to walk in humble obedience.

But as with every other aspect of repentance, turning to Christ, embracing a life of obedience, requires a power outside of ourselves. Look at verses 10 through 12 in Psalm 51.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

Where does a pure heart come from? How do I become steadfast? From whence cometh a perseverance unto righteousness? How is it that I am able to stand in the presence of the Holy One?

Or what control do I have over where the Holy Spirit chooses to dwell? Are not the attitudes of my own spirit even beyond my own control?

[31 : 21] How is it that I do or do not have a spirit that is willing and desirous of maintaining a life of obedience? A spirit that is oppressed with sorrow and guilt or lifted high with the joy of faith?

Repentance is not complete unless it seeks these things. And yet it is deceived and will fail unless it relies on Christ for the producing of them.

Several centuries after David God declared through the prophet Ezekiel the source of all such heart change. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Finally repentance is not complete. It's sickly at best until it focuses outwardly. And so our last point is repentance creates an outward focus.

[32:27] Repentance creates an outward focus. Look at verse 13 of Psalm 51. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you.

Save me from blood guilt O God the God who saves me and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.

Jump down to verse 18. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper build up the walls of Jerusalem then there will be righteous sacrifices whole burnt offerings to delight you then bowls will be offered on your altar.

The true penitent cannot remain inwardly focused. His eyes are turned outward in two directions toward his fellow man and then toward God first toward his fellow man.

as he receives cleansing from his Savior the repentant sinner soon sees the great filth and need of everyone around him and he wishes for them to be bathed in the same blood of Christ.

[33:33] If you've ever been on a wilderness camping trip for a while you probably have not noticed the increasing body odor that occurs of all those around you especially within your tent but if you had to go off on business for a day and you got cleaned up and showered and then you came back you would soon realize that everyone around you reeked and you'd be amazed that you had not noticed it before so it is with anyone who's been cleansed and washed in the blood of Christ as we reenter the world we find the odor emanating from the evil talk and deeds of those!

around us is nauseating when you add the love that Christ puts within our hearts for these people the natural response is to want them to go to the showers as well you want them to also be sprinkled by the cleansing blood of Jesus and sanitized by the renewing work of his Holy Spirit but this outward focus is going to wither and die if it remains purely horizontal so that leads to the second outward response of repentance and that is that every true penance ultimately desires his Savior's name to be praised ultimately the repentant one's desire for righteous living is that my tongue will sing of your righteousness it is so that I might declare your praise I'm quoting David here in Psalm 51 I pray for revival and righteousness to again be found in the land so that he will be delighted the application when I pray that

God would save my neighbor or my co-worker or family member what's the motive of my prayer is it that we would experience improved relations is it that the person for whom I am praying would experience eternity with God these are not bad motives when I'm praying that God will revive our nation is it that it might go better for me and my children and my grandchildren is it that we might have peace and freedom to worship God when I pray for cleansing and a willing spirit is it that I might experience peace with God is it that I might have a life of joy motives here that we recognize in and of themselves can be very good and proper there are certainly many purely evil motives for which I could pray such things just as an example in Timothy we read that we're to pray for kings and all those in authority that we may live peacefully in quiet lives in all godliness and holiness it's certainly not wrong to desire to live a peaceful life in this world however all such motives are idolatrous when they are our only or ultimate motive

David desired cleansing a willing spirit the joy of God's salvation and persevering obedience so that God would be praised and honored and glorified and pleased if we were to dive into what it is about David that made him a man after God's own heart I think this would be very close to the center of it David had God's glory in the center of his requests everywhere you read in his Psalms and I believe we do very well to emulate him in this area well in conclusion Phillips points out that repentance is a way of life repentance isn't just something we do when we enter the kingdom or that we do after gross or even smaller known sins known by others as Martin Luther proclaimed in the very first of his 95 theses when our

Lord and Master Jesus Christ said repent he meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance so as a way of life to repeat our points we should be confessing sin relying on God's mercy finding cleansing through Christ's blood as we come to him in brokenness which should

produce new obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit and then an outward focus we can immediately apply this lesson in the next hour we can apply it in our worship we prepare ourselves for worship by becoming broken and contrite over our sin we move into worship with the plea of a sinner have mercy on me oh God we approach God's word with humility and determined to submit ourselves to whatever instructions he brings us we look with dependence to the Holy Spirit to do an illuminating work in our hearts and as he does so we plead

[38 : 38] God's mercy through the cleansing power of Christ's blood and over it all we throw ourselves on God by faith to do for us what he has promised and that we cannot do for ourselves let us go in the next hour and worship him thank you