

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
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by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 51 — Biblical Confession

1.0 Introducing Psalm 51

- Several well-known individuals turned to Psalm 51 at the time of their death.
 - ◆ Both Sir Thomas More and Lady Jane Grey recited this psalm when they were on the scaffold as martyrs during the reigns of Henry VIII and Queen Mary.
 - ◆ Henry V requested it be read to him on his deathbed.
 - ◆ William Carey requested it be the text of the sermon at his funeral.
- Psalm 51 is one of the so-called “penitential” psalms.
 - ◆ Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.
- The background for the psalm is recorded in 2 Samuel 11–12.

Reading Psalm 51 (NAU)

51:1 A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Be gracious to me, O God,
according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion

blot out my transgressions.

A

51:2 **Wash** me thoroughly from my iniquity
And **cleanse** me from my sin.

B

51:3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.

C

51:4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

51:6 Behold, You desire truth
in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part
You will make me know wisdom.

51:7 **Purify** me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

C'
B'

51:8 Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

51:9 Hide Your face from my sins
And **blot out** all my iniquities.

A'

51:10 Create in me **a clean heart**, O God,
And renew **a steadfast spirit** within me.

51:11 Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with **a willing spirit**.

51:13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.

51:14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,
O God, the God of my salvation;
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

51:15 O Lord, open my lips,
That my mouth may declare Your praise.

51:16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.

51:17 The sacrifices of God
are **a broken spirit**;
A broken and a contrite heart,

O God,
You will not despise.

51:18 By Your favor do good to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.

51:19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

For the choir director.

2.0 Understanding Psalm 51

2.1 Outline

- I. Confession (vv. 1-9)
 - A. I Have Sinned (vv. 1-4)
 - B. I Am a Sinner (vv. 5-9)
- II. Restoration (vv. 10-13)
- III. Praise (vv. 14-17)
- IV. Intercession (vv. 18-19)



2.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “Be gracious to me”
 - Confession and forgiveness are both based upon the reality of God’s grace.
- **vv. 1-2** Three Words for Forgiveness
 - “Blot out” = the metaphor is erasing or removing writing from a book—perhaps an accounting metaphor.
 - “Wash” = the metaphor is that of the ancient near eastern laundryman who soaked, soaped, beat, wrung out, and rinsed clothing to get it clean.
 - “Cleanse” (same as “purify” in v. 7) = the metaphor is purification in order to approach the altar or to participate in worship at the Tabernacle.
 - Such multiplied references look at the totality and absoluteness of divine forgiveness.
 - Note the reverse order of the same three terms in verses 7-9.
- **vv. 2-3** Three Words for Sin
 - “Transgressions” = rebellion against divine authority.
 - “Iniquity” = perversion and guilt.
 - “Sin” = falling short of God’s holiness.
 - Such multiplied references look at the totality of sin and its absolute wickedness.
- **v. 3** “my sin is ever before me”
 - The natural consequences of sin are pervasive and often permanent.
 - Many times the effects are exhibited in one’s own family.
- **v. 4** “Against You, You only”
 - Sin, by definition and nature, is anti-God.
 - Even when the wickedness is perpetrated against someone else, the act is rebellion against God’s commands. Cp. Leviticus 5:21.
 - See 2 Samuel 12:13.
- **v. 5** “in sin my mother conceived me”
 - Verse 5 speaks of the psalmist’s sin nature, not about his mother’s morality.
 - This is the biblical foundation for the doctrine of original sin.
 - David confesses that he has been a sinner since conception.

- *What implications does this have for the abortion debate?*
- **v. 7** “hyssop”
 - Hyssop was a small plant that grew in rocky crevices in Palestine.
 - Perhaps the Syrian marjoram (*Origanum syriacum*), a fragrant grey-leaved wiry-stemmed herb, 7-12 inches high, with small white flowers.
 - The plant was employed like a brush in various purification ceremonies in the Old Testament:
 - Exodus 12:22
 - Leviticus 14:4-6
 - Numbers 19:18
- **v. 10** “Create in me a clean heart”
 - “Create” is the same verb used in Genesis 1:1.
 - The reference could be to creating out of nothing (creation *ex nihilo*). Cp. Romans 7:18.
 - However, it might be a reference to the miraculous nature of what God must do in David’s heart.
- **v. 11** “do not take Your Holy Spirit from me”
 - Is this a reference to the loss of salvation?
 - David might have been thinking of what he and Saul had experienced when the Spirit had come upon David, but had departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:13-14).
 - For David to pray this way would indicate that he was aware that God had not taken the Holy Spirit from him in spite of his grievous sins.
 - Verse 12 should be conclusive: “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.” David does not pray for the restoration of his salvation.
- **vv. 13-17**
 - “The proof of the forgiveness described in Psalm 32:7-9 is found in the altered heart attitudes depicted in [Psalm 51] verses 13-17.
“This changed attitude is evident in verses 18-19, too.”
—James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols.
(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 2:436.
- **v. 13** “I will teach transgressors Your ways”
 - Psalm 32 may have been a partial fulfillment of David’s vow.
 - Even those believers who, like David, were adulterers and murderers might have a writing ministry or deal with people one-on-one in order to help others escape the shackles of sinful living.
- **vv. 18-19** David’s Intercession
 - David recognized the effects that his sins had on his own nation.
 - He prays for the nation and for God’s blessing.
 - Intercession is another ministry that every restored sinner can and must do.

3.0 Singing Psalm 51

Whiter Than Snow

- ◆ Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole;
I want Thee forever to live in my soul.
Break down every idol, cast out every foe;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.



- ◆ **Refrain:**
*Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow.
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

Lord Jesus, let nothing unholy remain,
Apply Thine own blood and extract ev'ry stain;
To get this blest cleansing, I all things forego—
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Lord Jesus, look down from Thy throne in the skies,
And help me to make a complete sacrifice.
I give up myself, and whatever I know,
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Lord Jesus, for this I most humbly entreat,
I wait, blessèd Lord, at Thy crucified feet.
By faith, for my cleansing, I see Thy blood flow,
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

- ◆ Lord Jesus, Thou seest I patiently wait,
Come now, and within me a new heart create;
To those who have sought Thee, Thou never saidst “No,”
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

The blessing by faith, I receive from above;
O glory! my soul is made perfect in love;
My prayer has prevailed, and this moment I know,
The blood is applied, I am whiter than snow.

— Words: James L. Nicholson (1872)
Music: William G. Fischer

Gracious God, My Heart Renew

(Tune: “Rock of Ages”)

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Gracious God, my heart renew,
Make my spirit right and true;
Cast me not away from Thee,
Let Thy Spirit dwell in me;
Thy salvation's joy impart,
Steadfast make my willing heart. | 2 | Sinners then shall learn from me
And return, O God, to Thee;
Savior, all my guilt remove,
And my tongue shall sing Thy love;
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,
And my mouth shall praise accord. |
| 3 | Not the formal sacrifice
Has acceptance in Thine eyes;
Broken hearts are in Thy sight | 4 | Prosper Zion in Thy grace
And her broken walls replace:
Then our righteous sacrifice |

More than sacrificial rite;
Contrite spirit, pleading cries,
Thou, O God, will not despise.

Shall delight Thy holy eyes;
Free-will offerings, gladly made,
On Thine altar shall be laid.

— Author: Unknown
Music: John B. Dykes (1823-1876)

4.0 Praying Psalm 51

- Be gracious and merciful to me, O God. [v. 1]
- Lord, I have sinned against You. [v. 4]
- Help me to rejoice in Your loving discipline, Father. [v. 8]
- You are righteous, Lord. [v. 14]
- Father, do good things for Jerusalem. [v. 18]



5.0 Applying Psalm 51

- God desires that His people confess their sins. Cp. 1 John 1:9.
- Sin affects the sinner, the sinner's family, and the sinner's community.
- God's disciplinary measures are aimed at the restoration of the sinner.

Let us remember that everything we do affects other people, whether for good or evil. It is not true that we can sin "as long as it does not hurt anyone," because sin always hurts someone. But it is also true that those who confess their sin find forgiveness and renewal, teach others the ways of God, and become a blessing.

— James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols.
(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 2:436