

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

Pattern For Repentance

By

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Psalm 51

Villa Rica Communion 10/3/04

Public figures are scrutinized more than others.

Every move our president makes is noted and he could not do what David did without it becoming known. This was the case with David's sin. It was not only Nathan the prophet who knew about David's affair with Bathsheba. David's instruction to Joab must have been noised abroad. So his sins were known by the nation at large. His repentance, therefore, had to be public as well as private.

Let me begin by saying that not many men would have taken it as David did. An eastern monarch might well have considered himself above the law. Instead of repenting he could have had Nathan killed for coming to him as he did and exposing him to his face.

Psalm 51 is in the canon of scripture as God meant for it to be. It is an example to all Christians of repentance. What David has to say in this psalm should be instructive for any of us whenever we sin. It shows us the painfulness of offending God as well as the pathway to forgiveness. In the New Testament we have 1 John 1:9: **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

But lest that seem too easy, let us remember that David had pain and remorse as part of his confession and prayer for forgiveness.

Secondly, please notice that David did not try to bring in any excuses for his sin. He did not mention any mitigating circumstances to justify his sinful conduct. His prayer is an appeal solely to the loving kindness and great compassion of the Lord. **Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Psa. 51:1 (NASB)**

Thirdly, repentance does not pass the buck or try to put the blame elsewhere. Adam when he had sinned blamed Eve as the cause of his sin. She was the vessel of his temptation. Satan used her.

David might have blamed Bathsheba for having bathed herself in a place where she could be observed from the roof of his palace. But that would have been a pretty obvious non-excuse. But he never tried in any way to justify his sin. This is the way repentance ought to be for you and me.

Nathan used a parable recorded for us in 2 Samuel 12: 1- 4 of two men, a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many herds and flocks. A wayfarer came to the rich man and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's one little ewe lamb and prepared it for the wayfarer. David was angry when he heard it and passed judgment on the man who had done this wicked thing as being deserving of death and that he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold because he had no compassion. Then Nathan made his point. "YOU ARE THE MAN!" And he went on to pronounce judgment from the Lord on David.

Fourthly, David justifies the Lord's judgment upon himself. He says in verse 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. Psa. 51:4 (NASB)**

David is referring back to the judgment rendered by the prophet Nathan as recorded in the scripture. We do know that David suffered greatly as a result of his sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. He saw a sword come into his household that cost him two sons and much misery. He lost the child that had been conceived out of his sin with Bathsheba, and his son Absalom lay with all of his wives publicly when he rebelled against his father and tried to wrest the kingdom from him.

Please note that David puts the accent on sin being against God. As he says in verse 4 **Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight**

Some people might have a problem with this verse because it leaves out the people who were hurt by his sin. In reply to that I would answer that David was putting the accent on the offence of sin as being against God himself. David gives the reason for that which comes out of his knowledge of God as being omniscient. We can do nothing that God does not see. His knowledge of all things is perfect and entire. He not only sees what is going on in the world but can read the thoughts and intents of the heart. So we are constantly subject to his all-seeing eye.

There is a ballad that goes "God is watching." And that is good theology. He sees all that goes on everywhere at all times, even those things done in secret. So sin is first and foremost against God. As David says, **I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight.**

No one will ever get away with sin that is done secretly and in the dark. God sees it all. Sin comes out of the heart, as Jesus tells us, **"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. Matt. 15:18-19 (NASB)**

David's sin was conceived in his heart and God reads the hearts of men. So it was before Him that his sin had been done. Probably the public knew of David's sin but not the intimate details of it as God would know it, and though others were hurt by his sin, the accent is put upon having sinned against the Lord. .

As I said, David justifies God in his judgment upon him. This is appropriate and right. Sin is forgiven but God renders just judgments upon persons, especially public persons, when their sin is grievous and public.

I would cite the cases of Eli and Hezekiah as other examples. God told Samuel that he was going to judge Eli for not rebuking and removing his sons from their priestly office for their wicked behavior. God said that he had sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever. So Eli said **"It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."** (1 Sam. 3:18) Eli concurred with the Judgment of God as being just judgment in his case.

Then in Hezekiah's case Isaiah told him that the days were coming when all that was in his house, and all that his fathers had laid up in store would be carried to Babylon, and nothing would be left. This was because in his pride Hezekiah had showed the emissaries from Babylon all his treasures and wealth. So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, **"The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Is it not so, if there will be peace and truth in my days?"** 2 Kin. 20:19 (NASB). David did the same thing with regard to the judgment spoken against him by Nathan the prophet.

David's prayer is that God would not only pardon his sin but wash him thoroughly from his iniquity and cleanse him from his sin. In verse 7 he says **Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Psa. 51:7 (NASB)**

Hyssop was much used by the Hebrews in their sacred sprinklings for purification. The allusion is probably to the ceremony of sprinkling such as had been infected with leprosy. Two birds were taken, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop; one of the birds would be killed, and the priest, having dipped the living bird, the cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, in the blood of the bird that was killed, sprinkled the leper (Lev. 14). The ceremony was not to be performed until the person was cured, and it was intended as a declaration to the people that, God having healed him of a disease that no human means could remove, he might with safety be restored to society and to the privileges of which he had been deprived.

David, polluted with the crimes of adultery and murder, regarded himself as a man affected with the dreadful disease of leprosy, and he prays that God would sprinkle him with hyssop as a leper would be sprinkled. In using this figurative language he expresses his ardent desire to obtain forgiveness and cleansing by the application of the blood of Christ, and that God would show to the people that he had pardoned his sin, restored him to favor and purified his soul. (Calvin Commentary, p. 294)

This is the means by which we too are cleansed. As we come to the table of the Lord today, let us repent of any and all sin that would separate us from the communion and fellowship of the Lord.

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