

STUDY ON SIN Psalm 51

Every believer should have a contrite heart over their sin. I did this study because I felt I was taking sin to lightly and needed to refresh my mind on its offensiveness to God. Maybe we take sin to lightly because we live in an age of grace, but that should not be so. Or we forget that we have sinned against God. We need to have the right kind of mind toward God regarding sin. Even when we do confess our sin to God we make a broad confession because it is easier and less convicting than to confess a specific sin. Rather than say, "I lied," or "I lost my temper," or "I spoke ill of another believer," we simply lump it all together. We can also say we have sinned, but not be genuinely broken over it. In this Psalm David expresses genuine sorrow and brokenness over his sin.

David uses different words to describe sin throughout this Psalm. Transgressions (vs.1), iniquity and sin (vs.2), transgressions (vs.3), evil (vs.4), iniquity and sin (vs.5), sins and iniquities (vs.9), and bloodguiltiness (vs.14). David freely confessed his sin and wanted to be cleansed from it. Wash me, cleanse me, purge me, wash me, blot out, and a clean heart all reveal his desire to be cleansed. Whatever comes into our lives and breaks our fellowship with God should be cried and wept over, and we should desire to be cleansed.

David also knew that he had sinned against God. When the prophet Nathan came to David concerning his sin, David said, ". . . **I have sinned against the LORD** . . ." (2 Samuel 12:13). When Potiphar's wife tried to entice Joseph he answered her, ". . . how then can I do this great wickedness, **and sin against God?**" (Genesis 39:9).

In Psalm 32 David identifies transgression, sin, and iniquity. To define each one helps give us a better understanding of sin. (1) Transgression is rebellion against law. This is said to be forgiven, i.e. its punishment is unbound from off the transgressor for to forgive is to unbind. (2) Sin is offence, i.e. moral failure. This is covered by an atoning blood sacrifice. (3) Iniquity is corruption in the nature, i.e. wickedness. This is not imputed, but righteousness is, Christ's righteousness.

Mankind in general believes that sin is some outward thing which he does, i.e. drunkenness, imorality, smoking, etc., but never thinks that sin is from within his heart. In Mark 7, the Lord Jesus Christ plainly tells the Pharisees, ". . . That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed . . . All these evil things come from within, and defile the man " (Mark 7:20,21,23). We know that man is totally depraved, but still no man is ever as bad as he could be, for there are depths beyond what we see today, and what we see today is bad, but there are depths untold within the sinner. We are sinners saved by grace and we need to know it like God knows it.

We have many definitive statements as to what sin is in the Scripture. Some are written in plain language, and some are implied. The context is also important in defining the sin mentioned.

Sin defined in Scripture.

(1) Disobedience (Genesis 2:17; 3:1-7).

God gave Adam a command that he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But because of unbelief he committed the sin of disobedience. We find this recorded, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; . . . For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, . . ." (Romans 5:12,19). The same sin is seen in the life of king Saul when he disobeyed the command of the LORD and Samuel came unto him. ". . . Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice . . . for I

have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, . . ." (1 Samuel 15:22,24). We also get this knowledge of sin here. "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23). Witchcraft was one of the abominations of the nations (Deut.18:9-12). It is also mentioned in works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). Stubbornness is likened to the sin of idolatry which is condemned in the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). Samuel also said it was sin in ceasing to pray for the people (1 Samuel 12:23).

(2) Presumptuous sins, errors, secret faults (Psalm 19:12,13).

In this Psalm we have to see the context to determine the interpretation. David has just finished speaking of the Word of God. Therefore this must have something to do with the them. I believe he is saying who can find errors in the Scriptures? and of course no one can. We are to rather search for hidden faults in ourself, and pray to be guarded from the influence of those who presumptuously claim to find such errors in the Word of God. Thus we will be saved from the great transgression of stepping outside of the Word of God.

Application to ourselves. The errors and secret faults may be a reference to the sins of ignorance (Leviticus 4:2,22,27). They may also refer to those which are known only to God and ourself. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment: and some men they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24). They might also refer to the fact that our sins are so many we cannot understand the number of them, and that we have forgotten them. "For in many things we offend all . . ." (James 3:2).

Presumptuous sins were those which those committed against knowledge, and done deliberately, i.e. premeditated. He prays that they might be prevented. They are done against the checks of the conscience and the Spirit of God. "But if a man come presumptuously (premeditates it) upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile (craftiness); thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die" (Exodus 21:14; Deut.1:43). Such was David's sin with Bathsheba, and in the murder of Uriah. "Let them not have dominion over me." If at any time I be tempted to such sins keep me from them. Although God was merciful to David and forgave Him, under the law there was no forgiveness for the presumptuous sin (Numbers 15:30-31; Deut.17:12,13).

(3) An high look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked (Proverbs 21:4).

An high look is pride and we are to humble ourselves before God. Pride was the downfall of Satan, and is of all men. A proud heart is the fulness of pride. It is thinking more highly of ourself than we ought. Pride is the sin, the ambition, and the business of wicked men, and so it is called the plowing of the wicked. Their plotting, their pleasure, and their business is nothing but sin. This should not be part of the Christian life, and we see this when we connect this verse with verse three. Upright moral conduct is more acceptable to God than great donations to religion and charities, but haughtiness, pride, and prosperity are more acceptable to the worlding than a crucified Saviour.

(4) The thought of foolishness (Proverbs 24:9).

Foolishness is put for folly, lack of understanding, or lack of wisdom and good judgment. The very inward thought of evil, not the acting out of it, is sin in God's sight. "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Foolishness is the devising of evil and is made light of by those who devise it. It is bad to do evil, but worse to devise it, for that has in it the poison of the serpent. Foolish thoughts are sinful thoughts. ". . . How long shall thy vain (foolish or wicked) thoughts lodge within thee?" (Jeremiah 4:14). As believers we must keep our hearts with all diligence. "Keep thy heart

with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

(5) Unbelief (John 16:9; Hebrews 12:1).

Concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit the Lord stated, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, . . . Of sin, because they believe not on me" (John 16:8,9). Paul exhorts, ". . . and the sin which doth so easily beset us, . . ." (Hebrews 12:1). Unbelief entangles the feet and so hinders the runner. Unbelief is the cause of all the sin in a believer because we don't believe what God has said in His Word. If we believed it as we should we would not do the things we do. When looking at Christ nothing is easier than to lay aside a weight or the besetting sin, and nothing is harder when not looking at Christ. If our heart is set upon the prize we will readily throw away even a bag of gold, for it is a weight.

After His resurrection the disciples did not believe the report of the women. Then the Lord appeared to them. "Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen" (Mark 16:14). Unbelief is so dreadful because it is in essence calling God a liar.

(6) Whatsoever is not of faith (Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6).

This is one that must be kept in its context for the interpretation. Paul is giving instructions for meats and days. When one puts a difference between foods, and is condemned by his conscience if he eats what he believes to be "unclean," he sins because his action is not based upon faith. Faith is dependence upon God, and every action which displaces in the conscience that dependence is an independent action, and all such independence is sin. He who does a thing which he believes to be unlawful, however lawful the thing be in itself, to him it is sin. He does that which he is not persuaded he may lawfully do. He is not clear in his mind, yet he sees others do it, so he does it, and it is sin to him. Whatever is done without a clear and full persuasion of the lawfulness of it, is sin. What a man doeth doubting, he doeth sinfully. Whatever a man doeth without being persuaded it is pleasing to God, or according to the Word of God, it is sin.

". . . Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). We are in the age of grace and so meats and days are not a part of our economy. However we still have the obligation to be careful of offending other believers, especially when we know they are members of His Body. Our admonition is to build them up with gracious speech, and to edify them in love.

(7) Having respect of persons (James 2:9,10).

James is writing to the Jews of the dispersion, and in anticipation of the coming kingdom. The Jews had problems with the Gentiles who were coming to faith in Christ. In the interpretation of these verses the Holy Spirit condemns a profession of faith in Christ which distinguished between the rich and the poor (1-13), and which was barren of good works (14-26). Rich and poor (vs.2) are viewed as classes and not persons. It does not mean that all poor are Christians, and all rich are not. The supreme law is that of verse 8 (taken from Leviticus 19:18), and to make a distinction between rich and poor violates this law and thus is sin. Such action breaks the whole law, though not the whole of the law, and be a transgressor. To break one link of a chain is to destroy the whole chain. To break this law God would hold them guilty because the law of God condemned it.

Today "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all in all" (Colossians 3:11). The

admonition to us, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, . . ." (Ephesians 5:1,2).

(8) Knowing to do good and not doing it (James 4:17).

James is writing to the Jews of the dispersion. He had reminded them of the royal law of God (2:8). Now he reminds them that self-will and self-pleasure appear as motives against that law to love one's neighbor as one's self. The action is both negative and positive. Not to choose to do what is known to be right to do is sin (negative vs.17), and to determine to give one's self wholly to money-making (vs.13), so as to have no time to do good to others is to sin (positively) against this commandment. Knowledge without practice is presumptuous sin.

This man is guilty of sin if he does not do what he knows is good. Cotton Mather stated, "the ability to do good in any case imposes an obligation to do it." James is no doubt referring to the previous verse, i.e. the forming of plans respecting the future. The particular meaning would be, that the man who knows what sort of views he should take in regard to the future, and how he should form his plans in view of the uncertainty of life, and still does not do it, but goes on recklessly forming his plans boastfully and confident of success, is guilty of sin against God. He does so without God in his mind, and without thought of doing good to others.

By way of application we should know that if we have the means to do so, and can wipe the tear of a mourner, raise up those who are bowed down, if we can instruct someone in the truth, or supply the needs of the needy, and don't so it, it is sin against God.

(9) The transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

To transgress is to go beyond, to go over, and to transgress the law is to go beyond the law of God, i.e. lawlessness. This was written in light of the coming of Christ (vs.2,3), and that hope which purifies. Transgressing the law does not prepare one for future glory. John would excite them to holiness, and deter them from committing sin, because their hope of glory should make them desirous of being like their Saviour. Obedience ought to be the delight of every believer. The price God paid to redeem us should be incentive enough to obey Him because of our love for Him. There were those at this time who believed that all which was necessary to be a Christian was to be orthodox in the faith and that it was not expected they live a holy life. This verse teaches the nature of sin, and an argument against committing it.

(10) Unrighteousness (1 John 5:17).

This is another verse that must be considered in its context. This refers to the inter-Acts period where we see this principle in action. Sickness and death when God is in the camp are punishments for rebellion in doctrine or conduct (1 Corinthians 11:30); and there are sins like that of Ananias and Sapphira, which are unto death. No prayer should be made for them. Christ did not pray for the world (John 17:9), for it sinned unto death, but He did for the Roman soldiers for they knew not what they did.

While there was a sin which could not be forgiven, John adds that there are many more forms and degrees of sin for which they could pray. Everything which does not conform to the holiness of God is sin, but we are not to think that all sin is of the kind that cannot be forgiven. God is righteous, and anything which is not righteous is unrighteous, and therefore is sin. If someone were to break one of the Ten Commandments today would it still be sin? Except for the one concerning the Sabbath (Colossians 2:16). If someone were to break one of the laws of Moses? No, because they were given to Israel.

(11) Being angry (Ephesians 4:26).

We can be angry in a bad sense and it is sin. We are told to put it off (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8) because it is not a part of the new man. We can be angry and not sin, if we are angry in the right manner, and about the right things. Matthew Henry states, "Be angry at nothing but sin." We ought to be righteously angry against all sin, but we are not to be angry in a sinful way. Be ye angry, but don't sin in doing so. The Lord went into temple and overthrew the money-changers (Matthew 21:12,13).

(12) Murmuring and complaining (Philippians 2:14).

These two things break the unity of the Spirit, but Timothy and Epaphroditus by example did not commit them. Let there be no strifes and contentions, but rather follow the exhortation, ". . . but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (2:3). Do everything in a quiet and gentle manner avoiding any strife. We can make the application to our attitudes concerning life. A.W. Pink states that more sins are committed by believers complaining about the weather than any other. We are to be content in whatsoever state we are in. We need to ask God to keep us in His will every moment and then not forget it.

This certainly does not include everything that involves sin, but does reveal some specific sins mentioned in Scripture. What should we do about sin when we know it is in our life? In Psalm 51 we see David's response. He knew what God did not want (vs.16), and he knew what God wanted (vs.17), i.e. a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.

Isaiah gives a plea for national repentance for the nation of Israel (Isaiah 64:1-7). I think we would all agree that America needs to be broken before God and we are heading for real trouble because it does not look like it is going to happen anytime soon. But Isaiah also pleads for individual brokenness (Isaiah 66:1,2), ". . . but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

David also gives us this example. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23,24). There must be an inner desire, a hungering, for God to search out our heart. There are six things in these verses to consider.

A. Search me.

God knows our heart, but this plea is our desire for God to let us know He is searching us. Going down into the deepest recesses and rooting out all that is there which needs to be gotten rid of.

B. Know my heart.

This is wanting God to know it and reveal the true condition of it to us. Have you ever heard anyone say, "If I know my heart?" The truth is that we don't know our own heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, . . ." (Jeremiah 17:9,10).

C. Try me.

It is as if David is saying, "put me in the balances." God standards have never changed, nor has He ever relaxed them. He has never lowered them either. It is still, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). We have been made positionally holy in Christ (Colossians 1:22), but this is a plea for experiential holiness. Most believers would not likely attain to much if the standard were lowered. We have a tendency to aim lower than we should. God knows that we may not reach His standard, but He looks on the heart to

see if we want to attain it. Our striving to attain His standard is what pleases Him.

D. Know my thoughts.

David would have God probe his mind and show him his thoughts. Our minds run in all different channels and think of all kinds of things, good and bad, but we are to fill our minds with the Word of God (Colossians 3:16). We are to think on these things (Philippians 4:8). Our thoughts come from within and we must guard our minds at all times. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, . . ." (1 Peter 1:13). "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). I think that if our thoughts were outwardly known most of us would be ashamed of them.

E. See me.

"Thou God seest me." God sees the wickedness in us, but David is asking for God to reveal to him what he really is. We all know something of the inner corruptions of our old nature, but asking God to reveal what we really are will cause us to flee to Him, to rest in Him our righteousness. While the popular teaching is to get saved and get happy, the true believer knows that he has never been more miserable since he was saved. We have our sin forgiven, yet we still find it in our life, and are in a spiritual warfare all our days on this earth.

F. Lead me.

The Holy Spirit is always leading us, and without His leadership we would not make very much progression in our Christian life. But David is asking God to lead him, and it is when we want God to lead us that we will walk pleasing to Him. Led me in the way everlasting, i.e. the way which leads to perfect rest in Christ, and a life of holiness preparing us for glory. "O to be saved from myself, dear Lord, O to be lost in thee," is a chorus we used to sing, and when it becomes a reality in us we have joy and peace. If we have no joy, we have no strength, ". . . for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

An old hymn writer who lived from 375-436 A.D. wrote the following words which summarize these thoughts of David. It goes like this:

"Lord Jesus think on me and purge away my sin,
From earth borne passions set me free and make me pure within.
Lord Jesus think on me with care and woe oppressed,
Let me thy loving servant be and taste thy promised rest.
Lord Jesus think on me, and don't let me go astray,
Through darkness and perplexity point thou the heavenly way.
Lord Jesus think on me, and when the flood is past,
I may the eternal brightness see and share thy joy at last."