

PSALM FIFTY-ONE (Continued)

In our previous study of Psalm 51 we learned that sin is regarded as a blotted record, which must be expunged; as a polluted robe, which must be washed; and as a fatal disease, from which we must be cleansed. Wrong-doing is transgression, violation of law; iniquity is that which is not straight; and sin is a missing of the mark. Though evil-doing is an injury inflicted on others, it is essentially sin against God.

II. A Prayer For Purity. Psalm 51:5-11.

1. David prayed that God would purge him.

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." He was thoroughly convinced that an inherent depravity of nature was the evil root from which all sin sprang. So, he confessed his sinful nature, as well as his sinful deeds by saying, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." That is why he prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

2. David prayed that God would purify him.

He wanted his sin-polluted and sin-stained nature cleansed. He prayed, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow ... Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." David had an intense desire to be purified. However, he realized that cleansing had to come from other hands than his own. This prayer is a confession of his inability to cleanse himself. But, he believed that the cleansing would be complete. He wanted to be entirely cleansed and purified.

He wanted his cleansing from sin to be so thorough that that there would not be any visible marks of its occupation of his heart. He wanted to be as white as snow. That is what the cleansing process of the cross does. It does such a thorough work that nothing is left undone. The blood of Christ cleanses a person all over and does it for all time.

"Create for me." This is an appeal for a divine work of grace at the center of one's life. The word "heart" is used to represent the centrality of one's whole being: mind, emotions and will. It is the well-spring from which flow thoughts, motives and the will to do. "Clean" means unalloyed, or that which is acceptable to God. David greatly desired a clean heart. He wanted all the dirt swept out of it.

A clean heart is an inward work of grace, or what God does for and in a person. "Clean" means having a heart in which there is not any known unforgiven and uncleansed sin. In a clean heart there is the consciousness that there is not anything between the soul and the Saviour.

Note David's prayer for rightness of spirit also. Clean hearts and right spirits are twin necessities. The absence of a right spirit is the dead fly in the ointment of many a renewed life. It is possible for one to have a desire for a clean heart, and yet possess and maintain a wrong spirit in the daily life. Clean hearts are powerless to attract souls to Christ unless they are wedded to right spirits, which are the proper medium of expression.

3. David prayed that God would protect him.

"Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." This is an earnest entreaty for preservation from sin. "Cast me not away" from Thy protecting presence into danger, loving presence into wrath, joyous presence into distress, gracious presence into despair.

III. A Prayer For Power. Psalm 51:12-19.

1. David prayed for the restoration of joy.

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." A careful study of this penitential Psalm will reveal the past experience of its author. In it two types of experience are wonderfully blended -- that of a conscience-stricken transgressor, and that of a believer rejoicing in divine mercy. Nothing can be more mournful than David's profound self-abasement and piercing cry for pardon. Nothing can be more calm, hopeful and restful than his trust in God's forgiving and restoring grace. He is like a person emerging from a gloomy cavern, where no ray of light shone, who does not yet stand in the sunlight, but sees it shining at the mouth of the cave, and knows that a few more steps will bring him into full sunshine. He asks for full restoration to the happy consciousness of God's favor. He had done a great wrong. He was full of shame, regret and remorse. He prayed, "Cause to return unto me the joy of thy salvation."

In his prayer to God David said, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." This request implies that three things are true:

(1) There is joy in salvation.

Joy is the inevitable result of an experience of salvation. One cannot become a child of God without being made happy.

(2) The joy of salvation may be lost.

David had known the joy which arises from being saved, but in his prayer he acknowledges that he had lost that joy. He had not lost his salvation, and never said anything about losing it. He was simply praying for that which had gone out of his heart, which was joy. Through his sins David had lost his joy, and he was longing for its restoration. He was asking God to give him back the joy which had been his when he was conscious of the divine favor.

Many others have lost the joy of their salvation. This is not an uncommon experience. The loss of this joy may be caused by:

a. The neglect of known duties.

- (a) Prayer.
- (b) Bible study.
- (c) Public worship.

If you do not enjoy prayer, Bible study, public worship, listening to sermons and fellowship with God's people as you did in days gone by, most likely it is due simply to your neglect of known Christian duties.

b. Carelessness.

Perhaps you have carelessly failed to watch the inmost desires of your heart which God sees and your outward actions which both God and men see.

c. Indolence.

A lazy Christian is the most easily tempted and the most miserable. Working for the Lord, out of a heart of love for Him, imparts both joy and strength. The most industrious Christians are the most joyful ones.

d. Worldliness.

Just in proportion as one gives more of his time, attention and energy to secular interests, he will give less and less to the service of the Lord.

e. Indulgence in sin.

Sin grieves God and causes Him to hid His face. Sin also blinds our eyes to the promises and the power of God. Sin makes the conscience of the Christian smart and throb. It was through indulgence in sin that David forfeited his joy. His communion with God had been interrupted by the sins which he had committed. Joy is impossible when spiritual communion is interrupted. God will not give joy to anybody who lives in sin. To do so would be to put a premium on disobedience.

God wants His children to be happy. Christ made this plain when He said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). A joyful and radiant Christian attracts others toward Christ. There cannot be any usefulness in the Christian life unless there is joy in the heart. When joy is lost influence over others goes with it.

(3) The joy of salvation may be restored.

a. This restoration of joy is desirable.

David's earnest prayer, which was recorded in Psalm 51, revealed a real yearning for the restoration of a lost joy. Conscious of his great loss, for which he was altogether responsible, David longed for peace of conscience and the sense of the divine favor. He had lost that which the world could not give, and for which it could not compensate. Of this you may be sure, anyone who has once possessed this joy, who has truly experienced its sweetness and power, will never be content and happy to live without it. Because this joy is so desirable, there will always be a longing in the heart for its restoration.

b. This restoration of joy is possible.

The pleasures of sin had cost David the joy of salvation. He wanted to have his former joy restored, and sincerely believed that such a restoration was possible. Therefore, he sought the restoration of joy by praying unto the heavenly Father, against Whom he had sinned so grievously, "Cause to return unto me the joy of thy salvation." David was not praying for an impossibility. He firmly believed in God's willingness to forgive and His power to restore. Joy may be restored to the heart of a child of God when the cause of the loss is removed. Joy is found in obedience to God, but never in rebellion against Him. It is found in fellowship with Him, but never in discord. If you will get within the circle of God's will for your life, you will enjoy peace and the divine favor.

2. David prayed that he might be consistent.

"And uphold me with thy free spirit." It was his sincere desire to maintain a worthy character in order that he might have an effective testimony. A joyful salvation has power to attract. Does your face recommend Christ's salvation? Would anybody looking at you or listening to you suspect that you are a child of God? Why not be a radiant Christian? This radiance comes from the joy of the Lord in the heart.

3. David promised to be useful.

"Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." It is interesting to observe his promise.

- (1) To teach others.
- (2) To teach the worst men -- transgressors or rebels against God.
- (3) To teach the worst people the best truths - "thy ways." He was convinced that such teaching would reach sinners, that they would see the evil of their ways, that they would be convinced that mercy was available, that they would be moved to action, and that their conversion would be genuine. David was persuaded that he would be able to reach sinners and influence them in the right direction.