

Psalm 51 Spiritual Renewal: Repentance and Faith

Introduction

Many people want to change themselves: according to one statistic of young people aged between 13-29, about 54% said they are not satisfied with their current selves. About 77% said they felt bored and unmotivated during the week, and 78% said they felt depressed. How about you?

Starting today until Pentecost, under the theme of "Spiritual Renewal," let's take a look at the Bible and see how our lives and communities (churches) are transformed by the gospel. The Bible promises that we will be renewed, continue to grow (mature), and be re-created into the likeness of Christ.

The desire to change oneself is not limited to simply changing negative self-evaluation. Anyone can be renewed from the inside out if they are led by the Word of God to soundly acknowledge their sins, change their minds, repent, and deeply reflect on the gospel, which speaks of God's love and forgiveness. Today, as an introduction to spiritual renewal, let us take up the famous Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance by King David.

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, when you judge. 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. 15 Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. 18 May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

•First, spiritual renewal is a process of rebirth that involves repentance of sin. It begins with the knowledge of God's character, holiness and love.

•Second, let us look at repentance, which involves a deep acceptance of sin, sorrow, and a desire to abandon such things. Here, we must question our motive for “why we repent”.

•And third, let's take a look at how joy overflows from trusting in God and depending on him more, and how a Christ-like character is manifested in us. We will be encouraged in our process of knowing God, knowing ourselves, and being renewed through the gospel.

•Knowing God's Holiness and Love

Psalm 51 is a psalm of repentance by David, but here, two qualities about God are highlighted: His holiness and grace, or God's righteousness and love. We can say that the entire psalm is composed of God's holiness and love. Let's take a look at verses 1-2.

51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

The first two verses contain David's sense of despair over his sin and an expectation of God's mercy and grace. David is reminded of his sin and repents in understanding God's holiness. At the same time, he is asking for God's great love and grace in granting him forgiveness.

Various phrases that describe sin appear in Psalm 51. It is also referred to as disobedience, iniquity, sin, wickedness, and bloodshed (verse 14). Any sin calls for God's judgment, and God's conviction, because God is righteous and clean. As it says in verse 4, "so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge."

What is sin anyway? Sin is turning away from or disregarding God, even though we are in the world He created. It is our refusal to listen to God and live by His standards, our rebellion against Him, and our failure to do what He asks of us, thereby causing death and the collapse of the world.

When you think about it from this perspective, you realize it's akin to this: You like water and fish, so you want to live in the water like a fish without an oxygen tank. You would rather live according to your own ideas, way of life, and preferences than according to the order of this world. But that would be going against the general principle that humans cannot live in water in the first place. And if they did, they would have to die in a matter of minutes.

If we want to be transformed and experience spiritual renewal, we must first encounter the holy God. We must listen to the law that God speaks to us through the Bible and examine ourselves in light of His Word. We need to examine ourselves through the Word, because our hearts are so insensitive that we don't even recognize sin as sin. Subconsciously, we tend to think we are righteous, which is just our self-preservation at work, trying to protect ourselves.

This psalm is based on the story of David's own repentance. The title reads, "For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.." In 2 Samuel 11-12, we see that David had an affair with Bathsheba, and when she became pregnant with his child, he sent her husband Uriah to the front lines of the war to have him killed. David feared that his sin would become known, so he plotted to cover it up. Then God sent the prophet Nathan.

2 Samuel 12:1-6

1 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. 4 "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." 5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Just as David admitted his sin and repented after being accused by Nathan, we too must hear the voice of a holy God through the Bible. David made excuses in his mind that adultery was a small sin that anyone would commit, and that it was natural for a soldier to die in war. In the same way, we underestimate our own sins and make excuses that everyone does it and do not admit our sins. This is why we must encounter the holy God, listen to His Word, and apply it to our own lives.

But at the same time, we cannot truly repent unless we are filled with God's love. How can one come before a God of holy wrath and judgment unless he knows that he is guaranteed God's forgiveness and that he is loved? David is asking for God's mercy, grace, forgiveness, and love because he knows the Holy God. Likewise, the more we know God, the more we repent and ask for spiritual renewal. Let's take a look at Exodus 34:6-7.

Exodus 34:6-7

6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

•Genuine Repentance

But in a way, aren't we often reluctant to admit our sins and repent? Even though the Bible teaches us many times about the necessity of repentance, it is difficult for us to do so. Perhaps it's because it makes us feel denied or that we are useless beings.

But repentance is not mere regret. Theologically, repentance means to be remade, to be regenerated. It's actually very positive, as it means acknowledging sin, grieving for it, turning away from sin and turning to God, and reorienting one's life to receive God's spiritual renewal.

Therefore, repentance is not only the "first step" of faith in believing God and accepting Christ as your Savior. It is also a necessity throughout your life. You need to repent and believe again every day. Let's take a look at verses 3-5.

3. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Here, David is acknowledging and confessing sin in itself. There are two important elements for true repentance: in verse 4 he says, "Against you, you only, have I sinned." David's focus is on God, acknowledging that he has sinned against God. We usually think that apologies should be made to the person to whom we committed sin. But David is saying that he has sinned against God. The person that he owes the most apology to is Uriah, but he is already dead.

Our repentance often ends up half-hearted, because we look at others' faces and fear what people around us might say. We end up repenting superficially for the sake of our own reputation, to maintain our pride, or to normalize our relationships. But like David, we need to have the depth to admit our sins and repent, not to others or to those around us, but to God.

This leads us to another important point. What is the motive for our repentance? Why do we repent? David confesses in verse 3, "I know my transgressions," and "My sin is always before me." He repents because sin is sin. He feels sorrow for his sins and is humbled to admit that he has sinned against God. He even confesses that he is innately sinful by nature.

Perhaps we tend to repent out of fear of the consequences of sin, rather than because of the sin itself. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and when he found out that she was pregnant, he murdered Uriah to cover it up. Surely, he must have realized that he had sinned when he found out Bathsheba was pregnant.

But he did not repent then. He did not fear sin itself, but the consequences of sin. He feared that the consequences of his sin would be brought to light, that people would condemn him, and that he would be disgraced as a king. So David killed Uriah, committing more sins, without truly repenting of his sins.

What I want to draw your attention to here, brothers and sisters, is the recognition of sin itself, sorrow for it, and repentance toward God. What is our motive for repentance? True repentance requires real sorrow for sin and understanding the grief and sacrifice it has caused God. False repentance is grieving over the consequences of sin, such as the cost and inconveniences of sin.

•Spiritual Rebirth: Pure heart, New Spirit

Here is a summary of the six steps to true repentance.

1. We need to see our sins (verse 3). "My sins are always before me" No one can truly repent without the Holy Spirit illuminating us. When our hearts are illuminated by the Holy Spirit, we begin to acknowledge our sins realistically. This is why David needed the words of the prophet.
2. We must feel sorrow for sin. (verse 4) "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." True repentance means feeling real sorrow for having grieved God making Him a sacrifice for our sins. False repentance is grieving for the consequences of sin and for having grieved and sacrificed oneself. Self-pity may seem like repentance, but it is not.
3. We must take responsibility. (Verse 4) "so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge." True repentance is not making excuses, not shifting blame, but rather taking full responsibility, and accepting any consequences without complaint. This is a proper "confession of sin".
4. We must be humble (verse 5) "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." In true repentance, our entire attitude toward ourselves changes. We become more dependent on God and others. The myth of complacency is shattered.
5. We must feel hatred toward sin (verse 4) "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." If there is real sorrow for sin (not just its consequences), then you will hate the sin itself. It is to work the heart to hate sin more than any punishment.
6. We must be transformed (verse 12) "grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Along with the other five points we looked at so far, you will be able to forsake sin. The power of sin will weaken and you can at least move on from it.

•What kind of change (spiritual renewal) can we expect when we repent in this way?

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

God will never abandon you when you humble yourself and repent with a "contrite spirit. Rather, He remakes us so that we can rejoice in our relationship with God and leads us to a clean life of walking with Him with a firm heart. But this is only possible through God.

In Verse 10, the Hebrew word for "build" a good heart reminds us that God created the whole world in the power of His Word in Genesis 1. In other words, we who have been affected by sin cannot, without God's power and help, transform our character so that we can walk with Him in the knowledge of His holiness and love.

But let us all be thankful. David said in verse 13, "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you." For Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, has come.

Jesus rose from the dead from the cross, clearly showing us God's holiness and love. God has already done all things for us sinful people to be able to return to Him. Therefore, put your faith to work when you repent of your sins. Let us ponder how Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection will work in you.