

Completely Clean

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me,¹ O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem;¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Psalm 51 is the best known of the penitential psalms. This doctrinal psalm is one of the richest and most important of all psalms.

In this psalm David confesses the sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. David does not hold back where his sins are concerned. He recognizes that his sin has been most importantly against God (4).

David is deeply regretful over his sins. He pleads over and over again for God to clean him up. In verse 1 he asks for sins to be blotted out. The image is that of a papyrus scroll on which God had recorded David's deeds. The "blotting out" of sins pictures forgiveness. Its like they never happened.

In verse two David asks to be thoroughly washed from his iniquities. The verb "wash" is used more for washing clothes, it too is a figure of speech comparing laundering with forgiveness. Washing clothes usually meant beating the dirt out of them. The prayer is that God would thoroughly clean the sinner.

Verse 7 speaks of being purged with hyssop. In the NIV it means "Un-sin me." (CSB) the same verse speaks of "whiter than snow." When God forgives, the sin is taken away so that not a vestige of it is left. He forgives entirely and leaves not a speck of uncleanness on the pardoned sinner. This a troubled sinner should remember for his comfort. When old sins rise up in his remembrance he knows they will not condemn him.

In verse 10 David asks for God to "create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The verb "create" is always a work of God; it describes God's creating or renovating to produce something fresh and new. Here it means "to renovate." This is supported by the parallel verb "renew." The prayer is for spiritual renewal, a change of heart attitude or way of thinking. Spirit here embraces the intellect with which we think, and the will with which we choose to do or not do a certain thing. What David here then desires is that his thoughts may again be directed towards the will of God.

All of what David asks for are available to us as Christians. We can not only request but also know that He will provide. That is the ultimate comfort for our us in our daily lives.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, create me new again, giving joy for sadness. Have mercy on me, O God, and cleanse me from my sin. Amen. (TLSB)