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Lessons from Psalm 51

By Dr. David DeWitt

The 51st Psalm is one of the most-read psalms of all literature. It is filled with statements which reveal a great deal of our theology. For example:

- **Verses 1-3** are a call for the grace of God, even though God never offered grace to the individual in the Old Testament. Grace is unmerited favor. Mercy is unmerited compassion. Grace is getting favor we don't deserve. Mercy is not getting punishment we do deserve. David asks for both, even though they are beyond the scope of the Mosaic Law. *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me* (v. 3). David did not try to explain his sin. An explanation is not a confession.
- **Verse 4** declares that all sin is only committed against God. In David's case, it was not against Bathsheba or Uriah. David sees sin as only against God because God is the definition of righteousness. So here we come to grips with the definition of sin: not law breaking, not selfishness, not acts against humanity, but offending the character of God.
- **Verse 5** teaches original sin. We are sinners from conception. It also shows that we are who we are, that is, we come into existence as eternal beings. Our existence starts from the time of our conception. Not that David's birth was illegitimate but that he was a sinner from conception. **Also notice that he existed as David from the time of conception.** That does not mean every conception is a human being. Many fertilized eggs are discarded by the woman's body on a regular basis. But once a person is born, then we can be sure that person existed as a human being from conception.
- **Verse 6** says that what God desires for us is that we have inner truth, that we think the truth, not just tell the truth, and what is actually true, not just what we think is true. For example, I may tell something false, which is not a lie because I think it is true. But this verse is about thinking what is actually objectively true, and that leads to wisdom.
- **Verses 7** explains that forgiveness and restoration (*a clean heart*) come only from God. Of course, it took the blood of Christ, not hyssop, but David didn't know that, and his point is God could make him clean any way He chooses. Hyssop was used in cleansing the house of a leper (Leviticus 14:49) and in purification from defilement by death (Numbers 19:18-19).
- **Verses 8-9** do not say that when we are forgiven, God can no longer remember our sins. This is not a hole in the omniscience of God, as if He develops amnesia in this area. It means He does not look on them, and blots them out with the blood of Christ.
- **Verse 10** reveals that it is possible to have a clean heart and a steadfast spirit even after committing adultery and murder.
- **Verse 11** shows that it was possible for David to lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as Saul did. In our church age, believers do not lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but they can lose the filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:19).
- In **verses 12-15**, we learn that we cannot off-set our known, and therefore premeditated, sins with some religious practice, even one designed by God to atone for sin. If you know something is wrong, and you do it anyway, that's premeditated sin. And there is no way out of it.
- **Verses 16-19** say there was no sacrifice for David's sin because the law called for the death penalty. If we sin and beg God for forgiveness through the blood of Christ, His blood washes away our sin. But if we presume upon the grace of God, thinking we can sin because God will forgive us, then we should question our relationship with God and the assurance of our salvation. Remember, we sin because we think we can get away with it.