

# How Is It Between You and the Lord?

Sermon

*Based on Psalm 51*

What we learn here is that worship is for our benefit and not God's. Rituals and repetitive utterance would not constitute true worship. The prerequisite for true worship is a clean heart. Today we will look at Psalm 51 of David from the perspective of true worship with a penitent heart, cleansed of all guilt within us.

## **Guilt:**

It seems that guilt is one of the main reasons why so many people find true and authentic worship of our Lord difficult. We are often guilty about many things, being sinful. At times we feel guilty of things we do not need to feel guilty about. All the same, we neglect to deal with the burden of guilt effectively to prepare our hearts for true and intense worship of our Lord.

Psalm 51, read to us today, is the traditional Psalm used when people wish to express their penitence.

## **The Background:**

Let us take a quick look at the background which eventually resulted in David expressing his grief, penitence, and urge to worship the Lord in this Psalm. I am aware that most of us present here know the story quite well.

David was married to the daughter of the previous king but, over the years, their relationship seemed to diminish. His wife laughed at him and his uninhibited devotion to God when he danced before the ark on its return to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:16, 20-23). She seems to disappear from the biblical narrative quite quickly after this. Later on, David becomes involved with the wife of one of his soldiers. This woman, Bathsheba, was beautiful, and David saw her taking her bath one day (2 Samuel 11:2) and became instantly, and fatally, attracted to her.

Their adulterous affair led to her becoming pregnant. Her husband, Uriah, was away fighting wars, and her situation was going to prove embarrassing. David, therefore, summoned her husband back on the pretext of wanting a report on the progress of the war, and then sent him to his house to enjoy some rest. However, Uriah, thinking it dishonourable to return to his house while his comrades were still fighting, refused to do so — thus defeating David's deceptive plan to pass the responsibility for Bathsheba's condition onto him.

## **David's Many Sins:**

Adultery, compounded by deception to cover up his betrayal of his loyal soldier, resulted in David sinking deeper and deeper into sin. He was progressively moving away from God, as it would happen to an unrepentant person.

David then sent orders for Uriah to be stationed at the front of the war so that he would be killed. By then he was far gone in his sinful ways and had no scruples in doing something to get his loyal soldier killed. Sure enough, the battle did not go well, and Uriah was killed. After his death, Bathsheba became David's wife but, the Bible tells us, "the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Samuel 11:27), and the child died in its infancy.

David had committed many sins — betrayal, adultery, deception, wilfully sending a person to his death, and refusal to acknowledge his guilt.

## **David's Relationship with God:**

David knew he had sinned, but the Bible does not tell us how he was with God between sinning and repenting. It is quite possible that he got on with the rest of his life and avoided thinking about God. He probably stayed away from worship in the Temple, as his heart was heavy with the feeling of guilt. One cannot have both sin and God together in the heart. When one is tormented by the thoughts of sin, it is a difficult proposition to worship God sincerely. It is all the more so if one has no intention of turning away from sinful ways.

## **Living in Denial:**

It is not easy to do serious introspection, nor is it a light commitment to make to be truly penitent. Taking a serious personal inventory of our inner selves is something most of us would rather avoid. We continue to live in denial.

A story often told among those who work within Britain's penal system describes the startlingly ridiculous ways by

which criminals attempt to sneak out from under their crimes. One psychologist recounted a time when a man who had just been sentenced to life in prison for stabbing his wife to death emerged from the courtroom red-faced with rage. “That wasn’t justice, it was a kangaroo court,” he fumed. “They didn’t even call for any medical evidence!” “Oh,” the psychologist asked, “what kind of evidence should they have looked at?” “What she died of,” the man snapped. “And what did she die of?” “Excessive bleeding” was his answer. “How did she get the haemorrhage?” the psychologist asked. “They pulled the knife out,” was the murderer’s reply. You see what I mean. We are not prepared to come to terms with our mistakes.

Indeed, there are significant barriers to the process of self-introspection and penitence.

- We are too busy with our inner lives.
- We are quick to justify ourselves and slow to excuse others.
- We are sometimes fearful of what we will see.

### **The Process:**

It will usually take some kind of outer voice or an event to turn us to the inward journey. It can be the words of a friend who cares, or who dares to tell us to take a look at ourselves.

For David, the voice behind Psalm 51 was Nathan the prophet. Like many of us, David was living in denial of his grievous sins. In his greed and lust, David broke major commandments through lies, betrayal, adultery, and murderous conspiracy.

Eventually, prophet Nathan must have asked David the critical question, “How is it between you and the Lord?” — or words to the effect. For Nathan, it may not have been an easy task to perform — royal folks don’t often respond ‘reasonably’ to being told they are sinners! Remember what happened to John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-28)!

It is not an easy thing, even for us, ordinary people, to introspect on our sins. How often do we ask God in prayer, “How is it between You and me, Lord?” We tend to take God for granted.

David does not confront the seriousness nor the reality of what he has done until Nathan courageously comes to him and holds a mirror up to the king’s face. Ingeniously, Nathan leads his thinking into realisation with a parable. David was made to look at the situation as though someone else had committed the wrong.

A rich man steals a lamb from a poor man to feed a guest. The lamb had been like a member of the poor family. The rich man, who could have had anything he wanted, any lamb in the land, nevertheless devastated the poor man by stealing his lamb. David was furious and angrily blurted out, “As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity” (2 Samuel 12:5-6).

Having got him to think straight, Nathan delivers the crushing truth: “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:7).

### **True Repentance:**

David realises what it means to come into the presence of the Lord. All pretences must go, and one must come clean before the Lord. He cannot hide anything from God. David, being convinced of his sin, poured out his heart to God in prayer for mercy and grace. Where should backsliding children return, but to the Lord their God, who alone can heal them? He drew up, by introspection, an account of the workings of his heart toward God. Those that truly repent of their sins will not be ashamed to own up to their repentance. David had not only committed serious sins but suffered much in the cause of God; yet he flees to God’s infinite mercy and depends upon that alone for pardon and peace.

The blood of Christ, sprinkled upon our conscience, blots out our transgressions, and, having reconciled us to God, reconciles us to ourselves. The believer longs to have the whole debt of his or her sins blotted out, and every stain cleansed; a thorough cleansing is what they look for, but a hypocrite always has some secret reserve and would have some favourite lust spared. If we are not thoroughly cleansed, our mind and heart will not be ready to become our Lord’s abode.

David had such a deep sense of his sin that he was continually thinking of it, with sorrow and shame. He understood that his sins were against God, whose truth we deny by wilful sin; with Him, we deal deceitfully. He is encouraged, in his repentance, to hope that God would graciously accept him. Where there is truth, God will give wisdom.

We may fool ourselves and others by trying to ignore sin, or by explaining it away as being victims of circumstances, or by rationalising the act, but when we come into the presence of the Lord, there is no escape. God desires truth in the innermost parts. He wants us to come clean before Him. If we have done something wrong, it is better to say to the Lord what we have done rather than try to fool ourselves and hope to fool God Himself. Truth is important to God and the followers of Jesus. Remember what our Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Followers

of Christ cannot afford to lead a life of deceit.

We then see that eventually, David comes clean before God.

### **Forgiveness of God:**

However, it is important to realise that even though David is forgiven — as any of us can be forgiven of any sin if we honestly put away the sin and turn to God — David's life was never to be the same. Besides the death of his child, David endured the pain and anguish of family life that has forever been derailed by his actions.

### **Significant Clues for Us:**

Although King David's culture and time are so far removed from us, there are significant and important clues about forgiveness of sin and restoration of our relationship with God in these verses.

- God alone can cleanse us from sin and give us spiritual healing and recovery. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1).
- We need to come face to face with our sin and our separation from God. "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3).
- No matter who we have hurt or harmed, or what we have done, all sin is finally sin against God. David had sinned against his people, Uriah, and Bathsheba — but it was, finally, sin against God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight..." (Psalm 51:4).
- David seems to be acknowledging the sinful nature of man. He is thunderstruck at the discovery of his inbred sin and proceeds to set it forth. This was not intended to justify himself but is rather meant to complete his confession. It is as if he said, not only have I sinned this once, but I am in my very nature a sinner. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).
- Forgiveness of sin brings about new life, new birth, or new creation. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Let us dwell on this verse for a while:

Create in me a pure heart — the word *bara* used here is the same word used when God created the world (Genesis 1:1; Strong's Concordance, H1254). In other words, the recreation of the heart is a creative act of God, according to His word. He said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3) — the word can refer to a sustained process as well as an instantaneous act.

Heart and Spirit — the heart is the seat of the emotions, the place of thoughts. By beseeching God to "renew a right spirit" within him, David wants healing in the inward parts. He is not satisfied with cosmetic changes; he wants a heart transplant. Now he pleads with God that he should not be cast away from His presence, nor have His Holy Spirit taken away from him. David was constantly in the presence of God, for he had been given the Holy Spirit. In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit was a visiting spirit and not a resident one, as He is after Pentecost. David, however, had experienced the Spirit, and therefore did not want God to take the Holy Spirit away from him.

We are a post-Pentecost generation, and if we keep our inner beings free from guilt and fill them with God the Holy Spirit, He will reside in us for ever.

- We must also understand, without doubting, that there is no authentic joy in our living until we are reconciled to God. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Psalm 51:12).

David now pleads for the joy of salvation to be restored to him. It is as if a person who has fallen into sin, and has backslidden, now wants to be restored to the faith.

- Grant me a willing spirit to sustain me, David pleaded. When we have come to terms with our inner condition, and have received healing and forgiveness from God, there are two responses by which we may measure the depth of our restoration:

1. We share the good news of forgiveness of sin; and
2. We give witness to the love of God with our praise. "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm 51:13). "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise" (Psalm 51:15).

May God give each one of us the spiritual courage to look within ourselves, confront our many sins, and experience the joy of reconciliation freely offered by our Lord Jesus Christ. In this way, we will leave behind our guilt and worship our Lord in truth and peace.

Amen.