

Getting God Right

Psalm 51:1 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

Have mercy on me, 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

Getting God Right

LAST TIME WE ASKED THE QUESTION, “**What does the LORD require of you?**” We saw that Psalm 50 answers it in a long-form, arriving at the same conclusion that Moses and the prophets do, keeping God’s law with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, but taking it a step farther into the priestly sacrifices that provided a way for those who break the requirements to be made right with God. We then saw that Psalm 51 takes Psalm 50 in reverse order, showing exactly how we are to go about obeying it. This comes to us through the experiences of king David.

After David is confronted by Nathan, God opens his heart so that he does the things Psalm 50 tells him to do, things he was not going to do on his own because he was guilty of the very things the Psalm said: **hating discipline, keeping company with adulterers, forgetting God**, and the like. God swore that he would “**tear you apart,**” you who are like this unless you turn to him in repentance. Yet, for precisely these very reasons, David was not going to do anything. He didn’t want to be torn apart. But then God came to him in an act of free grace through the preached word from the mouth of the prophet to change his heart and bring him to repentance (**Psalm 51:1** Superscription). This is all people unless God grants them grace, and this causes us to do the very opposite thing as what God requires of us ... and what is good for us.

There are various errors that we can all get ourselves into here, even as believers as it regards our sins. One is to **do what David did**. Sin and hide it, have it eat you alive but do nothing about it, disobeying the Word in Psalm 50 while doing it.

Another is try to **listen these psalms, but in our own foolishness misunderstand and twist** the nature of the things that are found in them so that we become confused and

misguided, getting ourselves into very different kinds of troubles, even as we say to ourselves that we are doing the right thing. In his introduction to Psalm 51, **Martin Luther** said many don't understand these things even though they recite the Psalm ten times a day in the monastery. "These words are like a dream to them, which leaves some traces in the mind but itself has utterly disappeared from the mind and the eyes."¹ Beloved, this is not what you want to have happen to you. You want the Spirit of God to use the Word to work on your heart all of the graces to be found here.

A third error is **to not understand the God of Psalm 51**. This one is perhaps the most devastating, because you can't get the other two right if this is wrong. On one hand, it is interesting that Luther counseled people with this psalm to "hold firmly to the promised mercy of God, warning that the God we believe in is the God we get: '*[I]f you believe that God is wrathful, you will certainly have Him wrathful and hostile to you.*'"² On the other, Luther said, "*How can anyone give consolation if he does not understand what grace is?*"³ Psalm 51 is

¹ **Martin Luther**, *Luther's Works, Vol. 12: Selected Psalms I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 12 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 303.

² Cited in **Frederick J. Gaiser**, "The David of Psalm 51: Reading Psalm 51 in Light of Psalm 50," *Word & World* 23:4 (Fall 2003), 393 [382-94].

https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/23-4_David/23-4_Gaiser.pdf.

³ Luther, 304.

all about grace! Gaiser summarizes the point saying, “Getting God right is a matter of life and death, so David’s prayer and David’s trust in a God of steadfast love come to us as a gift that can set us free.”⁴ Do we talk about grace enough? Is that even possible?

As we get into the song itself we will see how, “A knowledge of this psalm is necessary and useful in many ways. It contains instruction about the chief parts of our religion, about repentance, sin, grace, and justification, as well as about the worship we ought to render to God.”⁵ Perhaps the best known and most widely used of all the penitential psalms in the Psalter,⁶ this is something we want to get right. For the sake of our souls. For the sake of the glory of God who, as Thomas Watson wrote, “Is more inclined to mercy, than wrath. Mercy is his darling attribute, which he most delights in. ‘Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy’” (Mic 7:18).⁷

⁴ Gaiser, 393.

⁵ Luther, 303.

⁶ The best historical analysis of the use of this psalm is Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 446-83.

⁷ Thomas Watson, “The Mercy of God,”

<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/mercyofgod.html>

Repentance

The Psalm is divided into **three stanzas**. The first deals with **repentance (Ps 51:1-9)**, the second with **forgiveness (10-17)**, the third with **prophecy and the church (18-19)**. The first two sections each form chiasms.⁸ Almost every verse of the song is a couplet with two (or three) lines, where the second line either repeats or expands the first. This helps us interpret the song.

What would you say is the first thing you need to have if you are going to repent? An awareness of your sins? A conviction that they are wrong? If we take the Psalm as a model of how we are to think about sin and God, this would be quite incorrect. In fact, I believe that many unbelievers who never come to God have both of those things. They know they do bad things. They know there is a God. If the first section is about repentance, then it seems that the first step towards repentance is **understanding who God is** by recognizing that he **loves to show mercy**. If you don't have this deeply felt conviction, you will never go to God with your sin.

⁸ See the screen shots at the end of the sermon from Gaiser, p. 385-86.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love,
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. (vs. 1)

Notice how “mercy” (*chanan*) is repeated twice—once in the first half, once in the second. The first half **grounds the mercy** in that which is unchangeable. The second half demonstrates what this **mercy is able to do**. First, what is mercy? The dictionary defines it as **compassion shown especially to an offender**. It also describes it as **forbearance, which is the refraining from enforcing something like a debt, a right, or an obligation that is due**. In this way, mercy is both not getting something you deserve and getting something you do not deserve.⁹

David roots mercy in God’s “**steadfast love**” (*hesed*). This love is his **covenantal love**. When He enters into a special relationship with someone, his love is unmovable towards them. God does not change; he is the same yesterday, today,

⁹ This is a little different from what we have sometimes been told that mercy is not getting what you deserve (judgement) while grace is getting what you do not deserve (salvation). Here, mercy is both things. And yet, see the discussion below on how in its positive form of giving, this really is grace.

and forever. Therefore, if he swears steadfast love, nothing will stop him from showing it.

Now mercy by itself doesn't do much more than just keep from doing something. A compassion that withholds punishment is one thing. And it is a glorious thing. It is something that our culture no longer knows anything about. When someone is wronged, we no longer know how to show forbearance. We want instant payback. If someone has wronged us, we immediately sue or slander or seek revenge. Our politics know nothing of mercy. Nor do our celebrities. Nor do the nations who fight over land. Nor do many Christians. "He harmed me. He deserves it!" This is law, not gospel. And eye for an eye. Not mercy. But God loves to show mercy.

He does this by "**blotting out my transgressions.**" This is a positive action. No longer the withholding of justice, but **the positive showing of grace.** To have your transgressions blotted out is **to be justified** by God. If your sins are written on a list, to blot them out is to have them erased. They are no longer there. To be justified is to not have our sins counted against you "just-as-if" you never sinned. Obviously, you recognize your sins and confess them, and the psalmist will do this next. But the focus now is on God's

mercy. This is the first step towards repenting. You must believe that God is merciful and that he wants to be merciful to you.

Only then, once you know God to be favorably disposed, not a tyrant, not a Judge, not full of wrath and anger, but full of kindness and compassion will you confess your sins to him. Confessing them is the second thing the psalmist does. **This confession takes three verses** to unfold before taking a brief pause. Then they unfold in the opposite way in the next three verses as parallels (following the chiasm).

First, *you must realize what your sins do to you*. They make you filthy, dirty, unclean. Therefore, you need to be washed and cleansed.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin! (2)

This time, the second line explains the first a little more. To be washed is to be cleansed. This is the **language of the temple** and in the OT idea of this, to be cleansed was to be made fit to enter the place where God is. Nothing unclean could be in the assembly of God. Thus, the sacrifices through

the blood of the animals and the washings by water were all about making space clean and sacred again. But there is something subjective about this as well, as Peter puts it, baptism is **not the removal of dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience (1Pe 3:21)**. Conscience is subjective, inside of you. To be washed is to have your conscience cleansed.

In the NT era, those OT types were done away with, as they existed only until the time of the new covenant, when the once-for-all sacrifice would be the only thing God sees that will do this cleansing. And through the act of the Holy Spirit baptizing a believer at their conversion and subsequently entering into them as God's temple, they are declared clean in God's sight. We will return to this later.

For now, I just want you to see how David—who lives in the OT era—can nevertheless be washed and cleansed inwardly. His sin can be taken away. This is what vs. 7—the parallel verse—teaches.

**Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (7)**

David could have this, not just NT Christians. David could be cleansed. David could be washed so that his dark filth is removed as is covered by freshly fallen snow. This is vital to understanding what is both new and not new about the days we live in.

After the realization that your sins make you dirty, you must recognize that just confessing one or two of them does not solve your problem. You are constantly dirtied by them.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me (3)

To know your transgressions is not to just be able to name a couple of sins you have committed. It is to know that your sin is always before you. **You do not just sin; you are a sinner.** But this knowledge is easily lost on us *because we sin!* Therefore, the parallel is that we need God to teach us to “make us know” that which we know.

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
And you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. (6)

David acknowledges that this knowledge about his sin was not figured out by himself. God taught it to him. And not only this, but God delights in truth in the inward man, and therefore he teaches wisdom about such things to our souls through his Word.

Vs. 4a ratchets this confession up a notch, as does its parallel in **vs. 5**. And it is a very important verse to get a handle on. For they teach **what your sin really is** and **how pervasive it is**. First, what is it?

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. (4)

First, notice that he is now **getting specific**. Confession of sin is not just general, “**God I sin, I know it.**” It is specific. “**I sinned**” is different than “**I sin.**” What did David do? Well, the context is Bathsheba. He committed adultery with her. He murdered her husband. He covered it up. He pretended he didn’t do anything. And so on.

Second, even though he did in fact sin against at least two other people, he states that it is **against God alone that**

he has sinned. The meaning of this is fairly difficult to understand. It could be an intensification of sin, that though he does sin against humans, at the end of the day God is the one who is righteous, it is God's law that is broken, it is God who is offended. In the previous Psalm, this parallels the speech of God against sinners, so this makes sense.

You should also note that part of the verse is quoted in **Romans 3:4**. Paul discusses the universality of sin, something we have seen in David and will see even more in the Psalm in a moment. He says, “**Every man is a liar, so that He alone is true**” (Luther's translation) against those who say that we should sin so that God may show more grace. Throughout Romans, people hear of the grace of God and think that God is more glorified when they sin because he loves to show grace. Therefore, they excuse their sins as good things. They have the same thought here: God's righteousness is increased by our sins. This is what they were saying that Paul taught (**Rom 3:8**). Instead, what it means is that I sin only in your sight, so it stands that you alone are righteous and the justifier of sinners.

If I sin against you, you need to forgive me. But David is speaking about eternal things. If he only sinned against Bathsheba, all he would need is her forgiveness. But he has

sinned against God, and only God can forgive his sin against Him. This is vital to recognize. Any sin you commit against someone else is a sin against God. So it does no eternal good to just seek their forgiveness (that is important), which many unbelievers do, but not approach the throne of grace for forgiveness from the Lord. In fact, it makes no sense that there even is such a thing as sin if there is no God. For sin becomes just an arbitrary convention of humans—to one person a thing is a sin, to another it isn't. This actually makes sin and forgiveness impossible, because if sin is just what you think, then I can think it isn't sin and therefore it isn't sin. It becomes a game of who has more power to impose their views on someone else. Who is ever going to repent of anything in this worldview? This is where our culture is at today.

Knowing that God is justified when he does a thing is the center of the first stanza of the Psalm. Everything leads up to this point. **If God were to judge** you for your sin, he is justified, as it said in Psalm 50. **If he is to show mercy**, then he is also justified, because sin is ultimately against only him. And all sin is against him. This actually becomes good news, because the context is not judgment but forgiveness. David's realization that God is justified when he judges is what

proves to him that he actually can receive mercy. God will do it and it is right for him to do so, because the crime was against him. Therefore, if he wants to show mercy, he can.

Yet, so that we do not fall into the trap of Paul's opponents, we move back out in the Psalm now as we think about sin even more. We've already looked at vv. 6 and 7. But vs. 5 is also vital.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin did my mother conceive me. (5)

There are only two options for what this can mean. Either David's mother and father committed some kind of horrible sexual sin like adultery or she was raped or something terrible like that, and therefore he was conceived by an act of sin. Obviously, this is not what he is talking about. Or ... his conception was itself not an act of sin, but rather at the very moment he was conceived, he was a sinner. There are no other options as far as I can tell. This is a key text for western Christianity for the doctrine of original sin. Somehow, we are all sinful from conception. Original sin is an attempt to explain how that could be.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Eastern churches do not hold to the doctrine of original sin, but they do hold that all people are sinful. They are not Pelagian. But I'm not sure how they would explain this.

This is the death-blow to all forms of Pelagianism which teach that humans are basically good, another common view not only in our culture, but throughout Protestant Christianity in our day. In fact, most Protestants believe this, which makes them Pelagians. We are not. In fact, we are basically evil. From the moment we were conceived, we were bent towards rebellion. It doesn't mean a single celled human in the womb is committing sins (actual sin), but rather that our bent is towards sin so that when we are able we will sin. This shows how pervasive sin is. This is not something Augustine made up. It is the teaching of Holy Scripture.

All of this shows just how important it is to get these things right in your thinking. **If you do not understand God's mercy** or his being justified in cleansing, you will not come to him for it. You will have your angry God and he will be that to you. **If you do not understand your sinfulness** and how deeply situated it is in your being, you will not come to him for mercy either. You will be eaten alive by your sins and not even realize it. You will die not knowing the joy and forgiveness of God. His smiling face will be hidden from you and God will still punish you for what you have done against him. Thus the section ends:

Let me hear joy and gladness;
Let the bones that you have broken rejoice. (8)

The Psalmist is not blaming God for his predicament. He is admitting that his sin is the problem. Nevertheless, God has broken him in order to mend him. He has taken away joy, and he desperately wants to know it again. Please remember that David is a believer. He is not coming to the LORD for the first time. The joy of his salvation was lost because of his sin. But it can be restored through repentance. Therefore he concludes the way he began,

Hide your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities. (9)

Forgiveness

After you repent of your sins, you need to come to the recognition that **God forgives you in Christ**. This is what the second stanza is all about. It follows a pattern of indicative/imperative or what God does and what we will do. It begins with a cry to God to do just that,

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me. (10)

The first thing it means to be forgiven is that God does grant you a clean heart. This is an act of God, an act of creation. Only God can do that. But if the parallel stands, this means that a right spirit is renewed inside of you. But what does this mean?

We've seen something of it with regard to having a conscience that is purified. But when the parallel to this verse speaks to us, it explains more.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise. (17)

To have a renewed spirit is to no longer be proud, stubborn, refusing to repent, doing all in your power to hide the sin. It is to be broken before God. This is the kind of heart that turns to him for help and forgiveness and mercy and washing. And God will not turn away any who come to him like this. He will not despise the one who is lowly and

humble of heart. God is not ruthless. To him, mercy is his darling virtue. Only man sees stubborn arrogant pride as a virtue. God hates it.

So forgiveness grants to a person a humble heart, a right spirit. **The second thing** it does it **keeps us in a right standing** before the throne of God. The often misunderstood verse says,

Cast me not away from your presence,
And take not your Holy Spirit from me. (11)

An entire sermon could easily go into just this verse. Some people think that this verse implies the possibility of **losing one's salvation**, because God could take his Holy Spirit away. A preface to that idea is a previous thought that when God sends the Holy Spirit to someone that this **equals regeneration**. Both are in error.

It is easily noticed that David sings in the next verse,

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
And uphold me with a willing spirit. (12)

This is a **third thing** forgiveness does; it restores **the joy of salvation**. This verse also builds upon **vs. 10** in that it shows you more of what it means to have a right spirit. Now it is a **willing spirit**, one that is desiring to love God's love rather than hate it; one that desires to repent rather than hide. David wanted to hear joy and gladness. So now he asks for it. Ask for it in your own prayers to God. Don't just assume it. Ask him for it.

Now, to have it *restored* means that he **had it once before**. In other words, he has already been saved. To be saved is to be regenerated; to be given a new heart. There is no saved person who has not been regenerated. David has this. He's living in the OT and he has this. Every elect believer in the OT was regenerated. And, **they were regenerated by the Holy Spirit**. This is the Spirit's work.

So does this mean David is praying not to lose his salvation? Not at all. You have to understand the difference in certain aspects of the work of the Spirit in the OT and NT. Regeneration is the same. His presence is not. Not that he wasn't present then, but is now. **No, it is not the "that" of the presence, but the "how" and "where" of it**. He was always present with his people in the OT. But he was not

present “in” his people. We have to think of this both individually and corporately.

The Spirit did come individually. David proves this. But he didn’t come “in” David, he came “upon” him. “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward” (1Sa 16:13). “Upon” not “in.” You may think this is nit-picky, but I assure you it actually helps you think more clearly about the Spirit’s work than you ever thought possible.

Think of it like a cloak—clothing that you put on. It even says things like, “The Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon” (Jdg 6:34). “And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them” (Num 11:17). The Spirit came *upon* certain individuals *for very specific tasks*: building the tabernacle (Ex 31:3), judging Israel (Jdg 11:29), bring a prophet (Num 11:17), ruling Israel as God’s king (1Sa 10:6).¹¹

The NT actually uses this language in a similar way for us, believe it or not. It does this through baptism. “For as

¹¹ For much more on this I highly recommend this following book: James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 80.

many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27) or “have clothed yourselves with Christ” (NAS). It is not that Baptism saves you, but that is it doing something else. This is OT Spirit language of coming upon for a task. It is ordination language. It is not regeneration language. We are baptized not to get saved, but because we confess that God has already saved us. We are baptized not to be made clean, but so that we can act as God’s priests and bring cleansing to the world and to his kingdom on earth by the Spirit. To put it another way, it is clothing for a task: obedience and holiness in the temple of God.

Any believer baptized in the NT puts the Spirit on in this way. But he did not come upon everyone in the OT this way. Moses laments, “Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). The Spirit did this with great power in order to prove to Israel that this person was really from God. That was the purpose. You couldn’t help but know that Samson was God’s judge, even though he was a total moral failure, because the Spirit rushed upon him in incredible ways.

All this said, nevertheless the Spirit did come “in” in the OT. Just not in individuals. He came “in” to the

temple/tabernacle. The cloud would fill the space, and Israel would know that God was there (Ex 40:34). Ezekiel sees the Spirit leave the temple (Ezek 10) and this showed that God's presence was no longer going to be with Israel. Yet, Ezekiel also prophesied of a better day when the Spirit would be "within" God's people (Ezek 36:27). This is what Pentecost fulfills. The reason is not because OT saints were not regenerated, but NT saints are. The reason is that the temple has been changed from Jerusalem's brick and gold to the body of Christ, a temple of living stones. We are the temple, and God's presence now abides in us.

David is not praying, therefore, that he would not lose his salvation. He is praying that God would not take the kingship away from him like he did Saul. Saul was filled with the Spirit in order to prove that he was king. The Spirit left him when David was anointed. There can be only one king. In the song, David does not want to be cast away from God's presence, the place of his favor, the place where joy is not found. He has been experiencing this as a believer for over a year now. And he is very worried, because he saw it with his predecessor, that God might be so angry with him

that he will give the kingship to someone else. That is what he is praying about.¹²

As you think about this important verse, the parallel is that **you can also lose the joy of your salvation**. This is what happens when we sin and refuse to repent. I think we have all experienced this at one time or another. But if you are God's elect, he will bring you to repentance sooner or later. The point of the word is to urge you to see God's grace and do so now, so that you might not suffer these internal consequences that your sins bring to you. That doesn't mean you won't suffer external consequences. It means that even if you should, God will restore the joy of your salvation. He will give you a willing spirit no matter if he disciplines you for your sin or not.

After the joy of salvation is returned, **A fourth consequence** of forgiveness is the **opening of your mouth** to tell others about it. This is the first imperative (“**I will teach**”).

¹² **Going Deeper:** The implications of this for how we read the book of Acts are many. The parallels are being filled with the Spirit in such a way that people know that God is really with these people, just as it was in the OT. He still empowers for works of service today by his Spirit. The parallels are that in Acts and in the OT, the Spirit regenerates people. The *difference* is that in Acts, the temple has changed. Losing salvation, no regeneration, speaking in tongues a necessary for being saved, all of these miss the point quite badly. If you can get your head around this basic idea of the change of temple, it will suddenly cause a great many once confusing things about this book seem much clearer than you thought possible.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
And sinners will return to you. (13)

This is not something that only extraverted people receive. It is something that naturally comes from forgiveness. If you find that you have never even a single time wanted to tell someone else about God's grace, if you have never ever had this desire, then friend, it can only be because such grace and forgiveness is foreign to you and you do not know it yourself. Because if you know what God does for you, you simply will tell people.

This does not mean that everyone will do it the same way, nor that you should be forced to do it one way or feel guilty for not doing it another. Some have gifts of evangelism and they simply tell everyone all the time. I know people like this. Their very presence sometimes makes me feel guilty, because why don't I do it like they do? And yet, I know that in my own way I have told many people of Christ's love and the hope that can be found in him.

My purpose here is to simply cause you to look inside and ask yourself if you ever have this desire or if you do not. If you do not, then you are either not saved, or you are saved

and are living in such horrible unrepentant sin like David that you cannot speak of forgiveness because you know that you need to receive it first. Either way, you need to come to God either for the first time or for the thousandth in order to know joy anew. But if you do and have had this desire, then be comforted in knowing that it is a grace that comes from forgiveness. If your desire to tell others is waning, perhaps it is time to seek the throne of grace once again for your own sins until you realize a fresh how good it is to be forgiven.

A fifth thing that comes from forgiveness is **worship**. This starts with an indicative and immediately follows with obedience (the imperative). It happens twice.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation,

And my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. (14)

O Lord, open my lips,

And my mouth will declare your praise. (15)

Not only will your mouth tell others about the goodness of God. **It will tell him!** This is worship. If you are delivered from the guilt of your own bloody hands, how can you not

sing aloud. The second verse puts emphasis on the first. If God will open your mouth, the first thing it will say is “Hallelujah, what a Savior! Thank you Lord for saving my soul. Blessed be the God of my salvation.” Much of the churches hymnody from the first day until this sing of this very thing. And thus, God’s people are brought to great joy and worship from the forgiveness that comes when they repent.

Prophecy and the Church

As we come to the last two verses, consider the truly amazing thing here. **We sing of God’s righteousness!** But can it be? I bought this up earlier. Now we need to examine it. How can God be righteous to forgive someone who is an adulterer, a murderer, a liar, and a blasphemer? This isn’t righteousness, it is the epitome of justice gone awry.

David concludes the song in an unexpected way (unless you see it as the reverse of Psalm 50 that is).

**Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
Build up the walls of Jerusalem. (18)**

Scholars have long been perplexed by this verse, because they can't figure out how David could be talking about the walls of Jerusalem being destroyed. We have no record of such a thing. Many feel certain that this must be a late addition by a scribe like Ezra contemplating the people of his day in light of this prayer. That's possible I suppose. But it isn't necessary.

David realizes that his own private sin as a leader of the people has ramifications that extend well beyond himself or Bathsheba or Uriah. He knows that as king, he has brought disgrace to the entire nation and given the Gentiles opportunity to mock God. Poetically then, **he can speak of having destroyed Jerusalem by his own sin!** He has ruined his own people.

But the king's hope is in the kindness and good pleasure of his God to rebuild what David has torn down. And it is also prophetic of the exile and the captivity and the destruction that would come later upon the nation for the sins of his children and grandchildren when they ruled on the same throne he did.

This is precisely what we see the Lord's Jesus Christ came to do, however. **He came to build up the walls of a heavenly Jerusalem** by bringing about a new temple through

the sacrifice of his own body that would take care of sins once-for-all, ushering us into the new situation we have already described that began at Pentecost. We must read Psalm 51 in light of these things, but we must read these things properly from the Psalm. Not from removing the Holy Spirit, but from rebuilding Jerusalem.

Perhaps the chief thing **Jesus' death** accomplishes in this regard is **to satisfy the justice of God**, thereby vindicating the righteousness of God in forgiving sinners, rendering David's words possible. You must sing about **the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom 3:24-25)**. And you must sing about how this great sacrifice not only saves you, but how it **shows God's divine forbearance (mercy) in passing over former sins, like David's (25)**.

You see, **God was looking forward to the death of Christ** which would vindicate his righteousness in saving someone like David, and of course any of us. Some have seen justification by faith alone as the greatest mishandling of justice ever conceived, a notion not only legally impossible,

but absurd.¹³ But friend, this gift that God gives by faith is the most legally just thing he could ever do. For only in the death of Christ are the law's demands against sin fully satisfied, as only in the life of Christ are they fully obeyed.

If God wanted to pardon people, the only way he could do it without sacrificing his justice, would be to set forth a perfect sacrifice of a lamb fully and wholly unblemished, without any tinge or taint of lawlessness. But there are no animals like this. Furthermore, animals did not sin against God. Man did, so it must be a man that satisfies the legal demands against sin: death by execution, cursing by hanging on a tree. If God were to pardon someone on any grounds less than this, justice would not be satisfied, and he would never be able to pardon any sinner at all. It is actually those who want our works to justify us that end up destroying the righteousness of God.

But in the greatest moment ever, before history began, the Son swore by the Father that he would be slain as that lamb, and it was as if it were true before the foundation of the world. And in time and space, God pardoned David because he looked forward to the death of Jesus in whom

¹³ Cf. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (New York: Clark & Austin, 1847), 98.

righteousness is fully met both in perfect law-keeping and in paying the penalty your sin deserves.

Therefore, the Psalm rightly ends with **God delighting in right sacrifices**—the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of his people, not for sin, but as thank offerings for having their sins pardoned and forgiven.

Then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
Then bulls will be offered on your altar. (19)

If the Word is working on you now, and you have found yourself this day contemplating your own sins for the very first time, wondering how you can be right with God, you now have your answer. Turn to him in repentance by first recognizing his mercy, his kindness, and the great grace that he is this very moment ready to grant. Then confess your sins to him and know the many benefits of forgiveness for the first time.

If you have found yourself more like David, contemplating your own sins in the fear and trembling of a wrathful God, not wanting to give them up, being afraid people will find out that you are wicked, then hear the word

of the LORD and remember the mercy of God, full of kindness and compassion, slow to anger, vast in love. Only then will you call upon him in confession of your sins again. **Get a right view of God** to gain a right view of repentance and a right view of forgiveness. Stop thinking unbiblically about this merciful, loving heavenly Father who has shown such compassion to you through the death of his Son and has given his Spirit to you, a sinner, as a deposit of eternal life. See if he won't grant you joy unspeakable and open your mouth anew as you come remember once more the joy of your salvation that is always available to those who put their trust and faith in Christ alone.

Stanza 1 (vv. 1–9) (a pattern based on repeated vocabulary)¹¹

A v. 1 blot out	(common vocabulary with A' — מחה) ¹²
B 2a wash	(common vocabulary with B' — כבס)
C 2b cleanse	(common vocabulary with C' — טהר)
D 3 I know	(common vocabulary with D' — ידע)
E 4a I sinned	(common vocabulary with E' — חטא)
F 4b you are justified	(center: justification of God)
E' 5 I...a sinner	(חטא)
D' 6 teach me (i. e., make me know)	(ידע - hiphil)
C' 7a clean	(טהר)
B' 7b wash	(כבס)
A' 9 blot out	(מחה)

Stanza 2 (vv. 10–17) (a pattern based on repeated or similar vocabulary)

A 10a clean heart, O God ¹³	(common vocabulary with A' — אלהים / לב)
B 10b spirit	(common vocabulary with B' — רוח)
C 11–12 spirit...spirit	(amplification of plea for “spirit” in 10b)
D 13 I will teach	
E 14 O God, my saving God ¹⁴	(center: my saving God)
D' 15 my tongue will sing	
C' 16 sacrifice...offering	(amplification of confession regarding “sacrifice” in 17a)
B' 17a my sacrifice, ¹⁵ O God...a broken spirit	(רוח)
A' 17b contrite heart, O God	(אלהים / לב)

X 10–12 Imperatives/precatives	(create...put...do not cast...do not take...restore...sustain)
Y 13 Indicative result	(then I will teach...sinners will return)
X' 14a Imperative	(deliver me)
Y' 14b Indicative result	(and my tongue will sing)
X'' 15a Imperative	(open my lips)
Y'' 15b Indicative result	(and my mouth will declare)
Y''' 16–17 Indicative basis	(for you have no delight in sacrifice, etc.)

Stanza 3 vv. 18–19

X'''' 18 Imperatives	(do good to Zion...rebuild)
Y'''' 19 Indicative results	(then you will delight in right sacrifices...bulls will be offered)