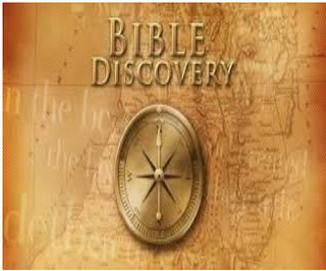


August 9, 2015

Psalm 51:1-5

## Just a Sinner Saved by Grace



In preparing today's message I read of a contemporary, popular minister who was asked about what He would teach on "sanctification". His simple response was "different age" inferring it no longer was applicable in today's enlightened society. While he's certainly entitled to his opinion, I pause with wonder at how many sophisticated pastors, evangelists, and teachers of the scriptures have lost their way, trapped by the lure of fanciful, comfortable, popular philosophies rather than adhering to the soundness of God's Word. Sin and the need for our Heavenly Father to sanctify – purify – us from the waywardness of sinful lives is neither popular nor a common theme in the pulpits of today. Sin has become an unpopular and little-used word in our culture. But that doesn't mean it's any less necessary to address the issue. What do you think sin is; how would you define it? Pastor John Piper says, "Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God." In general terms, Sin is disobedience to God's law, God's Word and God's commands. Is something a sin just because God says it's wrong? Does God just make up what is right and what is wrong as He goes along?

No, God's laws are rooted in His nature, His character. For example: Love – real love, not the Hollywood variety, not the lust-centered pursuit of the world - is right and good because God is love – not because God just decided it was a good thing to do. His commands come from who He is. So, we can say that sin is anything that's not like God and does not come from God! Sin is anything we do (or fail to do) that doesn't reflect the pure and holy character of God. Instead of living by a set of rules, we must ascertain: Does this action, this thought or this word (*that I'm about to do or have done*) reflect who God is and who God wants me to be? Right will always be right and wrong will always be wrong because God's character never changes! No legislation or popular following will ever affect it. Once you've understood what sin is and accepted that you're a sinner, you must decide for yourself what you're going to do about it.

**Sin is anything we do (or fail to do) that doesn't reflect the pure and holy character of God.**

It was the prophet Nathan who brought King David to his knees with his sin. David had sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah and then sent Uriah to die in the line of fire at the warfront to cover up the sin which led to Bathsheba being with child. In his search for forgiveness, the psalmist opened his sinful heart. Psalm 51 is built on David's confession of his sin – confessing before God, being transformed and receiving forgiveness. As David expresses his sin again and again – "*transgressions*", "*iniquity*" and "*stain of sin*" he demonstrates also our shameful ways, our evil pursuits, and just how much *we* too have erred against our Creator God. He confesses how rebellious he's been. His confession, more than mere introspection, is confirmation, as for each of us, that sin is always first and foremost against our Lord! "*Against you only have I sinned*"; and as David confesses, "*Surely I was sinful at birth*" he acknowledges what each of us discover – we've been born into iniquity – we're not only all sinners by what we chose to do or fail to do, but have been given that plight from our root in mankind – as descendants of Adam and Eve. Rather than offer excuses, we can learn from the psalmist David as he asks God to handle his sinful way. He requests of God that God *have mercy*, that He *blot out his transgression* and that *he wash and cleanse him from sin*. It's mercy which opens the door to heaven; it's grace that our transgressions are forgotten – removed as far as the east is from the west. And it is through the blood of Christ that we are cleansed and given new life.

**Sin always first and foremost against our Lord God!**

God's grace is the only reason David, the only reason we, dare approach God and ask to be restored. God is a God of unending love and great compassion. We cannot do anything to "earn" our forgiveness. Grace is a gift from God given because of His loving and compassionate character. We don't deserve it. To say someone

deserves grace is a contradiction in terms. As Andy Stanley writes, "You can no more deserve grace than you can plan your own surprise party." Grace can't be earned. God doesn't forgive us because we "*promise I'll never do it again*" or "*I'll serve you the rest of my life*". We ask for forgiveness resting solely on God's loving, compassionate, gracious character through which we receive His wonderful grace. David totally admits his wrongdoing. He doesn't try to rationalize his actions. He takes full responsibility. He admits to always being sinful. So must we! Grace is birthed from our hopeless inequity. Only as we come humbly before God, acknowledging we have failed Him, can we find hope – and joy and love and peace and forgiveness!

In many ways David sinned more horribly than his predecessor, Saul. Yet amazingly David is still called a "*man after God's own heart*" and it's through the line of David that the seed of salvation in Christ comes. No, David was not perfect; he was honest before God and accepted that God alone was *the One* able to save him.

David, in his confession doesn't dwell on his specific sin but goes beyond the acts to something much deeper. He understood something not fully revealed until we enter into a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father – in His grace, God reveals there's something wrong with every one of us that goes far beyond our outward actions, our behaviour, even beyond our innermost thoughts and motivations. Overcoming our sin requires God's amazing grace, and God's amazing grace is offered through the context of relationship for only through the mystery of our relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ can grace be experienced.

When David confesses his sin before the Lord, he takes responsibility for his actions without excuse. How honest are you about your sin? Do you recall getting your hand caught in the proverbial cookie jar? How did you respond to the charge of guilty for sin? Did you confess your sinful heart before your Heavenly Father or retreat to excuses and rationale?

**God reveals there's something wrong with every one of us that goes far beyond our outward actions, our behaviour, even beyond our innermost thoughts and motivations.**

Excuses which are common today such as... "*Everybody does it!*" "*It's not so bad!*" "*It's not against the law!*" "*I have to follow my heart!*" Let me warn you today none of these is sufficient to keep you from God's holy justice except you confess your sin, rely on His bountiful grace, receive His Son Jesus Christ into your heart and turn from your wicked way.

What I'm saying is we're not sinners because we sin but that we sin because we're sinners. In other words, it's what we *are* that accounts for what we do. We're sinners! There I said it! Sinners saved by the unmerited, undeserved favour of God's grace. We've, for the most part, lost such instruction in the church today. It leaves us way too uncomfortable. It's this fear of discomfort that leaves us suffering when we fail to seek God's wonderful grace. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, we suffer. Look at how David describes his condition. At Psalm 32:3-4 he speaks of physical discomfort – bones wasting away, groaning; the weight of guilt on him day and night; his strength sapped. Here in Psalm 51 David uses images such as feeling dirty in need of being washed and cleansed. He's preoccupied with sin, it haunts and hounds him; his sin leaves him with a lack of joy, a lack of willingness to want to obey what's right. We know God's hand was heavy on David for all those months. His conscience was nagging him. He never walked on the roof of his house without reflecting on that night when he saw Bathsheba. He never lay down to sleep without a sorrowful thought of the bed of his wickedness. He never sat down to eat without thinking of the last meal he had with Uriah. He never took a sip of wine without thinking of the time when he made Uriah drunk. He never took a quill in his hand without thinking of the execution of Uriah that he wrote and he signed. How does unconfessed sin leave you feeling in your life? How does God convict you of your sin? Why is it so painful, and so arduous to confront sin and deal with it? We all have a higher opinion of ourselves than we ought and that's in opposition to the exalted position we're to have of God. Sin puts us first instead of God. Do you see the source of the problem in bringing our failures to God? At the heart of this trauma is the great deceiver, the liar, the enemy of God – Satan chose to attempt a coup against God and lost but you would never know it by the way Satan behaves. He wants to take as many with him into eternal damnation. But there is a remedy.

## God has brought us out of sin if we receive His grace

Yes we've all sinned, but God has brought us out of sin if we receive His grace. Grace doesn't remove sin or make it more palatable and acceptable before our Holy God. Grace doesn't have to. Rather grace acknowledges the full extent of our sin, exposes our need for a Saviour, and, in the process, chooses not to condemn the sinner but to rescue him or her from their own destruction.

**Through Grace, truth exposes sin.** That's the essence of Numbers 32:23, "*Be sure your sin will find you out*". What David did displeased the Lord, and God sent Nathan the prophet to David to expose his sin. David expressed personal accountability. He doesn't blame the circumstances; he doesn't make Bathsheba share the guilt; David deals before God with **his sin**. David's conviction, David's awareness, of his sin is stressed in the words: "*my sin is ever before me*". God uses His Spirit to convict our hearts, to expose to us the truth of our lives and to draw us back to God. It's impossible to be in charge and be a disciple of Christ – we need to allow the Holy Spirit to have His rightful place in charge of our lives. The Holy Spirit leads us to confessing our sins. Literally, confession means "*to say the same thing about my sin that God does*". We spell it out, despising the sin in the same way God does.

If then we're sinners, if then we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, if then we're all dirty, rotten scoundrels unworthy of being kept from hellfire; what basis have we in seeking to confess before God our sin and seeking His forgiveness? Only on the basis of what Jesus completed on the cross at Calvary; only through the broken body and shed blood of God's Son as our substitute Lamb can we find justification. John reminds us that Jesus came into the world *full of grace and truth*. And the Apostle Paul instructs, "*God makes people right with Himself through their faith in Jesus Christ.*" [Romans 3:22 NCV]

Almighty God is a perfectly righteous God. The righteousness of God demands each sin be penalized by an eternity in Hell. Jesus has done just that, descending into hell and on the third day rose again. The price has been paid; we're to accept it as a free gift from God. Why then are we so hesitant to confess our sin, even when we know God forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness? Is it because we really don't want to give up our sinful ways? Is it pride that keeps us from confessing and asking for forgiveness?

There's no answer to these questions except **Jesus**. In Jesus there's no conflict over sin destroyed, there's no indecision between grace and truth. Jesus is our model for living in grace and in truth. Jesus has all power and in Him, our Heavenly Father has chosen to supply you and me with all the power necessary with His Holy Spirit dwelling within us, to help us conquer every stronghold of sin in our lives. What you and I need to conquer the strongholds of sin in our life is that *power of God*. We need to set aside the hammers we've been beating ourselves up with, stop the headaches and surrender to the God of the universe who is all-powerful. We need to acknowledge the weapon of God for our lives over sin – that weapon is grace! Did you catch that? The secret to having power released in your life and my life to conquer strongholds of sin is God's weapon of grace. It means that you and I are called to be *sinner*s – saved by grace! This weapon not only has the power to cast a mountain into the sea, but dry up the sea to have allowed the Israelites to cross over on dry land! Grace is sufficient to save the vilest of sinners, which Paul addresses to himself, and of which I can join the club – and probably you too.

Living by interpretation of the law that says... "*Don't do that. Do this! You can't do that. You must do this!*" is not from God. That was never God's intent. Grace didn't come about in the New Testament. God's law was all about His grace. In Jesus, however, we gain a clearer idea of what grace looks like. That grace changes the whole process. God's grace tips the scales in our favour.

The voice of God speaks to us through His Spirit, "*You know that isn't good for you. I'm here to guide you, to direct your paths that they may be straight, to keep you out of trouble. So go ahead and follow me; let my*

**Only through the broken body and shed blood of God's Son as our substitute Lamb can we find justification.**

**What you and I need to conquer the strongholds of sin in our life is that power of God.**

*Word teach you the way you should go. Be aware my power's sufficient to keep you from harm, my power's released through grace so you don't have to give into them temptations that come your way."* Oh, that we would each discover anew our deep need for God's strength in overcoming temptation, in God's offer for forgiveness – forgiveness that can be obtained only through Jesus Christ, only through grace – God's grace!

If you would like to know more about God's amazing grace, give us a call or send an email. We'd love to hear from you.

***Blessings,***

***Pastor Dave***