

FEELING OUR SIN
February 23, 2014
Psalm 51, Luke 18:9-14; 19:1-10

“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”
Psalm 34:18; 51:17

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and the consequences of sin are serious: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). But one who feels his sin, its guilt and defilement knows the greater evil: that sin offends a loving God, disregarding His kindness and holiness, and is an affront to our creator and keeper.

A man may define sin accurately. He may expound biblical teaching regarding sin and follow up with exacting definitions formulated by theologians and creeds. But he does not truly know sin unless he feels it in his own heart. “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:14, 15). Sin originates in the heart of man. It is there that its evil must be known.

If one does not feel his sin, it is not because he has none, for “all have sinned.” It is attributable rather to ignorance of God, to hardness of heart, a sin-numbness wrought by willful sinning. It is attributable to his quenching the Holy Spirit’s convicting. If one does not repent of his sin, it is because he does not truly comprehend or believe the magnitude of its offense against God.

When David recognized his sin he felt its weight, and Psalm 51 expresses what he felt. He was grieved to the depths of his being. He prayed for mercy (1), acknowledged that his sin was against God (1-4), plead for cleansing from its defilement (2, 7, 10), recognized its root as being in his own depraved nature (5) and knew that contrition and brokenness before God is the only acceptable response. We must feel our sin as David did.

The tax-collector whose prayer was reported by Jesus (Luke 18:9-14) exhibited profound sorrow for his sin, for he surely felt its weight. He too cried out to God for mercy. As he prayed, a Pharisee who knew the definition of sin and could doubtless name all of the publican’s sins, felt no weight of his own sin, assuming that he was righteous. The tax-collector was acceptable to God, but the Pharisee knew nothing of God or of his sin.

When Zacchæus met Jesus (Luke 19:1-10), he felt the weight of his sin and repented. This was evident when he confessed his dishonesty and vowed to repay those he had defrauded.

There are two kinds of sorrow for sin. One is the sorrow of this world, which mourns the consequences of transgression (II Cor. 7:10). It does not feel its sin. The other is godly sorrow shown in repentance. It exhibits a realization that the offense against God, not sin’s consequences, is the real evil of our sin.

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa. 57:15)

“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” (Isa. 66:2)