

Psalm 51:1-19

Repentance is one of those subjects, even as Christians, about which we are often reticent to think and speak.

Biblical repentance, however, is absolutely necessary to salvation.

Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

What is repentance? It is turning from sin and turning to God.

Repentance and faith are inseparably joined.

Summary

Psalm 51 is a psalm of repentance, providing a useful guide to this biblical doctrine and its practice in the Christian life.

1. Required Confession vv. 1-5

Psalm 51 shows that repentance requires confession of sin **vv. 1-4**.

This is a classic definition of what confession of sin is.

Vv. 1-5 provide a comprehensive definition of the nature of sin.

First, sin is transgression (**vs. 3**). Secondly, sin is iniquity (vs. 2).

Thirdly sin is "to fall short" or "to miss the mark." (**vv. 3-5**)

David acknowledges, therefore that God has been right to judge him (**v. 4**).

We all must realize that sin is the great problem of our lives. We need a thorough cleansing: we need to be born again and be given a new heart and disposition.

2. Foundational Mercy vs. 1

Secondly, repentance relies on God's mercy.

We are sinners by nature; held in a bondage that we ourselves cannot break.

David's plea for mercy (**Mark 1:15**) makes all the difference to convicted sinners.

Repentance relies not on our works, but directly on God's mercy.

Here is the good news that Christianity proclaims to the world: God has mercy for sinners who need to repent (**Psalm 86:5**) "For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you."

God's mercy is most vividly shown in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Have you pleaded for such mercy? It is freely given to all who will simply ask?

3. Cleansing Blood vs. 7

How can a holy God show mercy to guilty sinners?

The answer is that repentance finds cleansing through Christ's blood (**Ps. 51:7**).

The cleansing ritual for those cured leprosy from the OT (**Lev 14**) echoed in **Psalm 51:7**, pointed forward to the atoning (cleansing) work of Jesus Christ.

When we trust in Christ's death his blood is applied to us so that we are made clean.

Do you find it hard to believe that anything could cleanse you that thoroughly? God says that if you come to Christ to be washed clean, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool (**Isa 1:18**).

4. New Obedience vs. 10-19

Repentance not only finds cleansing in Christ's blood but also produces new obedience in the power of God's Spirit.

Repentance is not merely turning away from sin, but also walking with God in holiness (**Ps. 51:10-12**).

David's sin against Bathsheba had terrible consequences for the life of the nation. He prayed for God's Spirit, not just for his own spiritual benefit, but so that he can get busy undoing some of the harm that he had done (**Psalm 51:13-19**).

God was never interested in mere outward rituals, but always desired the heart response of faith. So David now wanted to offer God a heart that was now pierced by the gravity of sin and sensitive to God's truth (**vv. 16-17**).

5. Perpetual Pattern

We are very much mistaken if we think repentance is something we do only once to become Christians for the first time. Nor is repentance only for Christians who have sinned, as David did with Bathsheba.

Repentance is characteristic of the whole Christian life.

We can apply continual repentance to our worship of God.

We can apply continual repentance to the way we hear and heed God's Word.

We can apply continual repentance to all the challenges we face day to day in our lives.

Repentance, joined with faith, is the Christian's whole way of life, his or her path of blessing, to the glory of the holy God of mercy and grace.