

Total Depravity
SERMON
By
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TEXT: Psalm 51:1-12

PROP: Because our whole nature is affected by sin we must fervently and constantly cry out to God for mercy.

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Psalm 51:1-19 (ESV)

- 1 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.

We have been considering those things that distinguish the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. There are so many different kinds of churches and this is confusing to many. Which one is right or does it matter? It is my purpose to show you that it does matter and that it is very important to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. The organized church exists to promote the worship of God and to disciple the nations teaching them the commandments and precepts of Christ. The extent to which any church does this is the measure of her faithfulness to Christ the King.

It is not primarily the business of the church to relieve famine, to heal the sick or to provide social programs for the betterment of mankind. Neither is it the business of the church to enter the political arena, or to engage in secular activities that others are far better equipped to do. The church is here to worship God. It is here to call sinners to repentance and to teach them to live pleasing to God.

When we consider the Presbyterian government of Orthodox Presbyterian churches and we see that it is based entirely on the Word of God. The church of the apostles was governed by teaching and ruling elders and served by deacons. We are Presbyterian and this distinguishes us from other churches which have a different form of government. However many Presbyterian churches are liberal or modernist and do not accept the Bible as the only rule to glorify and enjoy God so they engage in worship practices and programs that are not biblical.

Another area of the church that distinguishes us in the OPC is that of worship and we insist that our worship, singing, preaching and prayer, be thoroughly grounded in the Bible. Indeed the Bible alone regulates our worship. That is to say that the **proper** worship of God, indeed the **only** worship that is acceptable to him, is worship in Spirit and truth. This means that our singing must be patterned after the songs recorded for us in the Bible as the Psalms. And our preaching must be biblical as well. When we consider the teaching of Paul in Romans 10 we see that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The Word of God, says Paul, must be preached by men who are gifted for that purpose and sent by God through the ordination of the church. And we have seen that not many churches are obedient to this precept.

Now we turn our attention to the area of doctrine and it is here that the distinction of the OPC is most clearly seen. We are distinguished in our church government and in our worship but much more in our doctrine which is set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. This confession along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, concisely expresses the system of doctrine in the Bible. The Westminster standards were published in 1647 and are the work of more than one hundred scholars and theologians assembled by the authority of the parliaments of England and Scotland. Most were Presbyterian with delegates from a number of other denominations.

It is not my intention to preach a series of sermons on the Westminster Standards but to consider five of the doctrinal issues presented in these standards which three years later in 1650 in Holland were debated in the trial of Jacobus Arminius. Found guilty of denying Scripture in these five important areas Arminius was excommunicated, that is, he was declared to be an infidel or an unbeliever. Today we know these as the five points of Calvinism summarized under the acronym TULIP, Total depravity (Total inability), Unconditional Election, Limited atonement (Particular atonement), Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints (Preservation of the saints).

I greatly prefer to preach expository sermons, or sermons the points of which are taken from a text of Scripture, therefore to deal with Total Depravity we shall see it in the context of David's confession of sin in Psalm 51. The sin of David is well known but we need to review the main issues of it. David committed adultery with Bathsheba who was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. When she informed David she was pregnant, David brought Uriah home from the war he was fighting and told him to go home to his wife. Bathsheba's pregnancy could then be attributed to Uriah's visit but he refused to go to his wife. David then sent Uriah back to the battle and instructed his general to put Uriah in the "forefront of the hottest battle."

This done, Uriah died in battle. David then took Bathsheba as his wife but we read that the “the thing David had done displeased the LORD.” (2 Samuel 11:27). Nathan the prophet confronted David with his sin

2 Samuel 12:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

David’s Child Dies

And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and he became sick.

2 Samuel 12:22-25 (ESV)

²² He said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ ²³ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” (This is a great comfort to believing parents who have to deal with the death of children)

Solomon’s Birth

²⁴ Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him ²⁵ and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord. (Yedid YAH or beloved of YAHWEH)

That is certainly a sermon in itself is it not? O to be beloved by God. But having reviewed the circumstances that moved David to give us this wonderful Psalm let us continue with the exposition at hand.

I. Those who are converted come to God for mercy.

Psalm 51:1 (ESV) — 1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

David comes to the only one who is able to show mercy to sinners. He comes to Him whose mercy flows from his lovingkindness. As he would show lovingkindness to his creatures he condescends to their needs, he redeems his

people, he quickens them unto spiritual life. It was the lovingkindness of God that brought David to come to point of crying out for mercy.

That David needed the mercy of God informs us that he was fully aware of his sinful condition. By God's grace David had been quickened or made alive with the result that he confessed his sin and came to YAHWEH the True and Living God for grace. It is one of the marks of the Christian to turn to the true God in the time of trouble. David's problem here was his sinful condition which inevitably issued in his particular sin. The only remedy for such a spiritual condition is to be cleansed and washed thoroughly. Our sinful record needs to be obliterated. It needs to be blotted out. Remember that David was a man after God's own heart. He loved the Lord. He was converted by God's grace so he prays wash **me**.

The ungodly are only concerned with the outward appearance of things. If they pray at all, and most do when they are in trouble, although not to the true God, the ungodly are only concerned that their social position not be affected by adultery. They say there is no problem if both parties consent or if no one gets hurt. But David prays that the pollution of his entire nature be cleansed. The sin he deals with is systemic. It affects every part of him not just some outward aspects or interpersonal relationships.

Many a murderer is more concerned with the electric chair than he is with the sin that brought him to it. The thief loves the things he has stolen but fears the prison. Not so with David, and it should not be so with us either. He is sick of sin as sin. He cries out against the evil of his **sin** and not against the painful consequences of it. This, I say, only a man who is converted by God will do or is even able to do.

II. Those who are converted by God know that they are depraved.

Psalm 51:3–4 (ESV) — 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.

David acknowledges his transgressions, his sin. The ungodly do not believe in sin. They have no interest in the commandments of God. There is no warfare with sin. They are so enslaved to sin that they believe they do not deserve the cruelties of nature or the vicissitudes of life. They have no ability to even conceive of doing spiritual good. They believe that they deserve to enter through the pearly gates because they have served humanity. Perhaps they have fought for their country or saved lives through medicine.

Here is a great king, David, who has done much for his country and ruled well. His sin with Bathsheba was practiced with impunity by the rulers and tyrants of his time. He did what everyone expects kings to do. So what! Business has never been better in the country. The stock market is soaring. Yet David does an amazing thing. He humbles himself before God saying “Against You and You only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight.”

Here was evil that very deeply hurt other people. It cost Uriah his life in addition to other servants of David and shamed Bathsheba. In Matthew’s genealogy of the lineage of Christ four other women are mentioned by name (Tamar, Rehab, Ruth and Mary) but not Bathsheba. She is referred to as “the wife of Uriah.” The evil done to others was fundamentally a breaking of God’s commandments and so was actually sin against God. The sin against others was insignificant compared to the sin against God. All his sin centered upon, culminated in rebellion against the living God. What an affront! What a callous disregard for the commandments of the lover of David’s soul!

So also is the sin that we do. To injure our fellow men is sin because in doing so we violate the commandments of God and we must cry out with David for mercy. We too must plead with God to blot out our transgression and to cleanse us thoroughly, because against God and God only we have sinned. Let us be reminded that this is the cry of a **regenerate man** and if we cry out thus to God it is only because we too have been converted by the grace of God. Because we are regenerate we know that we have sinned against God. Because we are regenerate we are moved to come to God for grace. We still sin as David did but sin does not enslave us such that we cannot and will not come to God for his mercy. Paul puts it this way

Romans 6:12–14 (ESV) — 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. **13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. **14** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Thus we have seen that sin corrupts the entire being even of those whom God has converted. David was a saved person yet every part of his being must be cleansed. Even the remnant of the old man in David affects every part of his being. What of those who are not converted, who are pagan and heathen, who despise YAHWEH and all that is his. Every part of their being is sold under sin so that even the plowing of the wicked is an abomination.

III. We are totally depraved and completely unable to come to God for grace.

Psalm 51:5–6 (ESV) — **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.

See how invasive is this sin of David. He was conceived in sin and born in it. He goes back to the very beginning of **his** life not to implicate his mother in his sin or to blame her for his sinful condition, but to say that every part of **his** being is polluted with sin and has been so from the first moments of **his** life. The effects of sin reach even to his unseen inward parts. David's mother was the Lord's handmaiden and his father Jesse was a godly man yet David's nature is as depraved as any other son of Adam. It is a great error to deny that natural depravity and original sin are not taught in this passage of Scripture as many do.

This doctrine known as Total Depravity concerns the pollution of the whole being of a man not the depths of depravity to which a man sinks. Homosexual proclivities and behavior are said by Paul to be utterly debased yet those who are heterosexual are depraved in their whole beings just as homosexuals are. It is not the heinousness of the sin that is in view here but the corruption of our entire spiritual and moral nature. Because our natures are totally depraved we have no **natural** power to believe in God or to believe what he says in the Bible. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to us apart from the grace of God. Lydia did not believe Paul's message until God opened her eyes to see it.

Paul refers to this deplorable condition of mankind as death.

Ephesians 2:1–5 (ESV) — **1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

So it is that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* explains (IX,3) Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

So we can see, can we not, why David cries out to God for mercy. What other remedy for his sin is there. David prays

Psalm 51:7–11 (ESV) — 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.

Because our whole beings are corrupted by sin we need to fervently pray for God's cleansing. We need the atoning blood of Christ. "Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me savior or I die." "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." O for a clean heart. O for a steadfast spirit and the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit. Do we know our sin? Do we realize the terrible consequences of unconfessed and unforgiven sin? How can we exist apart from the comforts, the counsels, the quickenings and the assistances of God's Spirit? Do we grieve him with our sin?

Have we little joy in the Lord? Then sing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Pray to the Lord to open our lips, to open our shame-silenced mouths that we might praise him who loved us unto salvation. Not sacrifices but a heart broken with the full knowledge of our sinful condition. Not mere liturgy but true repentance. Let the sight of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ be glorious in our eyes. May our desire to be righteous be found pleasing to God. Hasten the day O Lord when we will offer our service to you in your very presence with unspeakable joy. Amen