



The longer I follow Christ the more I notice something disturbing about the way I view sin. Basically I've created a sin hierarchy. There are some sins that I consider to be lesser sins, while others would be greater or more heinous sins. Let me give you some examples. I would consider stealing and lying to be "lesser sins." As I move up the hierarchy, I would place viewing pornography, drunkenness, the use of drugs, adultery and murder as "worse sins." I've thought about my reasoning for this and what it comes down to is the fact that I want to look good.

CNN did a study and asked Americans what they consider to be the worst sins a person can commit. Let me share the top five things American consider morally wrong: The fifth worst sin is viewing porn. The next higher is homosexual behavior. Number three on the list is having an abortion. Number two really shocked me, and it's cheating on your taxes. And the worse sin of all? The number one worst sin in the study is adultery.

Do you have a list in mind of what sins you consider to be worse than others? We want to think there are "big" sins and "little" sins, but the reality is that they are all sins, and this morning we're going to talk about how to restore our relationship with God after we've sinned.

Let me give a quick review. This morning we're continuing our series on The Story. We've been in this series for the last three months and we're going through the entire Bible to get a big picture of God's entire story. Last week we talked about how God used David to conquer the giant Goliath. After David beat the Philistine warrior, David endured relentless pursuit from king Saul for about 15 years and faced death on multiple occasions. After Saul lost his life in battle, David took his place as the new king of Israel.

Wrong Place, Wrong Time

Once the kingdom was securely in his possession, David began to sin in big ways. Many of us are familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba, but a refreshing of our memory can't hurt. In 2 Samuel 11 the story begins with David being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war,
David sent Joab out with the king's men and the
whole Israelite army (2 Samuel 11:1a).**

David stayed home while Joab led the men in war. At dusk David was walking around on the roof and began watching Bathsheba bathe. He was definitely in the wrong place!

So David instructs one of his attendants to find out who the woman is. The man replies, "This is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." David should have stopped right here. Uriah was one of David's closest friends, a man he went into battle with many times. Uriah is listed in the group of the 30 men who were closest to David.

and Uriah the Hittite.

There were thirty-seven in all (23:39).

But David ignores his attendant, calls Bathsheba to his palace, and has sex with her and she becomes pregnant. David tries to cover up his sin and invites Uriah to return home, hoping he can lure him into having sex with Bathsheba his wife. The plan fails and David writes a death order for one of his closest friends. Uriah is killed in battle and David invites Bathsheba to be his new wife.

Honestly, it all seems like David's plan worked—his sin has been covered up and now he can go on with his life. But the problem is the king broke half of the Ten Commandments, and God has a way of revealing what we think is hidden. What David did was displeasing to the Lord, so he sends Nathan the prophet to reveal the truth to David. Nathan pulled no punches. I imagine him taking a deep breath before saying; "David, you are this man." With head held low, David responded just how we imagine the man after God's own heart would.

**Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against
the Lord" (12:13a).**

Open your Bible to Psalm 51 so we can see what David does next. We're going to go through all of Psalm 51 this morning and I'm going to break it into three major parts. First I'm going to talk about confession. After that, I'm going to talk about forgiveness and renewal, and then I'm going to end with evidence of a changed life.

Confession is Good for the Soul

Knowing the horrendous behavior of David, let's see how he responds.

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.**

**Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:1–2).**

Right away this plea for mercy sticks out to me. David begins the psalm and immediately asks God to show him mercy for his big sins. The best definition of mercy I've ever heard is not getting what we deserve. Based on the Levitical Law, David deserved death and he knew it. He knew what he did was wrong. Verse 1 provides a foundation for all this psalm will focus on: mercy, compassion and the unfailing love of God.

David's relationship with God gave him the confidence to make this bold request at such a low time in his life. David knew he had sinned. He was so broken he asks God three times, in three different ways, to remove it completely. Look at how he asks in verse 2: blot, wash and cleanse. The nature of David's request stressed the need for a total and complete forgiveness of his transgressions, iniquity and sin. Can you see the depth of his brokenness in the language he uses to describe the kind of forgiveness he is looking for?

It seems like hiding the big sin for almost a year has wreaked havoc in David's heart. After begging for mercy, David moves to confessing his sin.

**For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge (51:3–4).**

It is clear that David was having a hard time forgetting what he had done. Maybe his dreams were haunted with Uriah or every time he saw Bathsheba he was reminded of what he had done. David felt like his sin was always before him. It's interesting that when David confesses his sins he says his sin is only against God. If I remember correctly David had failed Bathsheba and Uriah also. David felt that most of all he failed God. The reason David writes this is because sin is primarily a vertical issue. When we sin, we are primarily sinning against God. When we sin, and we are going to sin, we can confess our sin. Look at what the book of Proverbs says about confession. *"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy"* (Prov. 28:13).

Continuing through the psalm, David confesses something interesting.

**Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place (51:5–6).**

Some scholars have used this as a proof text for original sin. Original sin basically says that we have always been sinful people; we have a natural bent towards messing up. The text doesn't specifically say "original sin" but it gets you thinking. David makes a connection in verses 5 and 6, the connection of being sinful at

birth to God desiring faithfulness in the womb, which reveals to us the holy nature of God. When David talks about the secret place, from what I've learned I think he's talking about his heart. This would make more sense with how long David has followed God.

David knew he wasn't able to hide his sin, but do we know that? Maybe we think we can hide the small sins, but what about the big sins? A beach near Perranporth, Cornwall in Great Britain is unlike any other stretch of coast in the world. It's not known for its waves or sand, but for what washed up in the surf: tens of thousands of toy Lego bricks. Back in 1997, a shipping container filled with millions of Lego pieces went under the waves off the coast. As a result 62 containers on the ship went overboard, and one of those containers had over 4 million pieces of Legos bound for New York.

No one knows exactly what happened next, or even what was in the other 61 containers, but Lego pieces started washing up on both the north and south coasts of Cornwall. A U.S. oceanographer named Curtis Ebbesmeyer, who studies ocean currents and has been studying the story of the Lego pieces on the coast of Cornwall, offered a simple lesson. He said, "The most profound lesson I've learned from the Lego story is that things that go to the bottom of the sea don't always stay there ... The incident is a perfect example of how even when inside a steel container, sunken items don't stay sunken."

As hard as we try to keep our sin hidden, they're not going to "stay sunken." If you have things hidden deep in your heart, big or small, make a decision to confess them to God. Have a real conversation with God and confess these things to Him.

Forgiveness and Renewal

**Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity (51:7–9).**

Just a quick note; have you noticed the repetition in the Psalm? There is a progression in David's confession. David first petitioned God to forgive him and wash him clean, but he didn't stop there; he took it one step further and requested an inner renewal. Look at verses 7 and 8. David uses a double request for forgiveness that is completed in joy. He begins simply with cleansing and he would be clean. Think of a simple wiping away. Then he moves to a washing, which is more of a deep cleaning. Do you see the similarity here to verses 1 and 2 of the psalm? The cleansing David is writing about here feels like the ceremonial cleansing we see in the Levitical Law. David is not solely concerned with external appearance, he is looking for a deep inner cleansing.

The washing is forgiveness and the inner cleansing is renewal.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,

**and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit,
to sustain me (51:10–12).**

Let me try to explain more clearly this inner renewal. The result of this deep cleansing from sin would be the positive result of joy and gladness. David isn't looking to simply rid himself of guilt; he is looking for a complete forgiveness of the sins he's committed. David is asking for what the apostle John wrote about in the New Testament. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). With the intensity of his writing, it seems David wasn't sure if God would forgive him of the horrible things he had done.

Verses 7 and 8 deal more with an external cleansing while hinting towards inner renewal. Verses 10 through 12 don't hide the request of inner renewal and forgiveness; they speak directly to inner renewal. The verb *renew* used here comes from the Hebrew word **תָּקַן**, meaning to repair or restore. The cleansing with hyssop and washing are terms related to our exterior, but creating a new heart and renewing our spirit deal with the inner parts.

I can relate to the pain David was experiencing; I can relate to his desire to receive forgiveness and be restored into a right relationship with God. When I first gave my life to Christ I felt like I had so many sins to confess. I would often find myself confessing for up to fifteen minutes. I would confess my thoughts, my struggle with smoking, my language, cheating in school or my struggle with past behavior. I basically confessed everything and then confessed it again. I haven't given up this practice of confession. The time I spend may be a little less now and my struggles are different from cussing, smoking and swearing. They've move to pride, selfishness, and my occasional lack of patience with my kids. If you take one thing away from this message, remember: Repentance of sin is an essential part of a thriving walk with Christ.

We all sin; the key is to make sure we repent of our sin. I'm not done talking about renewal. In verse 11 we see that David feared separation from God. David feared losing his friendship with God. Many people have this same fear, in fact some of you have this same fear. David lived under the Law where he was right in fearing this, but we live under the grace of Christ and don't have to fear losing the Holy Spirit in our lives. I'm not saying we should just continue to sin. I like what the scholar John Goldingay says specifically in regards to verse 11: "By God's grace, sin does not separate us from God. But in due course it will do so, unless the sinner repents and unless God takes the kind of action the psalm has been pleading for." What I understand him to be saying is, don't keep sinning. If you are aware of your sin, confess it and experience the joy of salvation once again.

Look at verse 12 because we can't miss what David is talking about here. David knows that when God forgives him he will experience the joy he once experienced. I imagine David is down-cast and in an almost depressed state. He doesn't want to just get "ok" or "good;" he wants joy again. This isn't the joy of finding \$20 in your jacket from last winter. This is the joy of finding that all your debts have been erased. This is like every credit card bill, car payment, school loan and home loan have been completely wiped away. Think of that kind of joy!

Evidence of a Changed Life

David has confessed his sin, asked for forgiveness, and requested an inner renewal. Let's see the evidence of how his life will change.

**Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.**

**Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.**

**Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.**

**You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**

**My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise (51:13–17).**

Hoping to experience this inner renewal we now see what David will dedicate his life to. If we start in verse 13 a better reading would be, "I commit myself to teaching transgressors your ways." This isn't a one-time thing David is committing to; it's an ongoing action. David isn't using this like the Raiders throwing a Hail Mary in the hope of winning the game only to be the same poor team next week. David is making a commitment to a changed life. David's hope in teaching others about the mercy of God is for them to not endure the same pain he dealt with. This is similar to a parent who instructs their child to not touch the stovetop when it's hot. The parent wants to save their child from the pain of touching the stovetop.

Think about this. We love it when people are transparent. We would rather learn from someone who is transparent in their failures than someone who thinks they have it all figured out. Our transparency is powerful in life. Who are you transparent with? Some people may suggest that David isn't the best person to teach others about God's ways because of these big sins he committed. The truth is that David is the best person to teach sinners about God's mercy because he experienced mercy. He knew what it was like to have his sins forgiven, and this makes him one of the best people to teach us about living in God's

mercy. David knew the price of sin and wanted to spare others the substantial cost.

David really was a broken man after God's own heart. In the midst of his brokenness, he was committed to teaching sinners about God and praising God. In verse 17 he shares with us what his sacrifice will be—a broken and contrite heart. This is the kind of leader we can rally to follow; a leader who is humble, teachable, repentant and attentive to God's voice. He isn't a perfect leader; no, he is a leader who has the battle wounds to prove he has lived life and is close to God's heart. He is transparent and models repentance of sin.

All sins come with consequences. The consequences of stealing a candy bar and murder are much different but there is always a consequence. David had to pay the price for his sin. After pouring his heart out to God, Nathan informed him that the child Bathsheba bore would die and David would experience bitter tragedy in his family. One of his sons would rape his sister, another son would kill this son, and then that son would start a coup to overtake the kingdom from his father. In his book *Finishing Strong*, Steve Farrar sums up well the terrible price of sin: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you're willing to pay." There is hope though. Bathsheba became pregnant again and bore David a son named Solomon. In his old age David passed the kingship over to his son Solomon.

We can confess our sin, ask for forgiveness, have an inner renewal and commit to being a changed person, but there are still consequences for our sin. God doesn't take His spirit from us, but we have to deal with our sin. You may be dealing with the pain of a divorce and the struggle of not seeing your children. Maybe you think your sin is smaller, but you still had to pay your

speeding ticket when you broke the law or had to serve jail time for your DUI. There are consequences to our sin.

We don't need to sit around and debate which sins are bigger than others. We need to come face-to-face with the fact that sin separates us from God. We need to repent of our sin and enter a thriving walk with Christ. Leave here encouraged this morning that confession and repentance draw us closer to God. The best part of all this is, that in the genealogical line of David hope enters the world. Twenty-eight generations after David, Jesus Christ was born in the small town of Bethlehem. He came on a ransom mission. He lived a perfect life that would lead Him to the cross where He gave up His life so we can have life. After His death and resurrection the world was changed.

A man named Paul wrote a letter to the Romans where he spoke to them about sin and how Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins. Paul is clear that each and every one of us has sinned and our sin has separated us from the love of God. He made it known that the wages of sin is death. He wrote about how God demonstrated His love for us, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. He told us that we need to confess our sins with our mouth and believe in Christ so we can find salvation. Jesus takes our lists of sins and tears them up. He says, "I gave my life so you can live." It's not about a list of sins, it's about forgiveness. If you have never accepted this free gift of salvation, I invite you to accept it.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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