



**TRUE
CONFESSION,
REAL
FORGIVENESS**

SIN, CONSEQUENCES,
CONFESSION, FORGIVENESS

*A Self-Study in Psalm 51
and 2 Samuel 11 - 12*

by Chuck Gianotti
July 2000



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

Psalm 51:1

Introduction

There are times when a Christian finds himself mired in a problem of sin. Guilt has overcome his sense of peacefulness with God. His presence seems a distant memory. Songs of praise feel hollow and his experience of worship is superficial. Maybe you have felt this way or feel this way now. You have asked God's forgiveness, but you just don't feel forgiven. What can you do? Where can you turn for help.

The root problem often is a superficial treatment of the sin in our lives. We fail to embrace the seriousness of our sin and therefore we cannot appreciate the greatness of his forgiveness. We can learn much from David, about whom God says he is a "man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22) Scripture has preserved David's wrestling with major moral failure in his life, giving us an example of how godly people should respond to their sin.

Psalm 51, written by David, is a passage much worn in many bibles. Called by some, the "Psalm of Penitence", many have found in this passage deeper insight into the response of a godly heart to a holy, yet gracious God. Many have found great spiritual and emotional release as well as.

In our day and age, "sin" is often reduced to a mere social weakness or mistake, and forgiveness is claimed all too prematurely. Sometimes sin is justified as being the lesser of two bad choices. We must resist diluting the seriousness of disobeying God. The consequence of such rationalization is forfeiture of a deeper closeness with Him that comes from confessing and accepting His full forgiveness. A fresh look at this psalm is mandatory.

This study is designed to help you understand the seriousness of sin, its consequences, what we should do about it, and God's response to us. This will be valuable only to the extent that you put the effort into it, both at the study table as well as on your knees. Let me encourage you to carefully and prayerfully read the suggested passages and write your answers in the spaces provided. If you diligently study and apply what you learn, you will gain a greater depth in your relationship with the One who loves you with an everlasting love.

Study

1. Read Psalm 51 two times to become familiar with the passage.
2. Notice the few lines just before verse 1. This is also part of inspired scripture. Who is the author of the psalm?
3. Who confronted the author and why?
4. To understand more fully the background of this psalm, read 2 Samuel 11:1 through 2 Samuel 12:25.
5. According to the following passage what sins did David commit (in your own words):
 - a. 2 Samuel 11:1-5
 - b. 2 Samuel 11:6-25
6. Besides the two “big” sins, what else in David's attitudes, actions and words could be seen as sin? (See Exodus 20:15-17)
7. What was God's attitude toward David's sin? (2 Samuel 11:27)
8. Did David confess his sin(s) right away? Is there any evidence that a period of time elapsed first? (2 Samuel 11:27)
9. Nathan (remember him from the beginning of Psalm 51?) confronts David in 2 Samuel 12:1-12. How does he do it?

10. In so condemning the “rich man” in the story, David condemned himself. Now Nathan brings word of God's judgment. Why do you suppose Nathan told the story first, instead of just laying out God's judgment on David?
11. In your own words how did God interpret David's actions?
(2 Samuel 12:9)
12. Against whom did David ultimately sin? (2 Samuel 12:10)
13. What are the consequences of David's sin, that is, what would happen as a result of David's actions?
- a. 2 Samuel 12:10
 - b. 2 Samuel 12:11a
 - c. 2 Samuel 12:11b-12
 - d. 2 Samuel 12:14a
 - e. 2 Samuel 12:14b
14. Does God treat only “big” sins such as murder seriously? Explain.
(James 2:10)

15. What was David's response? (2 Samuel 12:13a)
16. After nine months of living in unconfessed sin David finally acknowledges his sin. Psalm 51 is a reflection by David on the thoughts of his heart at the moment he realizes the seriousness of his sin and the need for confession. Re-read Psalm 51 two times. What key words show his attitude?
17. Look up the word "mercy" or "gracious" (depending on your translation) in a good Bible dictionary or Bible handbook. What is David asking for when he uses these words?
18. What do you think David means by "washing" and "cleansing"? (Psalm 51:2)
19. Summarize David's initial plea for help. (Psalm 51:1-2)
20. In Psalm 51:3-4, we find an example of biblical confession. Look up the word "confess" in a good Bible dictionary or handbook. What does this word mean?
21. Does "confession" then mean simply saying "I am sorry?" or is there something more?

22. Describe David's confession in your own words.
23. David's confession goes to a deep level. He confesses that the whole problem of "sin" goes back to before the Bathsheba and Uriah incident. How does he bring this out? (Psalm 51:5-6, see also Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:11-12)
24. In verses 1-6, summarize David's heart attitude and emotions. Would you say he sloughed over his sin or attributed it to social pressure, human weakness or any other alibi? Or do you note a sense of desperation in his statements? Explain.
25. Does David ask that God would remove all the consequences of his sin? Explain.
26. How deep should our honesty about our sin go? (Psalm 51:6)
27. What then does David ask for? (Psalm 51:7-9)

28. The figures of speech in this psalm reflect a high degree of emotion on David's part. In verses 7-9 he asks for forgiveness (that is, cleansing as one would clean a dirty rag) and a return of the joy that he had once experienced when he was in close relationship with God. He asks God to deal with the specific sin he confessed in verses 3-4. In verses 10- 12 he asks the Lord to deal with the deeper problem of his sin nature, that is, his inborn tendency to sin. Summarize in your own words David's request in verse 10.
29. In verse 11, David is not in fear of losing his salvation by the removal of the Holy Spirit—that is not the issue. The relationship of the Holy Spirit to God's people in the Old Testament is different than His relationship to believers in the New Testament. Believers after the time of Christ are indwelt *permanently* by the Holy Spirit, as a seal of their salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14). However, before Christ the Holy Spirit was given for specific, selected purposes in a person's life. David had been anointed as king and had the Holy Spirit on him for this select purpose. Therefore, David is really asking that God not remove the Holy Spirit's anointing for him to continue as king. He must have remembered well that this had been the fate of king Saul before him (I Samuel 11:6, 16:13-14).
30. Psalm 51:11 might be seen then as David pleading for his life! According to Exodus 21:12, what would be his just punishment?
31. In verses 13-17, David outlines what he will do if and when he receives God's forgiveness. What are some of these things?
32. According to verse 17, what is the Lord really looking for? Describe this in your own words.

33. Based on this study of Psalm 51, why do you think some people don't experience joy and a special closeness to God?
34. Read Luke 7:36-50. Do you feel that the degree to which we acknowledge the seriousness of our sin and the degree of sincerity in confession have an effect on our appreciation of God's forgiveness? Explain.
35. Did God answer David's prayer for forgiveness? (2 Samuel 12:13b) Explain.
36. Although God revoked the death sentence for murder and adultery, one of the consequences of his sin was immediately carried out, despite David's pleading—the death of his son (2 Samuel 12:15-23). Did David become bitter? Did he lash out at Nathan for telling him God's judgment? Describe his reaction.
37. The other consequences were carried out as a natural result of David's sin. Even today, one of the consequences of David's sin is still happening. Many unbelievers dishonor and even mock the Bible and God because of what David did! For example, "How could God be good if He used such a wicked person like David? Is that the kind of God the Bible says we should love?" David's sin still has lingering consequences! With what you have learned so far in this study, how might you answer someone who makes a statement like that?

38. David's family experienced immorality, disobedience, and much more. Many of his children rebelled against him, Absalom being the most notable one. David remained a man of war and bloodshed all his life, which later disqualified him from being the one to build the temple for God. Read 2 Samuel 13:1-36, 15:7-12, 16:20-23. Was David truly forgiven even though he still had to suffer consequences?
39. He accepted full responsibility for his actions and did not complain when he reaped what he had sowed. Read Galatians 6:7. How does repentance relate to accepting the consequences of our actions?
40. Read 2 Samuel 12:24-25 and Psalm 32. How do these passages show that David received and embraced God's forgiveness and was restored to a joyful relationship with the Lord?
41. Is there currently a sin in your life that you have been hiding and is unconfessed? What are some of the consequences of this sin?
42. Have you fully confessed your sin to God?
43. How will you react if God does not remove all the consequences of your sin? What is your response to Galatians 6:7?
44. Has your fellowship with God been fully restored?

Further Reflection

God's word of forgiveness came to David through Nathan the prophet. He proclaimed that the name of David's second child through Bathsheba was to be Jedidiah¹, which means "Beloved of the Lord." David was still loved by God, and God wanted to reassure him of that.

David received full forgiveness for his sin. God did not hold a grudge against him. Only the ungodly characterize David as a murderer or adulterer. He saw himself as a forgiven sinner—forgiven by a gracious God. Yet, he knew the depths of sin and therefore he knew the depths of God's love. In all the failures of David, he never departed from following God. This man who fell in the darkness of rebellion against his Lord, reached out continually to the heart of the One who dealt out his discipline. Not only did he truly confess his sins, but also he acknowledged that the consequences were well deserved. He deserved even worse—death.

Forgiveness and removal of consequences are not identical. David was fully forgiven—but he still suffered consequences. And he accepted this! This brought new depths to his relationship to God. He discovered the graciousness of God and joy of forgiveness like never before. In fact, Psalm 32 is the reflection of David's heart when by faith he received the full forgiveness of God: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven..."

To Christians today, God has already shown himself to be merciful and has forgiven us for all of our sins—past, present and future (see Romans 3:25-26). Yet, according to I John 1:9, our experience of his "in-family" forgiveness depends on "David-like" confession of our sins.

If you are still wrestling with guilt and cannot bring yourself to accept God's forgiveness, I would suggest you meditate on Psalm 51 every day until God breaks your heart. Ask Him to help you understand the seriousness of your sin, so that you can more greatly understand His attitude toward that sin. Pray that He would help you experience new depths of His love as you realize His deep forgiveness for you in Christ. Ask Him to help you summon the courage to hold on to Him continually, regardless of the consequences. Ask Him to help you accept the consequences of your sin and to control bitterness against Him as well as against others.

Finally, read and meditate on Psalm 32. In faith, thank the Lord for his forgiveness. He will restore the joy of your salvation as you receive his grace in faith—simply by believing that in the death of Christ, you are completely forgiven.

¹ Often people were given various names, which were more epithets than anything else. Only one was usually used on a daily basis. This second child of David was also called Solomon.

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
