

Living Out of Old Covenant Theology: An Example

Psalm 51 is the principle text used by Christians to work through repentance and secure forgiveness. The passage itself is a very poignant piece of prose as it deals openly with David's appeal for forgiveness following Nathan's exposure of his adultery with Bathsheba, and his murder of Uriah, her husband.

The issue that is pertinent for us is that it is an Old Covenant (OC) piece of literature. King David is under the OC, and even though he has an intimate relationship with God, he has to approach God and get forgiveness with the OC rules in play.

It is critical to understand, therefore, that this Psalm is not an example that we should exactly copy as a model for repentance. This is because, today, we are to operate as Kingdom citizens and sons living under the New Covenant (NC). God's covenant has changed, and our approach to repentance and forgiveness as gentile believers is different to David's.

Read the whole Psalm below and try to get the 'feel' of it through NC 'glasses'. Notice whatever doesn't sit right with you.

NOTE: I've used the Living Translation to get away from the standard versions that most of us know off by heart. This will help bring home what's important for you to see.

Psalm 51 Living Bible (TLB)¹

O loving and kind God, have mercy. Have pity upon me and take away the awful stain of my transgressions. Oh, wash me, cleanse me from this guilt. Let me be pure again. For I admit my shameful deed—it haunts me day and night. It is against you and you alone I sinned and did this terrible thing. You saw it all, and your sentence against me is just. But I was born a sinner, yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. You deserve honesty from the heart; yes, utter sincerity and truthfulness. Oh, give me this wisdom.

Sprinkle me with the cleansing blood and I shall be clean again. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. And after you have punished me, give me back my joy again. Don't keep looking at my sins—erase them from your sight. Create in me a new, clean heart, O God, filled with clean thoughts and right desires. Don't toss me aside, banished forever from your presence. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. Then I will teach your ways to other sinners, and they—guilty like me—will repent and return to you. Don't sentence me to death. O my God, you alone can rescue me. Then I will sing of your forgiveness, for my lips will be unsealed—oh, how I will praise you.

You don't want penance; if you did, how gladly I would do it! You aren't interested in offerings burned before you on the altar. It is a broken spirit you want—remorse and penitence. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not ignore. And Lord, don't punish Israel for my sins—help your people and protect Jerusalem. And when my heart is right, then you will rejoice in the good that I do and in the bullocks I bring to sacrifice upon your altar.

As a help, compare the Living Bible translation with some quotes from The Passion Translation.

Psalm 51 The Passion Translation (TPT)²

1-2: God give me grace from your fountain of forgiveness. I know your abundant love is enough to wash away my guilt. Take away this shameful guilt of sin. Forgive the full extent of my wrong. And erase this deep stain on my conscience.

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2 – The Passion Translation copyright © BroadStreet Publishing Group, LLC,

10-12: Start over with me, and create a new, clean heart within me. Fill me with pure thoughts and holy desires, ready to please You. May there never be even a shadow of darkness between us! May You never deprive me of Your Holy, Sacred Spirit! Let the passion of my life be restored, tasting joy in every breakthrough You bring to me! Give me more of Your Spirit-wind so that I may stand strong and true to You!

15-17: Lord God, unlock my heart, unlock my lips and I will overcome with my joyous praise! For the source of Your pleasure is not in my performance or the sacrifices I might offer to You. The fountain of Your pleasure is found In the sacrifice of my shattered heart before You. You will not despise my tenderness as I humbly bow down at Your feet!

Many will use Psalm 51 as the blueprint for Christian repentance, not realising that it was written and experienced by David from an OC framework. Added to this, leaders may say something like: “God has ordained brokenness and the cross as the path we must take to maturity, while our overwhelmingly natural leanings are towards a pain-free journey.”³ This puts much pressure on believers to accept the use of Psalm 51.

Those who use Psalm 51 as a model point out the importance of brokenness and humility which is quite evident in the passage. The cross and associated dying is also drawn from this OT Psalm. However – and that’s a BIG however – it exemplifies the wrong sort of characteristics that a son is supposed to walk in under the NC. For example:

- **The Cross** is dying to our selfish desires – it’s not neglecting or flagellating ourselves.
- **Brokenness** is the death of our will and our rebellion – it’s not being weak and unable to do anything because of the shame and burdens we carry.
- **Humility** is allowing Father to have his way – it’s not berating ourselves continually.

The function of the OC was to point out sin and show that humans are unable to be perfect. The point of the NC is for God to impute perfection to us, enabling us to come back into Adamic sonship. God paid the price for sin, supplied permanent cover for sin, and opened up forgiveness for those whose hearts are genuinely repentant.⁴ So:

- **Forgiveness** is not grovelled for any more – it’s ours for the asking.⁵
- **Condemnation** and accusation are not our lot any more – provided we are Spirit-led.⁶

There’s so much that’s different between being a Christian and being a son. If we want to operate as a Kingdom son, we have to think like a son, and that includes living with a NC mindset and appropriating everything the NC supplies without any OC hang-ups – that includes how we approach forgiveness.

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3 – Marc Dupont (2002) “Pursuing Open Heavens” Sovereign World: Tonbridge, TN p:46

4 – See Romans 8:3

5 – Colossians 2:13

6 – Romans 8:1