

Weekly Reflection – “Confession and repentance are a good gift.”

I believe what God wants us to recognize, maybe for the first time or maybe as a reminder, that confession and repentance are an amazing gift, they are grace. I have the picture of those places that hand out the little sample on toothpicks. They want you to taste it and hopefully like it and then buy the product. God wants us to see how amazing the gift of confession and repentance are, so that we will live lives of confession and repentance.

Not always do we view them as a grace. It does not always feel like a gift to confess that you have sinned, done wrong, need to change. Confession and repentance can feel uncomfortable for our flesh, awkward, humiliating, painful, and risky. Something that often we try to avoid. God wants to show us that confession and repentance are grace, they are a really good thing, and when we see that, we will desire to press into and live lives of confession and repentance.

Through confession and repentance, we are healed.

Confession and repentance are like the administering of the medicine we need to be healed. It's the taking of the medicine out of the bottle and getting it into our body. We also need to remember that before we will take medicine, we need to know we are sick. Until we have a God centered perspective on sin, we won't really see how sick with sin we really are, we won't see confession and repentance as grace, as a gift. I want to look at a couple verses in Psalm 51 to help us have a God centered perspective on sin.

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.” (Psalm 51:2-3 ESV) David uses three words here that capture the sinfulness of sin.

The first word is “transgression.” Transgression is rebellion; it's trespassing; it's a willing, knowledgeable stepping over God's boundaries. It's you and me willingly parking in the “no parking” spot even though we see the sign, and we tell ourselves I'm just going to be a minute. This is what Achan did, he knew God had said destroy everything except the gold and silver and that goes to God. But Achan took it anyway. This is what the word broke faith means in Joshua 7:1; the Hebrew word (maal) describes a conscious act of treachery or unfaithfulness against the Lord. And I think it is dangerous for us, as believers, to think that our rebel days are over; our rebel days are not over; we are still being redeemed from our rebellion.

The second word is “iniquity.” Iniquity is the most foundational word for sin; it is moral uncleanness. It's not just that I do wrong things; it's not just that I say wrong things; it's not just that I have wrong reactions to different circumstances. I am wrong; there's something wrong inside of me, and it's this uncleanness inside of me that results in the rebelling outside of me. *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalm 51:5 ESV)* David is saying that he was born with this iniquity in him, sin nature, desire to rebel against God. And so, change has to happen inside of me. That is why I need a Redeemer who can get inside of me and clean me.

The third word for sin is the word “sin.” And it's said that sin means missing the mark, and that's sort of true, but not really a good definition. If you want to take that picture of a Bowman pulling his bow and aiming at a target, it's not just that the arrow misses the target. It's that, with his best aim and the best of his power, the arrow consistently falls short of the target. That's what sin is. If transgression is rebellion, if iniquity is moral impurity, then, sin is inability. Sin leaves me unable to live up to God's standard apart from the gift of divine power.

And so, you put these words together, not only do I often not want to do God's will, but I also can't apart from God's rescue. That's the theology, and that's why there's nothing beautiful about sin. Sin is the ultimate human disaster, it's destructive at every point.

Now here is the good news, there is a cure for this deadly disease, it's the blood of Jesus, and the blood of Jesus is applied to our hearts by confession and repentance. *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:7-9 ESV)

Until we see sin as the disease that it is we won't ever live in confession and repentance the way we need to. Confession and repentance are a gift of grace because it is the means of applying the blood of Jesus to our lives, it is the means of cleansing us of the disease of sin.

Confession and repentance lead to victory.

You've probably seen before and after pictures of something. I want to show you the before and after picture of Israel.

Before confession and repentance: *"So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water."* (Joshua 7:4-5 ESV) The before picture is Israel getting defeated and embarrassed. And God tells them this is not a one-time thing. *"Get up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, 'There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.'"* (Joshua 7:13 ESV)

Now here is the after confession and repentance picture: *"And the Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land.'* (Joshua 8:1 ESV) God tells them they will have victory before the battle even starts. *"But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction."* (Joshua 8:26 ESV) Before we see defeat and after we see victory.

In other words, confession and repentance lead to victory over the sin, the enemy, the strongholds in our lives. *"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."* (2 Corinthians 7:10 ESV) This is written to believers, this is not talking about our being initially saved, justified, it's talking about our being saved, our sanctification. Godly confession and repentance lead to our salvation, our victory over sin, over the enemy.

Confession and repentance restore intimacy with God.

Let's look at the first and last verses of chapter 7. *"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel."* (Joshua 7:1 ESV) *"And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor."* (Joshua 7:26 ESV) What happened between God's anger burning against them and God turning from His burning anger? Confession and repentance happened. We see that their relationship with God has been restored.

We're taught the same thing in verse 12: *"Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you."*

(Joshua 7:12 ESV) It's pretty clear what is implied here. Sin is a barrier between us and God, and what removes that barrier is confession and repentance.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:10-12 ESV) Why would David pray for God to renew him, to not leave him, for the Holy Spirit, for restored joy, unless he had not been living in it, not been experiencing it like he knew he could be?

Let's think about this from a different perspective. Why does God make us aware of what needs to change in us, why does God convict us of sin, why does God make us aware of our transgressions and our iniquity? Is it just because God enjoys making us squirm, God just wants to put us in our place, He just wants to make sure we are aware of how sinful we really are? Absolutely not. The reason God calls attention to what needs to change in us, the reason God brings conviction of our sin is because He wants us to live in a place where there are no barriers to an intimate relationship with Him. Because God loves us, He does His part to make us aware that there are barriers that need to be removed so we can experience that love that He has for us. **"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:19-20 ESV)** Jesus tells us its because He loves us that He reveals sin our lives. He tells us what we should do about the sin He has revealed, repent. And Jesus tells us what will happen if we repent of the sin He has revealed to us, intimacy with Jesus.