

19-51-01-The Heart in Contrition

contrite heart, repentance, godly sorrow, Epiphany, Lent

Psa 51:17

The right heart condition is a contrite heart condition.

INTRODUCTION:

–**Text: Psa 51:17**, *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* Nearby this verse is **Psa 53:1a**, The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.’ Anyone who says *there is a God*, but lives as if there is not is *also a fool*. We can say the same for someone whose heart is at peace with an ungodly life-style. It’s a bad heart condition that *could prove fatal!* Our **text** today says that **HOM.idea**.

–The context of this verse is *not a pleasant story*. Introducing Psalm 51 is this superscription: “A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.” David published his secret sin with a public prayer and publicly seen ashes, as some use in Lent...

–Lent follows Epiphany for a reason. The manifestation of Christ to a world filled with personal sins *exposes our need for a proper response to His light on our lives*. During the Lenten season, we explore *this proper heart condition* in themes of *the wilderness, repentance, and fasting*. But before we get to Lent I want to look at how the *Epiphany* or *manifestation* of Christ can enable our proper “heart” response. The first of these is **The Heart in Contrition**, and my first point is...

I. Contrition’s Roots in the OT Sacrificial System

A. We begin to understand *contrition* by *looking at the OT sacrifices*:

1. These sacrifices displayed the sorrowful condition of sin and highlighted the need for a sorrowful response to sin. (Innocent animals were being *slain for guilty sinners*, and the sinners needed to feel it: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit*”)
2. Bloody animal sacrifices gave a *vivid depiction* of sin’s terrible consequences under *God’s holy judgment* [**David’s own judgment** in **2 Sam.12:1-7a**, The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or

cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.” David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”]

- B. The OT speaks of God as enjoying these sacrifices, not just for removing the sinner’s guilt, but for changing the sinner’s heart. (This “joy” was shared by Christ Himself— Heb 12:2. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame...)

TRANS: [A. W. Tozer: “God will take nine steps toward us, but he will not take the tenth. He will incline us to repent, but he cannot do our repenting for us.”] God makes the first move, but we must respond, and the proper heart response is that of “a broken spirit.” But next is understanding...

II. Contrition As a Heart Condition (“a broken and contrite heart”)

A. What do these terms mean?

1. “**heart**” – a term meaning the totality of our inner self, expressed in *emotion, thought, and will*. [Translating repentance: to the Kekchi Indians of Guatemala it means “it pains my heart”; to the Baouli tribe in West Africa their *sorrow for sin* means “it hurts so much I want to quit it.”]
2. “**broken**” [lit., burst or fractured] – Christ’s life, broken at Calvary, was the only adequate sacrifice for sin. The brokenness of the sinner’s heart is the only adequate disposition in which to acknowledge His sacrifice.
3. “**contrite**” [lit., crushed or smitten] – Exemplified by Christ’s own broken and contrite heart on the Cross— Isaiah 53:10a (ESV), Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief...

B. What happens to us when our heart is broken and contrite?*

1. *Ideas of self-importance vanish [broken jars are worthless to people] But “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (In fact, God delights to use the person whose heart broken over sin.)
2. *Superficiality is over. [Spurgeon: “With broken hearts the hymn is a real hymn, the prayer a real prayer, the hearing of sermons is earnest work, and the preaching of them is the hardest work of all.”]
3. *We express grief, because our sins resist our Father’s will; they ignore our Savior’s love; they grieve the Holy Spirit, and they

can lead others astray.

TRANS: The heart in contrition is **not** just remorse. [A pastor in the 1800s captured this idea well: “It is one thing to mourn for sin because it exposes us to hell, and another to mourn for it because it is an infinite evil; one thing to mourn for it because it is injurious to ourselves, and another thing to mourn for it because it is wrong and offensive to God. It is one thing to be terrified; another, to be humbled.”] Contrition sets our focus on God.... And finally, there is...

III. Gratitude for God’s Grace in Contrition

- A. Psa 51:16b-17 (TLB), 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. (Paraphrased in another way, these words are a form of praise: “God, how good You are to me! When no sacrifice in the law could cover my sin of adultery and murder, you look at my broken heart and forgave me!”)
- B. David was gratefully saying: “You have not despised my broken and contrite heart, O God!” [Christ told how the proud Pharisee despised the broken-hearted publican who cried, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!” But God heard that cry and forgave him, while the Pharisee went away unjustified and lost.] (That story, and so many other Scriptures, show the key to God’s heart is for the sinner to have a broken and contrite heart: Psa 34:18— The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. // Isa 57:15— For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones. // Isa 66:2— “This is the one I esteem,” declares the LORD, “he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”)

CONCLUSION:

—**The right heart condition is a contrite heart condition.** [Theologian Edward Payson said, “There is a greater depravity in not repenting of sin when it has been committed, than in committing it at first. To deny, as Peter did, is bad; but not to weep bitterly, as he did, when we have denied, is worse.”] We see things clearly and things get cleared up, when our hearts are contrite....

—[from Max I. Reich’s poem, “The Penitential Tear”

The penitent can see
With more than mortal sight;
Earth’s wisdom gropes and fails
Like lame men in the night.

To penitents alone
Are heavenly things made clear:
The best of lenses is
A penitential tear.]