

# PSALM 51

Though David penned this psalm upon a very particular occasion, yet, it is of as general use as any of David's psalms; it is the most eminent of the penitential psalms, and most expressive of the cares and desires of a repenting sinner. It is a pity indeed that in our devout addresses to God we should have any thing else to do than to praise God, for that is the work of heaven; but we make other work for ourselves by our own sins and follies: we must come to the throne of grace in the posture of penitents, to confess our sins and sue for the grace of God; and, if therein we would take with us words, we can nowhere find any more apposite than in this psalm, which is the record of David's repentance for his sin in the matter of Uriah, which was the greatest blemish upon his character: all the rest of his faults were nothing to this; it is said of him (~~1~~<sup>1</sup> Kings 15:5), That "he turned not aside from the commandment of the Lord all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." In this psalm,

**I.** He confesses his sin (v. 3-6).

**II.** He prays earnestly for the pardon of his sin (v. 1, 2, 7, 9).

**III.** For peace of conscience (v. 8, 12).

**IV.** For grace to go and sin no more (v. 10, 11, 14).

**V.** For liberty of access to God (v. 15).

**IV.** He promises to do what he could for the good of the souls of others (v. 13) and for the glory of God (v. 16, 17, 19). And, lastly, concludes with a prayer for Zion and Jerusalem (v. 18). Those whose consciences charge them with any gross sin should, with a believing regard to Jesus Christ, the Mediator, again and again pray over this psalm; nay, though we have not been guilty of adultery and murder, or any the like enormous crime, yet in singing it, and praying over it, we may very sensibly apply it all to ourselves, which if we do with suitable affections we shall, through Christ, find mercy to pardon and grace for seasonable help.

## ~~450~~ PSALM 51:1-6

### PENITENTIAL PETITIONS

*To the chief musician. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.*

The title has reference to a very sad story, that of David's fall. But, though he fell, he was not utterly cast down, for God graciously upheld him and raised him up.

**1.** The sin which, in this psalm, he laments, was the folly and wickedness he committed with his neighbour's wife, a sin not to be spoken of, nor thought of, without detestation. His debauching of Bathsheba was the inlet to all the other sins that followed; it was as the letting forth of water. This sin of David's is recorded for warning to all, that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall.

**2.** The repentance which, in this psalm, he expresses, he was brought to by the ministry of Nathan, who was sent of God to convince him of his sin, after he had continued above nine months (for aught that appears) without any particular expressions of remorse and sorrow for it. But though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, and to lie a great while in it, yet he will, by some means or other, recover them to repentance, bring them to himself and to their right mind again. Herein, generally, he uses the ministry of the word, which yet he is not tied to. But those that have been overtaken in any fault ought to reckon a faithful reproof the greatest kindness that can be done them and a wise reprover their best friend. *Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be excellent oil.*

**3.** David, being convinced of his sin, poured out his soul to God in prayer for mercy and grace. Whither should backsliding children return, but to the Lord their God, from whom they have backslidden, and who alone can heal their backslidings?

**4.** He drew up, by divine inspiration, the workings of his heart towards God, upon this occasion, into a psalm, that it might be often repeated, and long after reviewed; and this he committed to the chief musician, to be sung in the public service of the church.

(1.) As a profession of his own repentance, which he would have to be generally taken notice of, his sin having been notorious, that the plaster might be as wide as the wound. Those that truly repent of their sins will not be ashamed to own their repentance; but, having lost the honour of innocents, they will rather covet the honour of penitents.

(2.) As a pattern to others, both to bring them to repentance by his example and to instruct them in their repentance what to do and what to say. Being converted himself, he thus *strengthens his brethren* (<sup><4223></sup>Luke 22:32), and *for this cause he obtained mercy*, <sup><5016></sup>1 Timothy 1:16.

In these words we have,

**I.** David's humble petition, v. 1, 2. His prayer is much the same with that which our Saviour puts into the mouth of his penitent publican in the parable: *God be merciful to me a sinner!* <sup><4283></sup>Luke 18:13. David was, upon many accounts, a man of great merit; he had not only done much, but suffered much, in the cause of God; and yet, when he is convinced of sin, he does not offer to balance his evil deeds with his good deeds, nor can he think that his services will atone for his offences; but he flies to God's infinite mercy, and depends upon that only for pardon and peace: *Have mercy upon me, O God!* He owns himself obnoxious to God's justice, and therefore casts himself upon his mercy; and it is certain that the best man in the world will be undone if God be not merciful to him. Observe,

**1.** What his plea is for this mercy: "*have mercy upon me, O God!* not according to the dignity of my birth, as descended from the prince of the tribe of Judah, not according to my public services as Israel's champion, or my public honours as Israel's king;" his plea is not, *Lord, remember David and all his afflictions, how he vowed to build a place for the ark* (<sup><4071></sup>Psalms 132:1, 2); a true penitent will make no mention of any such thing; but "Have mercy upon me for mercy's sake. I have nothing to plead with thee but,"

(1.) "The freeness of thy mercy, according to thy lovingkindness, thy clemency, the goodness of thy nature, which inclines thee to pity the miserable."

(2.) "The fulness of thy mercy. There are in thee not only lovingkindness and tender mercies, but abundance of them, a multitude of tender mercies

for the forgiveness of many sinners, of many sins, to multiply pardons as we multiply transgressions.”

**2.** What is the particular mercy that he begs — the pardon of sin. *Blot out my transgressions*, as a debt is blotted or crossed out of the book, when either the debtor has paid it or the creditor has remitted it. “Wipe out my transgressions, that they may not appear to demand judgment against me, nor stare me in the face to my confusion and terror.” The blood of Christ, sprinkled upon the conscience, to purify and pacify that, blots out the transgression, and, having reconciled us to God, reconciles up to ourselves, v. 2. “*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity; wash my soul from the guilt and stain of my sin by thy mercy and grace, for it is only from a ceremonial pollution that the water of separation will avail to cleanse me. Multiple to wash me; the stain is deep, for I have lain long soaking in the guilt, so that it will not easily be got out. O wash me much, wash me thoroughly. Cleanse me from my sin.*” Sin defiles us, renders us odious in the sight of the holy God, and uneasy to ourselves; it unfits us for communion with God in grace or glory. When God pardons sin he cleanses us from it, so that we become acceptable to him, easy to ourselves, and have liberty of access to him. Nathan had assured David, upon his first profession of repentance, that his sin was pardoned. *The Lord has taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die,* <sup>1123</sup>2 Samuel 12:13. Yet he prays, *Wash me, cleanse, blot out my transgressions;* for God will be sought unto even for that which he has promised; and those whose sins are pardoned must pray that the pardon may be more and more cleared up to them. God had forgiven him, but he could not forgive himself; and therefore he is thus importunate for pardon, as one that thought himself unworthy of it and knew how to value it.

## **II.** David's penitential confessions, v. 3-5.

**1.** He was very free to own his guilt before God: *I acknowledge my transgressions;* this he had formerly found the only way of easing his conscience, <sup>1510</sup>Psalm 32:4, 5. Nathan said, *Thou art the man. I am,* says David; *I have sinned.*

**2.** He had such a deep sense of it that he was continually thinking of it with sorrow and shame. His contrition for his sin was not a slight sudden passion, but an abiding grief: “*My sin is ever before me, to humble me and mortify me, and make me continually blush and tremble. It is ever against*

me” (so some); “I see it before me as an enemy, accusing and threatening me.” David was, upon all occasions, put in mid of his sin, and was willing to be so, for his further abasement. He never walked on the roof of his house without a penitent reflection on his unhappy walk there when thence he saw Bathsheba; he never lay down to sleep without a sorrowful thought of the bed of his uncleanness, never sat down to meat, never sent his servant on an errand, or took his pen in hand, but it put him in mind of his making Uriah drunk, the treacherous message he sent by him, and the fatal warrant he wrote and signed for his execution. Note, The acts of repentance, even for the same sin, must be often repeated. It will be of good use for us to have our sins ever before us, that by the remembrance of our past sins we may be kept humble, may be armed against temptation, quickened to duty, and made patient under the cross.

**(1.)** He confesses his actual transgressions (v. 4): *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.* David was a very great man, and yet, having done amiss, submits to the discipline of a penitent, and thinks not his royal dignity will excuse him from it. Rich and poor must here meet together; there is one law of repentance for both; the greatest must be judged shortly, and therefore must judge themselves now. David was a very good man, and yet, having sinned, he willingly accommodates himself to the place and posture of a penitent. The best men, if they sin, should give the best example of repentance.

**[1.]** His confession is particular; “*I have done this evil*, this that I am now reproved for, this that my own conscience now upbraids me with.” Note, It is good to be particular in the confession of sin, that we may be the more express in praying for pardon, and so may have the more comfort in it. We ought to reflect upon the particular heads of our sins of infirmity and the particular circumstances of our gross sins.

**[2.]** He aggravates the sin which he confesses and lays a load upon himself for it: *Against thee, and in thy sight.* Hence our Saviour seems to borrow the confession which he puts into the mouth of the returning prodigal: *I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,* <sup>☞</sup>Luke 15:18. Two things David laments in his sin: — *First*, That it was committed against God. To him the affront is given, and he is the party wronged. It is his truth that by wilful sin we deny, his conduct that we despise, his command that we disobey, his promise that we distrust, his name that we dishonour, and it is with him that we deal deceitfully and disingenuously. From this topic

Joseph fetched the great argument against sin (<sup>(139)</sup>Genesis 39:9), and David here the great aggravation of it: *Against thee only*. Some make this to intimate the prerogative of his crown, that, as a king, he was not accountable to any but God; but it is more agreeable to his present temper to suppose that it expresses the deep contrition of his soul for his sin, and that it was upon right grounds. He here sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, against his own soul, and body, and family, against his kingdom, and against the church of God, and all this helped to humble him; but none of these were sinned against so as God was, and therefore this he lays the most sorrowful accent upon: *Against thee only have I sinned. Secondly*, That it was committed in God's sight. "This not only proves it upon me, but renders it exceedingly sinful." This should greatly humble us for all our sins, that they have been committed under the eye of God, which argues either a disbelief of his omniscience or a contempt of his justice.

[3.] He justifies God in the sentence passed upon him — that *the sword should never depart from his house*, <sup>(120)</sup>2 Samuel 12:10, 11. He is very forward to own his sin, and aggravate it, not only that he might obtain the pardon of it himself, but that by his confession he might give honour to God. *First*, That God might be justified in the threatenings he had spoken by Nathan. "Lord, I have nothing to say against the justice of them; I deserve what is threatened, and a thousand times worse." Thus Eli acquiesced in the like threatenings (<sup>(108)</sup>1 Samuel 3:18), *It is the Lord*. And Hezekiah (<sup>(121)</sup>2 Kings 20:19), *Good is the word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken. Secondly*, That God might be clear when he judged, that is, when he executed those threatenings. David published his confession of sin that when hereafter he should come into trouble none might say God had done him any wrong; for he owns the Lord is righteous: thus will all true penitents justify God by condemning themselves. *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us*.

(2.) He confesses his original corruption (v. 5): *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity*. He does not call upon God to behold it, but upon himself. "Come, my soul, look unto the rock out of which I was hewn, and thou wilt find I was shapen in iniquity. Had I duly considered this before, I find I should not have made so bold with the temptation, nor have ventured among the sparks with such tinder in my heart; and so the sin might have been prevented. Let me consider it now, not to excuse or extenuate the sin — *Lord, I did so; but indeed I could not help it, my inclination led me to it*" (for as that plea is false, with due care and watchfulness, and improvement

of the grace of God, he might have helped it, so it is what a true penitent never offers to put in), “but let me consider it rather as an aggravation of the sin: Lord, I have not only been guilty of adultery and murder, but I have an adulterous murderous nature; therefore I abhor myself.” David elsewhere speaks of the admirable structure of his body (<sup>139</sup>Psalm 139:14, 15); it was *curiously wrought*; and yet here he says it was shapen in iniquity, sin was twisted in with it; not as it came out of God's hands, but as it comes through our parents' loins. He elsewhere speaks of the piety of his mother, that she was God's handmaid, and he pleads his relation to her (<sup>116</sup>Psalm 116:16, 86:16), and yet here he says *she conceived him in sin*; for though she was, by grace, a child of God, she was, by nature, a daughter of Eve, and not excepted from the common character. Note, It is to be sadly lamented by every one of us that we brought into the world with us a corrupt nature, wretchedly degenerated from its primitive purity and rectitude; we have from our birth the snares of sin in our bodies, the seeds of sin in our souls, and a stain of sin upon both. This is what we call *original sin*, because it is as ancient as our original, and because it is the original of all our actual transgressions. This is that foolishness which is bound in the heart of a child, that proneness of evil and backwardness to good which is the burden of the regenerate and the ruin of the unregenerate; it is a bent to backslide from God.

**III.** David's acknowledgment of the grace of God (v. 6), both his goodwill towards us (“*thou desirest truth in the inward parts, thou wouldst have us all honest and sincere, and true to our profession*”) and his good work in us — “*In the hidden part thou hast made,*” or shalt make, “*me to know wisdom.*” Note,

**1.** Truth and wisdom will go very far towards making a man a good man. A clear head and a sound heart (prudence and sincerity) bespeak the man of God perfect.

**2.** What God requires of us he himself works in us, and he works it in the regular way, enlightening the mind, and so gaining the will. But how does this come in here?

**(1.)** God is hereby justified and cleared: “Lord, thou was not the author of my sin; there is no blame to be laid upon thee; but I alone must bear it; for thou has many a time admonished me to be sincere, and hast made me to know that which, if I had duly considered it, would have prevented my

falling into this sin; had I improved the grace thou hast given me, I should have kept my integrity.”

(2.) The sin is hereby aggravated: “Lord, thou desirest truth; but where was it when I dissembled with Uriah? *Thou hast made me to know wisdom;* but I have not lived up to what I have known.”

(3.) He is hereby encouraged, in his repentance, to hope that God would graciously accept him; for,

[1.] God had made him sincere in his resolutions never to return to folly again: *Thou desirest truth in the inward part;* this is that which God has an eye to in a returning sinner, that *in his spirit there be no guile,* ~~150~~ Psalm 32:2. David was conscious to himself of the uprightness of his heart towards God in his repentance, and therefore doubted not but God would accept him.

[2.] He hoped that God would enable him to make good his resolutions, that in the hidden part, in the new man, which is called the *hidden man of the heart* (~~150~~ 1 Peter 3:4), he would make him to know wisdom, so as to discern and avoid the designs of the tempter another time. Some read it as a prayer: “Lord, in this instance, I have done foolishly; for the future make me to know wisdom.” Where there is truth God will give wisdom; those that sincerely endeavour to do their duty shall be taught their duty.

## ~~150~~ PSALM 51:7-13

### PENITENTIAL PETITIONS

**I.** See here what David prays for. Many excellent petitions he here puts up, to which if we do but add, “for Christ's sake,” they are as evangelical as any other.

**1.** He prays that God would cleanse him from his sins and the defilement he had contracted by them (v. 7): “*Purge me with hyssop;* that is, pardon my sins, and let me know that they are pardoned, that I may be restored to those privileges which by sin I have forfeited and lost.” The expression here alludes to a ceremonial distinction, that of cleansing the leper, or those that were unclean by the touch of a body by sprinkling water, or blood, or both upon them with a bunch of hyssop, by which they were, at



length, discharged from the restraints they were laid under by their pollution. “Lord, let me be as well assured of my restoration to thy favour, and to the privilege of communion with thee, as they were thereby assured of their re-admission to their former privileges.” But it is founded upon gospel-grace: *Purge me with hyssop*, that is, with the blood of Christ applied to my soul by a lively faith, as water of purification was sprinkled with a bunch of hyssop. It is the blood of Christ (which is therefore called *the blood of sprinkling*, <sup><302></sup>Hebrews 12:24), that purges the conscience from dead works, from that guilt of sin and dread of God which shut us out of communion with him, as the touch of a dead body, under the law, shut a man out from the courts of God's house. If this blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin, cleanse us from our sin, then we shall be clean indeed, <sup><301></sup>Hebrews 10:2. If we be washed in this fountain opened, we shall be whiter than snow, not only acquitted but accepted; so those are that are justified. <sup><318></sup>Isaiah 1:18, *Though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.*

**2.** He prays that, his sins being pardoned, he might have the comfort of that pardon. He asks not to be comforted till first he is cleansed; but if sin, the bitter root of sorrow, be taken away, he can pray in faith, “*Make me to hear joy and gladness* (v. 8), that is, let me have a well-grounded peace, of thy creating, thy speaking, so that the bones which thou hast broken by convictions and threatenings may rejoice, may not only be set again, and eased from the pain, but may be sensibly comforted, and, as the prophet speaks, may flourish as a herb.” Note,

**(1.)** The pain of a heart truly broken for sin may well be compared to that of a broken bone; and it is the same Spirit who as a Spirit of bondage smites and wounds and as a Spirit of adoption heals and binds up.

**(2.)** The comfort and joy that arise from a sealed pardon to a penitent sinner are as refreshing as perfect ease from the most exquisite pain.

**(3.)** It is God's work, not only to speak this joy and gladness, but to make us hear it and take the comfort of it. He earnestly desires that God would lift up the light of his countenance upon him, and so put gladness into his heart, that he would not only be reconciled to him, but, which is a further act of grace, let him know that he was so.

**3.** He prays for a complete and effectual pardon. This is that which he is most earnest for as the foundation of his comfort (v. 9): “*Hide thy face*

from my sins, that is, be not provoked by them to deal with me as I deserve; they are ever before me, let them be cast behind thy back. *Blot out all my iniquities* out of the book of thy account; blot them out, as a cloud is blotted out and dispelled by the beams of the sun,” <sup>2342</sup> Isaiah 44:22.

4. He prays for sanctifying grace; and this every true penitent is as earnest for as for pardon and peace, v. 10. He does not pray, “Lord, preserve me my reputation,” as Saul, *I have sinned, yet honour me before this people*. No; his great concern is to get his corrupt nature changed: the sin he had been guilty of was,

(1.) An evidence of its impurity, and therefore he prays, *Create in me a clean heart, O God!* He now saw, more than ever, what an unclean heart he had, and sadly laments it, but sees it is not in his own power to amend it, and therefore begs of God (whose prerogative it is to create) that he would create in him a clean heart. He only that made the heart can new-make it; and to his power nothing is impossible. He created the world by the word of his power as the God of nature, and it is by the word of his power as the God of grace that *we are clean* (<sup>4873</sup> John 15:3), that *we are sanctified*, <sup>4877</sup> John 17:17.

(2.) It was the cause of its disorder, and undid much of the good work that had been wrought in him; and therefore he prays, “*Lord, renew a right spirit within me*; repair the decays of spiritual strength which this sin has been the cause of, and set me to rights again.” Renew a *constant* spirit within me, so some. He had, in this matter, discovered much inconstancy and inconsistency with himself, and therefore he prays, “Lord, fix me for the time to come, that I may never in like manner depart from thee.”

5. He prays for the continuance of God's good-will towards him and the progress of his good work in him, v. 11.

(1.) That he might never be shut out from God's favour: “*Cast me not away from thy presence*, as one whom thou abhorrest and canst not endure to look upon.” He prays that he might not be thrown out of God's protection, but that wherever he went, he might have the divine presence with him, might be under the guidance of his wisdom and in the custody of his power, and that he might not be forbidden communion with God: “Let me not be banished thy courts, but always have liberty of access to thee by prayer.” He does not deprecate the temporal judgments which God

by Nathan had threatened to bring upon him. “God's will be done; but, Lord, rebuke me no in thy wrath. If the sword come into my house never to depart from it, yet let me have a God to go to in my distresses, and all shall be well.”

**(2.)** That he might never be deprived of God's grace: *Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.* He knew he had by his sin grieved the Spirit and provoked him to withdraw, and that because he also was flesh God might justly have said that his Spirit should no more strive with him nor work upon him, <sup><106></sup>Genesis 6:3. This he dreads more than any thing. We are undone if God take his Holy Spirit from us. Saul was a sad instance of this. How exceedingly sinful, how exceedingly miserable, was he, when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him! David knew it, and therefore begs thus earnestly: “Lord, whatever thou take from me, my children, my crown, my life, yet *take not thy Holy Spirit from me*” (see <sup><107></sup>2 Samuel 7:15), “but continue thy Holy Spirit with me, to perfect the work of my repentance, to prevent my relapse into sin, and to enable me to discharge my duty both as a prince and as a psalmist.”

**6.** He prays for the restoration of divine comforts and the perpetual communications of divine grace, v. 12. David finds two ill effects of his sin: —

**(1.)** It had made him sad, and therefore he prays, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.* A child of God knows no true nor solid joy but the joy of God's salvation, joy in God his Saviour and in the hope of eternal life. By wilful sin we forfeit this joy and deprive ourselves of it; our evidences cannot but be clouded and our hopes shaken. When we give ourselves so much cause to doubt of our interest in the salvation, how can we expect the joy of it? But, when we truly repent, we may pray and hope that God will restore to us those joys. Those that sow in penitential tears shall reap in the joys of God's salvation when the times of refreshing shall come.

**(2.)** It had made him weak, and therefore he prays, “*Uphold me with the free Spirit: I am ready to fall, either into sin or into despair; Lord, sustain me; my own spirit*” (though the spirit of a man will go far towards the sustaining of his infirmity) “*is not sufficient; if I be left to myself, I shall certainly sink; therefore uphold me with thy Spirit, let him counterwork the evil spirit that would cast me down from my excellency. Thy Spirit is a free spirit, a free gent himself, working freely*” (and that makes those free whom he works upon, for where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty)

— “thy ingenuous princely Spirit.” He was conscious to himself of having acted, in the matter of Uriah, very disingenuously and unlike a prince; his behaviour was base and paltry: “Lord,” says he, “let thy Spirit inspire my soul with noble and generous principles, that I may always act as becomes me.” A free spirit will be a firm and fixed spirit, and will uphold us. The more cheerful we are in our duty the more constant we shall be to it.

**II.** See what David here promises, v. 13. Observe,

**1.** What good work he promises to do: *I will teach transgressors thy ways.* David had been himself a transgressor, and therefore could speak experimentally to transgressors, and resolves, having himself found mercy with God in the way of repentance, to teach others God's ways, that is,

**(1.)** Our way to God by repentance; he would teach others that had sinned to take the same course that he had taken, to humble themselves, to confess their sins, and seek God's face; and,

**(2.)** God's way towards us in pardoning mercy; how ready he is to receive those that return to him. He taught the former by his own example, for the direction of sinners in repenting; he taught the latter by his own experience, for their encouragement. By this psalm he is, and will be to the world's end, teaching transgressors, telling them what God had done for his soul. Note, Penitents should be preachers. Solomon was so, and blessed Paul.

**2.** What good effect he promises himself from his doing this: “*Sinners shall be converted unto thee, and shall neither persist in their wanderings from thee, nor despair of finding mercy in their returns to thee.*” The great thing to be aimed at in teaching transgressors is their conversion to God; that is a happy point gained, and happy are those that are instrumental to contribute towards it, ~~SHD~~ James 5:20.

## ~~PS14~~ PSALM 51:14-19

### PENITENTIAL PETITIONS

**I.** David prays against the guilt of sin, and prays for the grace of God, enforcing both petitions from a plea taken from the glory of God, which he promises with thankfulness to show forth.

**1.** He prays against the guilt of sin, that he might be delivered from that, and promises that then he would praise God, v. 14. The particular sin he prays against is blood-guiltiness, the sin he had now been guilty of, having slain Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon. Hitherto perhaps he had stopped the mouth of conscience with that frivolous excuse, that he did not kill him himself; but now he was convinced that he was the murderer, and, hearing the blood cry to God for vengeance, he cries to God for mercy: “*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness; let me not lie under the guilt of this kind which I have contracted, but let it be pardoned to me, and let me never be left to myself to contract the like guilt again.*” Note, It concerns us all to pray earnestly against the guilt of blood. In this prayer he eyes God as the God of salvation. Note, Those to whom God is the God of salvation he will deliver from guilt; for the salvation he is the God of is salvation from sin. We may therefore plead this with him, “Lord, thou art the God of my salvation, therefore deliver me from the dominion of sin.” He promises that, if God would deliver him, *his tongue should sing aloud of his righteousness*; God should have the glory both of pardoning mercy and of preventing grace. God's righteousness is often put for his grace, especially in the great business of justification and sanctification. This he would comfort himself in and therefore sing of; and this he would endeavour both to acquaint and to affect others with; he would *sing aloud* of it. This all those should do that have had the benefit of it, and owe their all to it.

**2.** He prays for the grace of God and promises to improve that grace to his glory (v. 15): “*O Lord! open thou my lips, not only that I may teach and instruct sinners*” (which the best preacher cannot do to any purpose unless God give him the opening of the mouth, and the tongue of the learned), “*but that my mouth may show forth thy praise, not only that I may have abundant matter for praise, but a heart enlarged in praise.*” Guilt had closed his lips, had gone near to stop the mouth of prayer; he could not for shame, he could not for fear, come into the presence of that God whom he knew he had offended, much less speak to him; his heart condemned him, and therefore he had little confidence towards God. It cast a damp particularly upon his praises; when he had lost the joys of his salvation his harp was hung upon the willow-trees; therefore he prays, “*Lord, open my life, put my heart in tune for praise again.*” To those that are tongue-tied by reason of guilt the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins says

effectually, *Ephphatha* — *Be opened*; and, when the lips are opened, what should they speak but the praises of God, as Zacharias did? <sup><46></sup>Luke 1:64.

**II.** David offers the sacrifice of a penitent contrite heart, as that which he knew God would be pleased with.

**1.** He knew well that the sacrificing of beasts was in itself of no account with God (v. 16): *Thou desirest not sacrifice (else would I give it with all my heart to obtain pardon and peace); thou delightest not in burnt-offering*. Here see how glad David would have been to give thousands of rams to make atonement for sin. Those that are thoroughly convinced of their misery and danger by reason of sin would spare no cost to obtain the remission of it, <sup><36></sup>Micah 6:6, 7. But see how little God valued this. As trials of obedience, and types of Christ, he did indeed require sacrifices to be offered; but he had no delight in them for any intrinsic worth or value they had. *Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not*. As they cannot make satisfaction for sin, so God cannot take any satisfaction in them, any otherwise than as the offering of them is expressive of love and duty to him.

**2.** He knew also how acceptable true repentance is to God (v. 17): *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit*. See here,

**(1.)** What the good work is that is wrought in every true penitent — a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. It is a work wrought upon the heart; that is it that God looks at, and requires, in all religious exercises, particularly in the exercises of repentance. It is a sharp work wrought there, no less than the breaking of the heart; not in despair (as we say, when a man is undone, His heart is broken), but in necessary humiliation and sorrow for sin. It is a heart breaking with itself, and breaking from its sin; it is a heart pliable to the word of God, and patient under the rod of God, a heart subdued and brought into obedience; it is a heart that is tender, like Josiah's, and trembles at God's word. Oh that there were such a heart in us!

**(2.)** How graciously God is pleased to accept of this. It is *the sacrifices of God*, not one, but many; it is instead of all burnt-offering and sacrifice. The breaking of Christ's body for sin is the only sacrifice of atonement, for no sacrifice but that could take away sin; but the breaking of our hearts for sin is a sacrifice of acknowledgment, a sacrifice of God, for to him it is offered up; he requires it, he prepares it (he provides this lamb for a burnt-

offering), and he will accept of it. That which pleased God was not the feeding of a beast, and making much of it, but killing it; so it is not the pampering of our flesh, but the mortifying of it, that God will accept. The sacrifice was bound, was bled, was burnt; so the penitent heart is bound by convictions, bleeds in contrition, and then burns in holy zeal against sin and for God. The sacrifice was offered upon the altar that sanctified the gift; so the broken heart is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ; there is no true repentance without faith in him; and this is the sacrifice which he will not despise. Men despise that which is broken, but God will not. He despised the sacrifice of torn and broken beasts, but he will not despise that of a torn and broken heart. He will not overlook it; he will not refuse or reject it; though it make God no satisfaction for the wrong done him by sin, yet he does not despise it. The proud Pharisee despised the broken-hearted publican, and he thought very meanly of himself; but God did not despise him. More is implied than is expressed; the great God overlooks heaven and earth, to look with favour upon a *broken and contrite heart*, <sup>2011</sup> Isaiah 66:1, 2; 57:15.

**III.** David intercedes for Zion and Jerusalem, with an eye to the honour of God. See what a concern he had,

**1.** For the good of the church of God (v. 18): *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion*, that is,

**(1.)** “To all the particular worshippers in Zion, to all that love and fear thy name; keep them from falling into such wounding wasting sins as these of mine; defend and succour all that fear thy name.” Those that have been in spiritual troubles themselves know how to pity and pray for those that are in like manner afflicted. Or,

**(2.)** To the public interests of Israel. David was sensible of the wrong he had done to Judah and Jerusalem by his sin, how it had weakened the hands and saddened the hearts of good people, and opened the mouths of their adversaries; he was likewise afraid lest, he being a public person, his sin should bring judgments upon the city and kingdom, and therefore he prays to God to secure and advance those public interests which he had damaged and endangered. He prays that God would prevent those national judgments which his sin had deserved, that he would continue those blessings, and carry on that good work, which it had threatened to retard and put a stop to. He prays, not only that God would do good to Zion, as

he did to other places, by his providence, but that he would do it in his *good pleasure*, with the peculiar favour he bore to that place which he had chosen to put his name there, that the walls of Jerusalem, which perhaps were now in the building, might be built up, and that good work finished. Note,

[1.] When we have most business of our own, and of greatest importance at the throne of grace, yet then we must not forget to pray for the church of God; nay, our Master has taught us in our daily prayers to begin with that, *Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come.*

[2.] The consideration of the prejudice we have done to the public interests by our sins should engage us to do them all the service we can, particularly by our prayers.

2. For the honour of the churches of God, v. 19. If God would show himself reconciled to him and his people, as he had prayed, then they should go on with the public services of his house,

(1.) Cheerfully to themselves. The sense of God's goodness to them would enlarge their hearts in all the instances and expressions of thankfulness and obedience. They will then come to his tabernacle with burnt-offerings, with whole burnt-offerings, which were intended purely for the glory of God, and they shall offer, not lambs and rams only, but bullocks, the costliest sacrifices, upon his altar.

(2.) Acceptably to God: *"Thou shalt be pleased with them,* that is, we shall have reason to hope so when we perceive the sin taken away which threatened to hinder thy acceptance." Note, It is a great comfort to a good man to think of the communion that is between God and his people in their public assemblies, how he is honoured by their humble attendance on him and they are happy in his gracious acceptance of it.