

97-06-08a

So as we continue our worship, if you'll observe with me Psalm 51. This is subtitled to the chief meeting of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone into Bathsheba. This would not be one of those pinnacles of spiritual fulfillment and achievement in David's life.

But the fact that David was thinking through the principles that were resident in his soul is evident in this song. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight.

That you may be found just when you speak and blameless when you judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts and in the hidden part you will make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness that the bones you have broken may rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and pleas. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me by your generous spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners shall be converted to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These, O God, you will not despise. Do good in your good pleasure to Zion.

Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then you shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering. Then they shall offer bulls on your altar.

A wonderful psalm which we have often turned to for comfort in our own periods of failure and the times when we wish to be restored to the joy of our salvation, the joy of God's deliverance of us in time. You might note toward the end of this song when he says that it isn't the sacrifice and burnt offering that God is looking for but the sacrifice of a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. And yet immediately following that he says in verse 19, after God does his good pleasure in Zion and

builds the walls of Jerusalem, then God will be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.

And it seems almost contradictory that the first David says that's not really what God is looking for and yet he says once God has accomplished his work in Jerusalem, it ends with those things. It reminds us of the principle we've been seeing recently in Romans that it is why we do what we do that God looks for. And it doesn't mean that what we do is without significance but it's the motivation and the thinking behind it that counts.

And God is pleased with the sacrifices that he ordained in the law of Moses for Israel in this period when they come from a heart that is oriented to God, that is humble, that returns to God when it strays and so forth. So it isn't that the sacrifices are without merit when David says these are not what please God but it's the sacrifices that are offered out of a heart that is devoted to him that makes those sacrifices truly meaningful. And one of the reasons that we find ourselves in Psalm 51 this morning is this word that we find in verse 17 at the end of the verse.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These, O God, you will not despise. And this not only the principle but also the vocabulary links this passage to where we resume our studies this morning in Romans chapter 14.

In Romans 14 we have begun by noting that our lifestyle, the things that we do, matter. We talked about the principle of our example or our witness last time. And this is a topic that has sort of lain fallow in some of our strong teaching emphasis type churches and groups of believers who recognize the importance of the Word of God and what God does on the inside.

We tend to de-emphasize and even throw rocks at the portions of Christianity that talk about your witness and your example and so forth. And we find here a passage that helps us balance those things. Much as we see in Psalm 51, it is what God does on the inside that counts.

We have seen the comparison beginning with our study of David and we reviewed it several times that God told David, drive the enemies out of the land so that the temple can be built, so that the presence of God can reside in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. So there is preparation, there is a driving out of the pagans, driving out of evil that precedes the dwelling of God in the midst of His people. We have seen that that is a spiritual principle that carries over today and we have a responsibility to purge out the leaven in our lives, to not regard iniquity in our hearts, to take advantage of the power that God has made available to us through His Word and through His Spirit, to overcome patterns of sin and evil that exist in our lives, bad thought patterns, bad habits, bad lifestyle, so that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father can come and make their home in our heart.

We know that this is a church age principle, it's something that Jesus taught in the upper room as a part of teaching for the new dispensation and it is important for us to understand that we have

to make some decisions and we have to set some priorities before we will enjoy the fullness of the indwelling of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of God the Father, another somewhat neglected principle in this age. And so in Romans 14, He is talking about the interaction between believers. Some believers are going to be further along, some believers are going to have advanced toward perfection, advanced toward maturity.

We understand that term perfection, we have studied it both on Sundays and on Fridays. We know that this is not sinless perfection, this is completion. It means all of the parts of the machine have been assembled and it can now perform its function.

And it matters how we live. It matters the example that we set. It matters the witness that we have before unbelievers.

It makes a difference and the scripture addresses this and we will see some of those passages when we pick up this study this morning. But there is a balance and it is easy to go to one extreme or the other. In some circles, especially many of us are familiar with churches and with ministries that have a strong teaching emphasis, a strong emphasis on personal growth in the word, which is valid and is central to our life as believers.

But many times in those circles we think, well, all this hoopla about your witness and about being an example and so forth, and modeling behavior, that's a bad emphasis and we shouldn't worry about that. On the other end of the spectrum we have ministries and churches and teaching emphasis that overemphasizes witness and example and says you need to do things because it's a part of your witness, because you are setting an example. And this is where your whole ideas about modeling the Christian life come into play and mentoring and so forth.

Well, where is the scriptural balance in those two extremes? We know that it makes a difference. We began looking at these passages last time where the scriptures point out the fact that there are examples to observe and to follow. In 1 Timothy 4.12, Paul tells Timothy, be an example of good conduct, be an example to the flock, and that's to a pastor.

Timothy is not an apostle, he's a pastor, and the apostle Paul tells him, your example makes a difference, be sure it's a good one. In Titus 2.7 and 8, Paul tells Titus, another pastor, show yourself a pattern for those who observe you. So we know that there is a valid scriptural reason to pay attention to the way we live.

In Hebrews 13.7, the author of Hebrews says, follow the faith of those who have the rule over you. Follow their example of faith. Consider their lifestyle.

Look at it. Paul tells them in another place, I don't have the reference in front of me, but he says, mark well those who walk according to the example that we have taught and set for you. He says, mark them and follow their example.

Peter tells ladies to heed the example of the holy women of old, in 1 Peter 3, 5, and 6. In 1 Peter 5.3, he says, basically, that the pastors and elders in the church are examples to be observed and followed. So this is a principle that matters. If an example is being observed, somebody is setting it and somebody is watching it.

And this might seem like an absurdly simple concept, but think about this. How often have we started to look at another believer and then thought, oh no, judge not lest ye be judged. I shouldn't be observing and making decisions and perceptions about whether this person is living a good lifestyle or not.

That's between them and the Lord, and who am I to judge? And I don't want to be judged and I just need to pay attention to myself. And that's a valid principle, but it has to be balanced with what the scripture says. There are examples to be followed.

There are role models in the church. That's the reason that lifestyle makes a difference. One of the reasons, for pastors and for elders, is that they are to be examples.

And many of us can think back on examples that we have seen of different people. We say, you know, it is possible for someone to be married for 25 or 30 years and to still be excited and enjoy the company of their spouse. I have seen that personally in people, and it made a difference to me.

It's something that stuck in my mind. I have seen people who have been faithful to teach the Word of God and to not stray, or faithful to present the Gospel as an evangelist over decades. And at the end of their life, they are still plugging away, doing the thing that they started out to do, doing the thing that they were called to do.

And that makes a difference. And it is a worthy thing. So now, this complicates our life, doesn't it? Because now we have to pay attention to examples and to the lifestyle of other believers.

We have to mark those who do not walk orderly. And make decisions about whether to continue to have close fellowship with them. Paul says, if you see those who are walking disorderly, separate from them.

Those who are idle and don't work with their hands, don't even sit down at the table with them. So now we have a challenge, because we have to observe and make decisions and yet not go into the realm of judging. And not go into the realm where this observation turns into sin.

So what are we going to do with this? Well, here's what the Word of God has to say. What is the criteria? What is the purpose? I think if we understand the purpose of the examples that we see and the lifestyles that are set, then we'll understand what to do with that when we observe it. So we have these good examples.

We know that pastors and leaders are told to set an example. By the way, we also have a responsibility for our lifestyle as it appears before unbelievers. Turn with me to 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2. In 1 Peter 2.11, Peter talks about the way our life appears before unbelievers.

He says, Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly desires which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles. Now, who is 1 Peter written to? Remember 1.1, we've gone into that in some detail. The Jewish Christians who are scattered abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, and so forth.

This was a part of God's preordained plan for their life, that they be scattered. So now you have these believers, Jewish believers, shaken like salt out amongst the nations, among the Gentiles. And Peter says, you need to have your conduct honorable among those Gentiles, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

So the lifestyle that these Jewish believers have before unbelievers, they need to be aware of the fact that that makes a difference. The observation of their good works, hopefully, will be an occasion for these evildoers. Actually, these who speak against them as evildoers, will be a cause for them to glorify God in the day of visitation. What do you think the day of visitation is? That they may glorify God in the day of visitation.

I would submit that this is the day of visitation by God the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. They will be aware of the existence of God.

They know that He is there through what they see in nature. Romans 1 tells us that. And there is a point at which God the Holy Spirit is going to face unbelievers with a decision about Himself.

What are they going to do with God? What are they going to do with Christ in this age? And where are they going to turn if they say, I want to pursue knowledge of God? I want to develop a relationship with God. I realize that I am insufficient in and of myself. Hopefully, people who have had their conduct honorable among the Gentiles, even though they have been reviled and spoken of as evildoers, these are the people that unbelievers will think of and will turn to in the day of visitation.

In the day when they decide they need to know more about God. They need some information about God. Who are they going to turn to? Who are they going to listen to? And it is often the case that people who seem to be most against God and are rabidly rejecting the things of God, many times those people we say, oh, there is absolutely no hope for that person.

All they do is rave against God and the things of God. Oftentimes, those are the last stages of resistance before collapse in the face of the convicting ministry of God the Holy Spirit. And it is not a time for us to give up or to reject or to say, well, it does not matter what I say or what I do in

front of this person.

They are a hopeless case. In many cases, they are not. And the more animated they are in their rejection and their talking against God, why does this subject keep coming up? Why do they keep wanting to converse and trying to tear these things down in conversation? It is because they are under the convicting ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

They are experiencing the day of visitation. And that is not the time to give up. That is the time to pray.

That is the time to observe closely our actions and our conversation with those people because that is an opportunity for us to have our conduct honorable so that they may observe our good works and glorify God in the day of visitation. So we have a responsibility before unbelievers to have an honest lifestyle. And this goes along with what Jesus said in Matthew 5. Remember when Jesus was talking to the disciples? This, of course, was in the age of Israel.

But the principle is valid in this age as well. Matthew 5. Jesus tells his disciples that their conduct makes a difference. He says in verse 13 of Matthew 5, You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Peter remembered this when he wrote his letter, that conversation, conduct, lifestyle before unbelievers makes a difference. And it's an opportunity for people to observe that and glorify God. The problem we have is that many times today we try to set this example consciously so that people will glorify us.

And the idea is that our light shines before men so that they glorify God. And we can't do that by consciously modeling the Christian life or consciously modeling humility or consciously modeling what is our motivation. Are we living our life in order to influence another person or are we simply letting our light shine so that people see what God can do and what the divine principles are that pertain.

And that's the difference. Why would someone offer a sacrifice, thinking about Psalm 51? Are they offering the sacrifice to appear to their fellow Israelites as though they have been restored and that they have humility and in their heart they really don't? Well, then that sacrifice doesn't count. If we do what we do to influence other people, we're not offering the sacrifices of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

We're not living our life to our Heavenly Father, to our Master. We are instead seeking to manipulate and influence by our behavior and by our conscious modeling of good things. We're trying to make someone do something different, trying to make someone think something different, think better about us or think better about their lifestyle.

And that's wrong. If we do things out of that motivation, we do error. And so that's the thing we have to keep in mind when we see these passages.

What does it mean to be salt and light? What does it mean to let our light shine before others? Well, we have to examine ourselves. When we say, well, I'm going to go ahead and do this thing, I'm going to do the honest thing here because people are watching and I don't want them to get the wrong idea. Well, right away we're convicted out of our own mouth, out of our own heart.

If we're doing the right thing because we want to glorify our Father and want to please Him, we can be aware that that's going to be observed, but the observation is not the reason we're doing it. This is where we have to start sorting out the motivations in our own heart. The problem with that is we are a mass of conflicting motivations and we're a mixture.

It's difficult to think of a thing that we do out of a single pure motive. We always say, well, here's the main reason I'm doing this, but there are some other reasons I'm doing it also. And this is where the Word of God helps us out.

What is it that cuts to the quick? What is it that goes to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints of the marrow? What is it that is the critic of the thoughts and intents of our heart? It's God's Word, and that's the light that we shine on our heart. That's the light that we, when we meditate about these things, we need to stop and think, why am I doing what I'm doing? We often just operate on reflex action. We have knee-jerk, we have instinctive responses, and we don't stop and analyze, why am I really doing this? Why do I feel the need to justify myself in front of this person? Why do I feel the need to explain? Why do I feel the need to correct? Why do I feel the need to try to show someone by my actions the right way? We need to stop and think about that, because if we're not doing what we do first and foremost to please our Heavenly Father, if we're doing it because of other people, we fall under the condemnation of these principles.

At the same time, we don't have to put a bushel basket over our lamp, and we are aware that people are watching, and we are aware that we have a responsibility to let our light shine, and to be a good example. So this is a tension, and this is a conflict, and this is something for the mature. This is not a conflict that infant believers and baby believers worry about.

There's much more fundamental issues at stake. But those of us who have been fed, who have grown, who have taken in the milk of the Word, and are now trying to start to chew on the meat of the Word, this is one of the new areas of challenge for us. Why do we have the exhortations to

meditate? Psalm 1.1, Blessed is the man who has conquered the areas of association with sin and evil, and in the law of the Lord he meditates day and night.

Well, what do we think about when we think about the law of the Lord? Do we just see how many verses we can remember, or how many principles we can recall? Can we remember all the 36 things that happened at the point of salvation? Can we remember the seven kinds of biblical death, or the five baptisms, or the five resurrections, or any of the other things that we've learned? Do we just kind of go through the card catalog of doctrines in our soul? What is it we meditate on? Well, as growing believers, our responsibility is to meditate on our application of those principles. Are we living what we believe? Are we operating out of a contrite heart, out of a desire to please God? It takes meditation. It takes some thinking.

Most of what we do in our day doesn't fall in that category, does it? When someone speaks and we respond, a lot of our analysis is in retrospect, because we didn't think at the time. When we make decisions, we have a gut feeling that we operate on, and it's only in retrospect that we realize that maybe that wasn't the best thing to say, or the best thing to do, or that we fell into the trap of trying to defend ourselves, or justify ourselves, or be pleasing in someone's eyes. In our middle years, our teenage years, if you will, as believers, that's the time when we begin to learn how to think ahead.

That's what children do. Children have knee-jerk responses. Children react out of emotion rather than out of thought.

They don't plan ahead. They don't analyze their priorities. They just respond to whatever is going on at the time.

What is it that happens in human growth and maturity? As a teenager and as a young adult, we start remembering that there are consequences for not thinking ahead, that we will have regrets, that we will be sorry if we don't think ahead and figure out why we're doing what we're doing. The same thing happens in the spiritual life. Whatever our chronological age, whatever our distance in time from when we were first saved, we have a responsibility.

If we want to grow and if we want to become perfect, if we want to become complete in Christ, we have to learn how to think about what we're doing and think ahead about what we're doing in spiritual terms. That's the subject of our meditation. That's the subject of our prayer.

That's the sensitivity level that we have to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in our soul. How much of a difference does it make in our daily negotiation of the obstacles of life? So, this is a challenge, and this is what Paul is talking about in Romans chapter 14, when he says our lifestyle makes a difference. What we think about one another makes a difference.

Are we thinking about it correctly? Do we think about ourselves correctly? That all falls under the heading of our witness or our lifestyle. It makes a difference before believers. It makes a

difference before unbelievers, but it still has to be motivated first and foremost by the difference that it makes to God the Father.

And thinking at the time and thinking ahead is what we have to do as growing and maturing believers. Now, we have the example that Paul the Apostle sets himself, and he says, what you have heard and seen in me, do. And I find this fascinating because I catch myself doing this with my own children.

We sit at the table and there's manners involved. There's chewing with your mouth closed. There's sitting at the right distance and having your stuff organized, where your glass is and where your food is and how much of it winds up in your lap or on the floor.

And when you have little children and you're trying to teach them how to eat and act like an adult, it seems like meal after meal, you have so many opportunities for practice. How many exhortations does it take to get these things down? Well, if you've ever trained children, you know that it takes a lot. And I catch myself saying, have you ever seen me sit with my elbows on the table? Have you ever seen me lean back in my chair and try to get my spoon all the way from the bowl of soup? How much food do you find under my chair when the meal is over with? And we wind up using ourselves as an example, don't we? I mean, even little things.

Do you see me have a big milk mustache after I drink? Why is that? There must be a way that I'm drinking that's different than the way you're drinking so that you end up with a big milk mustache and I don't. And of course, we do this in love and great toleration, but we still... And I catch myself saying, if you haven't seen me do that, then don't do it. Look at me and do what I do.

Look at how I eat at the table and do that. Well, if you think about this a little bit, you realize that this is the kind of talking you do to people who aren't catching it when you just talk about it in academic terms. I can give a big long explanation of how wonderful it is to sit up straight and lean over your plate with your napkin in your lap and so forth, and it doesn't seem to sink in.

So when I despair of it sinking in at an academic level, I say, okay, look, just do what I do. Look at me. If you have any questions, just look at me.

Well, this is what the Apostle Paul does. And it's interesting that many of these exhortations that he says, look at my example, are given to immature churches, to churches that we know are in the early stages of growth. Well, think about your epistles.

What epistle is written to probably the most immature church in the New Testament? It's Corinth. The Corinthians, he says, you all haven't even figured out the basics yet. He says, I can't even speak to you as spiritual people but as carnal because your mind isn't even oriented in the right direction.

And so look, for example, at 1 Corinthians 4. 1 Corinthians 4. In verse 16, Paul says, Therefore I

urge you, imitate me. Now, if you think about this, how often would a pastor, how often would a teacher, how often do I come out and say, if y'all would just look at me and just act exactly the way I act, live the way I live, just follow my example. I mean, it just sounds incredibly arrogant.

Now, but Paul does this over and over again. Well, what is he talking about here in 1 Corinthians 4? He says, look at verse 14. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children, I warn you, for though you might have 10,000 instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers.

For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. He says, I am your spiritual guide.

I am the one that is training you in how to live. And he says, imitate me. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ.

He doesn't say Timothy is going to remind you of great principles of the Word of God, and he's going to expound advanced truth. He says, Timothy is going to remind you of my example. Well, this is what we turn to when we're young, when we don't have the ability to process and digest a lot of advanced truth.

We just operate on example. We look around and find somebody who's setting a good example, and we follow that. And that carries us until we have the understanding to make these decisions and set these policies for ourselves.

That's a responsibility that mature believers have, is that if someone is looking around to find an example to follow, that we're a worthy example. But we don't do that because we're trying to help them along. We do that because that pleases our Father in heaven.

He says, Timothy will come and remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach everywhere in every church. So this is a consistent pattern that Paul presents. But he's not doing it.

He's not saying, well, I basically live the way I live so that I will be a good example. He lives the way he lives to please God. Read the first part of chapter 4 there, and we see that.

But this is to the Corinthian church. Turn over a few pages to 1 Corinthians 7. He's talking about concerning the things related to marriage. And he says, do not deprive one another in verse 5 of chapter 7 except with consent so that you can give yourselves to fasting and prayer, come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. Then in verse 7 he says, for I wish that all men were even as I myself, but each one has his own gift from God. He says, I wish everyone could follow my example.

Paul did not lead about a wife. If he had ever been married, and there's some indication that he may have been because he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and part of being a Pharisee was to have a model marriage. He may have been married at one time, but apparently he was widowed if he had ever been married.

Then he says, I wish everyone was able to devote themselves fully to the things of the Lord and not even have to split their attention in a marriage. So he points to himself as an example. In 1 Corinthians 11, verse 1, he says, imitate me just as I also imitate Christ.

These are bold words. How many of us can go to a group of believers, go to an entire church and say, imitate me. I'm imitating Christ, and I'm a pretty good copy.

Here's the example of Christ. I'm imitating that example, so you can imitate me and you're on solid ground. These are bold words, and I would submit that this type of example setting was restricted to the apostles.

You do not have this ability nor the need for this in this age, because we have the example of the Scriptures, and we have the example of those who are recorded in the Scriptures. But at the time when Paul was ministering, there were virtually no New Testament Scriptures at all. There were a few epistles, and there were many apostles circulating, and they said, I am an epistle for you.

I am a living example of the principles that you need to learn here in the early days of the church. And so he says, imitate me. But I think we misunderstand and misapply that principle today when people get into the idea of modeling and mentoring and discipling and saying, well, I'm going to be the head of a little group here, and you all, I'm going to model for you a good marriage, and I'm going to model for you a good ministry, and I'm going to model for you a good prayer life.

I'm going to model for you these other things. We're not apostles. We don't have that gift, and we don't need to be looking at one another because we have the Scriptures.

We've got a New Testament canon which is complete, and we have the example of the apostles recorded there to emulate. So I think we become exceedingly and perhaps excessively bold to try to set an example and tell others to imitate us in this part of the age. Look at Philippians 3, verse 7. Here is perhaps a better way to view that principle in our time.

Philippians 3. This is the passage I referred to earlier. In verse 7 of Philippians 3. I must have written that down wrong because that is not... It's 17. I'm sorry.

Philippians 3.17. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. Join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things.

This is the essence of the pattern in the example. Where is our mind set? This is what David was talking about in Psalm 51. It's not so much the pattern of life as it is the mindset behind that pattern that Paul is pointing to here.

And so that's what he's talking about just a few verses earlier in Philippians 3.15. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal this even to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have attained, let us walk by the same rule.

Let us be of the same mind. That mindset, that set of priorities, is the example that God has for us. Let's pause here and take our break, and when we come back we're going to move forward in Romans 14 and see what the application of this principle is between believers who have advanced and those who are not so far along in the body of Christ.

Let's pause here and take our break.