

Sorry Is Not Enough

1Samuel 24:16-22

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-16-2011

Introduction

Last week we saw the subtle difference between pursuing God in everything and pursuing everything as a replacement for God. And even Christians can do that. Today we are going to dig a little deeper and see that this difference between David and Saul even manifests itself in so-called spiritual things such as singing, worship, prayer, and of course (today's subject) repentance. We can pursue repentance from two totally different perspectives.

I. God knows how to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgment (vv. 8-15 – see last week's sermon)

In this chapter God gives Saul an amazing opportunity to repent and be restored to usefulness. I'm blown away with how patient and gracious God is with Saul. He gives Saul opportunity after opportunity to repent, and Saul blows it. This would have been the perfect time to confess and to seek forgiveness and to be restored to God's favor. But all Saul could do was say, "I'm sorry. What I did was wrong." But as we will see, that is not enough.

But before I get to that, I do want to comment on God's faithfulness to Saul in bringing a David into his life to confront him over his sin. You may not consider a faithful rebuke from a friend to be a blessing, but it is. God used David to expose what needed to be healed in Saul, and He did it through the rebuke of David. Even David's lifestyle was a rebuke to Saul. David refused to get bitter, refused to take his own revenge, and even refused to despise Saul. But David also confronted Saul over his sin rather boldly. In verse 11 he accused Saul of hunting down an innocent man. In verse 12 David called down God's curses on Saul but said that he himself would not fight Saul. That is quite a stark contrast in character. In verse 13 he warns Saul that without God's grace all Saul can produce is wickedness. In verse 14 David modeled humility. And in verse 15 he again confronts Saul over his sins. These sins were clearly, clearly exposed so that everyone could see them.

And by the way, if you don't confess your sins quickly, God has a habit of exposing them to the whole wide world. I have learned that it

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doesn't pay to hide my sin. Samuel's warning still stands today: **“Be sure your sins will find you out.”**

You may have heard of the story of the American ship, the Nancy. At least the captain was an American. It was 1799, and the ship was a smugglers ship bringing contraband into various ports. And don't be looking for the Americans to win on this one. The point of the story lies elsewhere. Anyway, the Nancy was captured by the British warship, the Sparrow, and was brought into Kingston, Jamaica. And you need to understand that back in those days, some of these Commanders and Captains were able to get rich over prize ships that were captured – usually because they were engaged in piracy or smuggling. So Commander Whylie brought charges against Captain Briggs in court claiming that the Nancy was a smuggling ship. Captain Briggs, the American captain, filed a counter claim to dismiss his case with costs. And because of the lack of evidence it looked like Commander Whylie would lose his prize and Captain Briggs would retake possession of his ship. So Whylie, instead of making money would be losing money.

But something very strange happened. Two days after the capture, one of Whylie's colleagues, Lieutenant Michael Fitton, arrived in port with his British frigate, the Abergavenney. Fitton had caught a giant shark, and when the crew had cleaned the shark, they found a bundle of papers in its stomach, tied up with a string. When Fitton looked it over, he saw that they were the papers of the Nancy. It just so happened that Commander Whylie was going to join them that morning for breakfast. Since the shark was fresh, he served Whylie some shark, and then told him that he had the Nancy's papers. Whylie said, “That's impossible. I sealed the Nancy myself and I have the papers.” Fitton took Whylie over to where the shark was still being cut up and showed him the papers drying out. What were the chances of that? That extraordinary find was immediately brought to the court and gave all the evidence of the smuggling that Captain Briggs had been involved in. In fact, it involved Briggs in perjury since he swore that the papers he gave were the official papers and that he had not thrown any papers overboard. Here Captain Briggs thought that his misdeeds were forever hidden. But God's providence exposed his misdeeds to the whole world since they ended up in a museum. And you know what? It is just as easy for God to expose your secret sins today and make them known to the whole world. As Jesus said, the secret things will be shouted from the housetops. That was what God did with king Saul. It was a blessing to be so confronted. But Saul did not make

the most of it. He was sorry for his sins, but as we will see, sorry is not enough.

II. Where worldly repentance is similar

A. There is sorrow (v. 16)

We are going to start by showing five similarities between Saul's repentance and God-given repentance. Let's go through them quickly. First, there was sorrow. Verse 16: **"So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?' And Saul lifted up his voice and wept."** Saul's conscience brought sufficient pain that he wept bitter tears.

But sorrow by itself is not evidence of saving repentance. Judas wept over his sins. The Roman Catholic priest who recently got caught absconding \$850,000 in funds from his parish had deep remorse over his sin. Scripture says that there will be weeping in hell (Matt. 8:12). We have had American politicians caught in sexual sin who have shed crocodile tears – or maybe they were real tears. We have seen pastors like Jimmy Swaggert cry when they have been caught. And Saul is the biggest Scriptural illustration that your sorrow is not sufficient to qualify as Biblical repentance.

B. It can admit to evil and justify those who are right (v. 17)

The second thing we see in Saul was that he was able to admit to evil and was able to justify those who are right. He had a better repentance than those who just say, "I'm sorry." He vindicated David. Verse 17: **"Then he said to David: 'You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil.'"** That's quite a public testimony to guilt. It looks pretty convincing.

We have had a president who initially was excusing himself. He tried to redefine the word "is" when he was questioned in court. But there did come a time when he publically admitted that what he had done was wrong – with no excuses. Is this repentance? Well, it is part of repentance, but it is also part of counterfeit repentance. It doesn't take a work of grace for you to confess what everyone already knows. In verse 17 Saul isn't saying anything that his 3000 soldiers hadn't already just figured out. In fact, they are probably standing there shell-shocked at the realization that Saul has sent them on an errand that was unconstitutional and immoral. So what else is Saul going to say? Denying the facts that David has so brilliantly marshaled would be lunacy. It would look as ridiculous as saying, "It depends on what you mean by 'is'." "It depends on what you mean by 'alone.'" So Saul does

what he has to do – he admits he did wrong. Don't think you are a hero when you do the same. It is essential, but it is not enough.

C. It can recognize God's hand (v. 18)

Third, Saul's counterfeit repentance was even able to recognize God's hand. Even though we saw last week that God was rarely in Saul's thoughts and that he tended to be driven by the things of the earth, earth-bound thinkers can still be religious. Verse 18: "**And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me.**" He is expressing good theology here. God controls all things. God's hand of providence is everywhere. God delivered Saul into David's hand.

But counterfeit repentance can still acknowledge very, very good theology. Over the past thirty years I've known pastors with the best of theology commit adultery. And when confronted they appeared to repent. But within days they were back in the same sin, and justifying it. I've known pastors steal funds from the church. I knew one pastor who justified his unbiblical divorce. He even had a good theology on divorce and admitted to me that it wasn't Biblical. But he was able to justify in his mind that even though it wasn't God's perfect will, it was God's permissive will. And here's the point: at least some of them had false repentance even though they had good theology. You see, this demon that afflicted Saul was a religious spirit. Demons don't care how religious you are so long as they can keep you from genuine faith and genuine repentance – which by the way, are flip sides of the same coin.

D. It can recognize the truth path of what should be (v. 20)

In verse 20 we see that Saul is able to agree to the path that really should be. Here is another amazing similarity to true repentance. He says, "**And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.**" That is quite an admission. Well, maybe not. His son Jonathan had all along been insisting that he was not going to take over the throne from his dad; David would. So maybe Saul is forced to admit to what should be. But does that make him step down from the throne? It does not. He insists on staying on the throne, even forcing David to swear not to kill him. It is counterfeit repentance that simply has five similar characteristics.

E. It can turn from evil to a degree (v. 22)

The fifth similarity is that it can turn from some evils to a certain degree. Verse 22 says that Saul went home. He didn't kill David that day. That's huge, isn't it? Many people would be satisfied with that repentance and say, "This is all God requires, isn't it?" No. It is not. And if that is as far as you go with your children, you have not moved them to grace. And of course, we adults fall into the same error when we turn from periphery evils (which are easy to turn from), but refuse to touch what God is calling us to destroy. In fact, the harder, or more painful, or more shameful God's call of repentance is, the more little evils we will be willing to repent of, trying to take God and His people off of our tails. In counseling I frequently see people willing to repent of anything and everything except for their clinging to the throne. They won't let God on that throne because it will just be too hard, in their minds. That was Saul. "OK, I won't kill David. But I am not stepping down from the throne."

If you are a control freak who is willing to throw bones of repentance here and there so as to be able to stay on your throne and to keep your control, then all your repentances are fake. They are red herrings designed to throw God's people off the scent of the real issue that needs to be repented of. This passage goes to the heart of what fake repentance is. And always, you will find that it holds on to some areas of independence that you may not touch. "I'll repent of that thing, but don't ask me to repent of this."

In contrast, God-given repentance says, "Lord, no matter how painful your call might be, I give up everything to You. Take my life if need be. Take my reputation. I give You my throne. I give You my cherished goals. I give up my comfort. I want to please you above everything else." When you see that, you see genuine repentance. So those are the five ways in which counterfeit repentance looks very similar to God-given repentance. But it doesn't go far enough.

III. Where worldly repentance differs

A. It tends to arise only when publicly exposed (v. 16a)

Point three looks at the differences. Actually, we have already been looking at some differences, haven't we? But let's dig in deeper and see other ways in which worldly repentance differs from God-given repentance. The first difference is that counterfeit repentance tends to arise only when it is publically exposed or there is threat of public exposure. Verse 16 shows

Saul repenting only after he has nowhere to run and the public already knows that what he was doing was wrong.

But when *God* grants repentance, what happens? The repentance is God-ward, right? So when you are evaluating if your children are ready for communion, you are looking for a God-ward focus, not a parent-focus. Does the child voluntarily repent of things that no one knew about? Does he or she bring their sins to God on their own? Does the repentance go deeper on her knees before God than you have been able to expose? Do you see a softer heart when the child has been in prayer? Then even though she still struggles with sin, she likely has a heart like David. We are not talking about perfection; we are talking about focus. Where is your focus? No one's repentance is perfect, but are there embers of these characteristics present? That's what we are looking for.

B. It hears the rebuke of man much more strongly than the rebuke of God (v. 16b)

Second difference. Saul's repentance hears the rebuke of man much more strongly than the rebuke of God. "**So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?'**" It's David's words and David's voice that Saul is struck with. Later he acknowledges that he has sinned against David. But nowhere do we see a deep realization of how much he has offended God.

In contrast, David says in Psalm 51, "**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.**" In fact, the whole Psalm is so God-centered that it stands in sharp contrast with this passage. And so the second characteristic of true repentance is that it has the character of last week's sermon. Repentance has you turn around so that you can pursue God. If repentance keeps you in the doghouse, you aren't pursuing God, are you?

C. It centers around "me" rather than God's glory (v. 18)

Third difference. Saul's repentance kept centering around "me" rather than around God's glory. So this is closely related to the previous point. Look at verse 18: "**And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me** [He is saying in effect, "I appreciate the fact that you have been thinking about my welfare. Thank you for letting me off the hook. Thank you for not killing me."]; **for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me.**" As we will see under point E, his goal in this

verse and the next verse is about self-preservation. But if you were to read all the verses in light of point C, I think you would be seeing “me” show up in many ways. He weeps because of the pain he feels, not so much because of the pain he has caused God. How many times do people come to me for counseling just to get rid of their pain? In fact, there are whole books out there that advocate counterfeit repentances as a psychological tool to get rid of pain. It’s all about me, isn’t it? At almost every point he is looking through the lenses of how this will affect him. Well, if you have that focus, then you are only going to repent when it benefits you. You are always going to be having this cost/reward ratio playing in your mind. And you might think, “Well, I guess this might be worth repenting of.” No! No! No! That’s not what genuine repentance does.

In Psalm 51 David is extremely sorrowful about what? He is extremely sorrowful about God’s testimony that he has ruined, God’s honor, God’s Spirit being grieved, the way he has created a stumbling block to others, his desire that sinners would be converted to God, what God despises, and what God takes pleasure in. You go through the Psalm and you see that it is an amazingly God-centered repentance.

If your repentance is simply to get rid of your pain, it represents Saul’s repentance more than David’s. If your repentance is more concerned about your reputation than God’s, it is counterfeit. And of course, counterfeit repentance is the only thing our flesh can produce. We must want what Acts refers to as a God-granted repentance (“Then has God granted repentance to the Gentiles.”). Repentance is a product of God’s grace. We don’t earn God’s favor by crying, suffering, denying ourselves, putting ourselves in the doghouse, or beating ourselves. No, true repentance springs from faith and turns from sin to the arms of God. It is God-centered and cross-centered.

D. It goes on the attack even while sounding sincere (v. 19a – “enemy”)

Point D shows another difference. Saul’s repentance still has some accusation about it. Look at verse 19: “**For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely?**” He’s amazed that his enemy David would not kill him. But he is assuming that David has seen him as his enemy. David has not. David has bent over backwards to please Saul in the previous chapters, yet Saul is blind to this. He does acknowledge good things about David in this verse, but he does it in a backhanded way. There is a certain self-justification when he treats David as an enemy. “Yeah, I shouldn’t have done this, but everyone needs to realize that David has after all been my

enemy. David might be extra merciful to enemies, but he is an enemy.” At the very time that he is repenting, he is going on the attack. And there is more attack mode in verse 21 when he forces David to swear.

And of course we see *this* all the time too, don't we? People aren't comfortable admitting to wrong if they can point out the faults of the other. “Yeah, I'm sorry for doing that, but...” And they go on to explain how they really couldn't help it because the other person really was being such a jerk. You don't find that at all in David's confessions of sin in the Psalms. He doesn't say, “Please forgive me for doing such and such, but...” No. He owns up to his own sin and leaves the conviction of the other person to God. If you cannot repent without throwing out some barb at the person you are repenting to, it is not a God-granted repentance. It is a repentance that still stinks of self-justification. If you have to paint others as bad so that you don't feel so bad admitting to your badness, you have missed the whole point. The theology of grace knows that we are all bad. God's grace so overwhelms us with our badness and God's goodness that when we confess sins to others, we aren't worried that they will think too badly of us, because we know that we are a thousand times worse than anything that we could ever confess. People have trouble with confessions because they still think of themselves as mostly good, and they are embarrassed that somebody has found a little bit of bad in them. The demon in Saul had to let Saul have at least a smidgeon of self-respect. But it shows a lack of grace in his heart. He doesn't understand grace.

E. It is preoccupied with self-preservation (v. 19)

Point E – Saul is still preoccupied with self-preservation. We've already seen it in the previous verses, but I think it is illustrated again so well in verse 19. “**For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.**” He is so appreciative of David's protection of his life that he is willing to temporarily back away from his sin. But what is at the heart of his desire to kill David? It is self-preservation. And what is at the heart of this confession? It is self-preservation. And why does he stay on the throne instead of stepping down? It is self-preservation. There really hasn't been a true change of heart. It's just manifesting itself in different ways.

F. It doesn't give full restitution (v. 20)

And that can especially be seen in verse 20 when Saul shows no inkling that he should now give full restitution. “**And now I know indeed**

that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.” There is a mental acknowledgement that David should be king. But he doesn’t step down from the throne. His will is not involved. In genuine repentance the mind, affections, and will are always involved. Regret is being sorry – mentally. Remorse is being sorry – mentally and emotionally (like Judas). Repentance is turning from our rebellion mentally, emotionally, and volitionally (like the tax collector, Matthew), who left his profession and followed Jesus.

Stepping down from his throne would be the logical implication of this confession, wouldn’t it? If he had received a God-given repentance, it would have resulted in restitution. He would have said, “I step down from the throne voluntarily, and I would be honored if I could be one of your generals. But I give the throne to you.”

And too often Christians are willing to offer up the words, “I repent; please forgive me” without showing what the Gospels call the “fruits of repentance,” which are restitution. Jay Adams tells of a lady he knew in California who had been ripped off of her entire life savings by two Christians who claimed that they were investing her money. But they spent it. She confronted them, and they asked for forgiveness. She graciously said, “I forgive you. When can I get my money back?” Their response was, “Since you have forgiven us, we don’t have to give you your money back.” Well, they just stole from her a second time, didn’t they? Without any desire to provide restitution, it is extremely unlikely that there is genuine repentance.

Let me illustrate this on a kid-level. I read an article years ago on how to recognize repentance in our young ones. And this mother was telling the story of how her son had spread baby powder all over the living room floor. It was a mess. I don’t know if you have ever tried to clean up baby powder, but it is tough. You can clean it, and clean it, and clean it, and some powder still seems to be there. So when the mom walked in and saw the baby powder all over the floor, she got mad and chewed her son out. She left the room to get some cleaning supplies, and when she came back in, there was her son pouring water on the floor and making an even bigger mess by helplessly wiping the baby powder around and around. And she was tempted to get even more angry, but it suddenly dawned on her that without any prompting, this child was seeking in his own way to do restitution – to try to fix the problem. And that made her merciful and to clean it up with him.

And the restitution that you see in your spouse may be awkward and clumsy, and you might be tempted to be even angrier at the clumsiness of the restitution. But bless your spouse by thanking her or him for the restitution. Instead of stomping out the little flames of grace that are in evidence there, fan those flames with encouragement. We need to bless each other when we see tiny evidences of God's grace at work in each other's repentance. It may not be a perfect repentance, but if these points are present in a tiny way, fan the flames, and thank God for giving them. It is an evidence of God's grace at work.

G. It is driven by fear rather than faith (v. 21)

There are just two more contrasts that I want to make. In verse 21 we see that Saul's repentance was driven by fear rather than faith. And Romans tells us that whatever is not of faith is sin. Verse 21 says, "**Therefore swear now to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house.**" He is not even in a position to be making demands like that! How can the sinner be making such demands? Well, he does have an army of 3000, so he is in a power position to force such a concession from David. But he is not in any moral position to make such demands. And yet this is Saul's self-preservation kicking into high gear again. I will stop trying to kill you if you promise to do such and such. It's fear that drives this, not faith. Faith would just confess his sin, step down from office, and leave the results in God's hands. But Saul is so driven by fear of what might happen to him if he steps down from the throne that he can't bring himself to have an unconditional repentance. What if David takes advantage of me? I think you can see what's going on here.

But it goes on in the Christian church all the time. I will repent and do my part if you repent and do your part. Brothers and sisters, a repentance that flows from faith, is a repentance that trusts God enough to say, "I will repent even if the other person uses my repentance against me. I will repent even if it means that I am put in a vulnerable position. I will repent even if I am scared to death of the results of repentance. I will repent and trust God for the results." And you know what? Maybe it will go bad for you. Sometimes God does test us in those ways. But being right with God should be more important than preserving our current position, honor, finances, or whatever else it is that you are trying to preserve and hold onto. True repentance flows from trust, not fear. And like I said earlier, true repentance and true faith are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without

the other. And that is quite clear in Psalm 51. If your repentance does not drive you instantly to the Lord in faith, it is not God-granted repentance. It's Satan accusing you and beating up on you.

H. It fails to result in full reconciliation (v. 22)

The last contrast that we see is that Saul's repentance did not result in reconciliation. Verse 22 says, "**So David swore to Saul.** [That's a one-way street. Saul doesn't do any swearing himself. If he had stepped down from the throne, it would have brought reconciliation. But it says, "So David swore to Saul."] **And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.**" They parted ways. There was no reconciliation. And there can't be without true repentance. I'm sorry always falls short.

And while we are talking about reconciliation, I should point out that reconciliation cannot occur when true repentance is not received with true forgiveness. David was willing to forgive if Saul truly repented. But Saul did not. Elizabeth Barrett is a famous poet who became the wife of Robert Browning. Her parents disowned her because they disapproved of the marriage. However, Elizabeth wrote to them every week, telling them that she loved them and longed for reconciliation. After ten years of doing this, Elizabeth received a huge box in the mail that contained all the notes she had ever sent to her parents. Not one of them had been opened. Even though these love letters are now a precious part of the classical English literature, it's really sad to think that her parents never opened them. Had they even read one note, they might have had their broken relationship healed. So reconciliation takes not only God-given repentance but also God-given forgiveness.

Conclusion

And my closing admonition to each of you is to not allow pride to keep you from full repentance over your own sins, and to not allow pride to keep you from full forgiveness (unconditional forgiveness) and reconciliation with those who have sinned against you. Your temptation is to want to make them suffer, rather than the Biblical way of forgiveness. But we must walk the path of the cross. David had it in his heart to do that, and the beautiful tribute that he gives to king Saul at Saul's death shows that he was an Elizabeth Barrett, willing to be reconciled.

The title of this sermon is that "Sorry is Not Enough." It's not enough in our human relationships, and its not enough to be restored to God. Sorry just means that you are sad. It doesn't take any steps toward restoration. True repentance turns around from rebellion and runs into the arms of Jesus.

The turning around is repentance and the running into the arms of Jesus is faith. Genuine repentance doesn't stand there for years beating up on you. No, you run to Jesus. So telling God you are sorry is not enough. You must tell Him that you renounce self-trust, self-pursuit, and independence and you want to follow Him and trust in His provision. Another way of saying it is that genuine repentance always leads to faith.

In the same way, saying "It's OK" is not enough either. Sin is never OK. Don't say, "It's OK" when people ask your forgiveness. We must learn to say, "I forgive you because of the sacrifice that Jesus made." God doesn't say, "It's OK" about our sins. Instead, He says, "I hate those sins enough to sacrifice My Son, but I love you enough to forgive you for Jesus sake." Genuine forgiveness does not minimize sin. In this chapter David did not minimize the sin of Saul. In fact, he made it clear that all Saul could expect from God was judgment if he did not repent. He took Saul's sins seriously. That was a kindness from David's lips, but it was rejected. But David also showed a heart that was immediately willing to forgive and to be reconciled if Saul would just repent.

God calls for us to be a church full of people who are willing to put away the Saul syndrome and to be Davids and Elizabeth Barretts who pursue reconciliation. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.

I charge you to put away the Saul-syndrome and to put away any pride that will keep you from full repentance and full forgiveness.

Sorry Is Not Enough

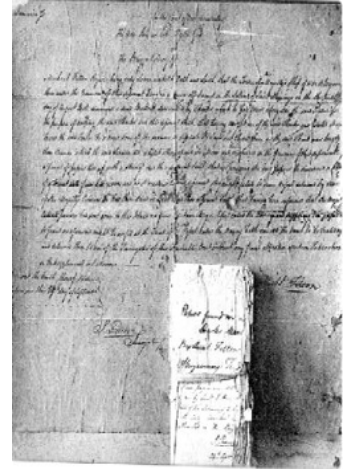
1 Samuel 24:16-22

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-16-2011

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