

Psalm 51:7

**Theme:** Wash me and I'll be clean

“Teacher, all these I’ve kept since I was a boy!” Jesus looked at him and loved him. Sigh. This is us more often than we’d like to admit. Most of us here already believe, and many of us have been believers for as long as we can remember. Because of that, we often slip into thinking we’ve got the whole righteous Christian living thing down pat. Or we convince ourselves that we aren’t as sinful as other people. And ironically, since we’ve heard so many times that God’s grace is ours, we start to think we need forgiveness less than we really do.

Such thinking is not good, it’s dangerous. It distorts our view of God, making us less appreciative of his mercy and grace. We come to think that God’s command to flee from sin more accurately applies to someone else. We deceive ourselves with the same lie of, “All these I’ve kept since I was a kid!” As a result, we view others scornfully, placing all kinds of blame on them for their sins while justifying and excusing our own. We become stingy with mercy even though we of course want for ourselves and have it in rich abundance from God – we don’t share it! We’re greedy with grace. “How could that person do that?!” we say with a judge-y, “Harumph!” in what just has to be willed forgetfulness that our own sin is just as vile as theirs.

Yet, Jesus looked at him and loved him. And then he said, “One thing you lack…” Many things we lack. Let’s be honest. We know we aren’t perfect, but we often fail to see just how imperfect we are. The outcry and desperate demand of **Psalm 51:7** comes from a heart broken by guilt and shame, a heart that’s painfully aware of its own impurity. Yet at the same time, the cry is full of hope. The desperation of the plea shows its urgency. “Wash me, God, and I’ll be whiter than snow” is not a casual request. It’s the cry of someone who knows that cleansing is critical, who knows that only the Lord, the God of grace, can grant it.

When, by God’s design, the law causes the crushing weight of our sin to come crashing down on us, hopefully, we respond with the right kind of despair. Not the kind Luther lists among the “other great and shameful sins” in the Catechism, but the spiritually redemptive kind of despair that despairs of self. It’s good to think this way, though not pleasant, because it’s honest and biblical. It allows us to see God, ourselves, and others as they truly are. It sounds like, “God, I have done evil and vile things because I am vile and evil by nature. I think stuff that’s messed up and I can’t stop no matter how hard I try! I’m broken by sin and I can’t fix myself. Help me! Put me back together! Cleanse me!” If we don’t think like this, how can we ever truly live in the repentance John the Baptist calls us to and in the joy of Christ’s forgiveness? If we don’t see ourselves as just as sinful as the next person, far beyond the realm of self-repair – why would we ever cling to Christ with desperation? And how could we ever be humble and loving enough to approach a fellow sinner with the grace of Jesus?

The cry of a heart that knows its sin and it’s gracious savior God even more sounds like this, “*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*” (**Psalm 51:7**) This statement recognizes three things. **First**, the speaker’s uncleanness. There’s no denial of sin here but full acknowledgement of its depth. **Second**, the need for divine intervention. No human effort can cleanse sin; only the Almighty and merciful Lord has the authority, power, and love to purify us. **Third**, God’s ability to make good on the request. This isn’t a go for broke, shoot the moon, or pie in the sky kinda hope either. This is certainty. “If you cleanse me, I will be completely clean. If you remove my sin, it will be gone.” With God doing the purifying, no stain remains. We are whiter than snow. This is a confession of faith; this is complete reliance on God’s grace.

Washing with hyssop is a picture which points toward something far greater. The true cleansing happened when Christ Jesus entered the Most Holy Place in glory, not built by human hands, and not with the blood of bulls, goats, and calves, but with his own blood he shed on the cross to redeem sinners. His life in place of ours: *“But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup> He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. <sup>14</sup> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”* **(Hebrews 9:11-12, 14)** By the blood of Jesus, our sins are blotted out forever. Right now, at this very moment, you are whiter than snow. Completely forgiven. The blood of Jesus, the Son of God, purifies you from all sin.

We are purified, sin taken away by Jesus, and one day, we’ll be made new in his likeness, fully so. What did Jesus look like at his transfiguration? Glorious. His face was like a sustained flash of lightning, his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach them. When John saw Jesus in glory later on in his vision of Revelation, he saw him with hair and beard white like wool, white as snow – totally sinless.

The prayer of **Psalm 51:7** is a plea to be made as sinless as God, to be made like him in holiness – the highest level of holiness a person can ask for! It’s an audacious request, so high, so lofty, that we can’t comprehend it. Yet, faith asks it anyway! Faith demands it! “Father, make me as sinless as Jesus, who pleases you perfectly!” Reliance on God’s grace and knowledge of ourselves causes us to cry out for this all the time! In love, God grants it because being gracious and forgiving sin is what he longs to do.

God does forgive. When, not if, you are forgiven, rejoice. Say along with David in **Psalm 30:11-12**, *“You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, <sup>12</sup> that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.”* Let’s do this, shall we?! Let thanksgiving flow from you always because God’s grace in Jesus is yours forever. Jesus rose to make it so! Cling to it. Rely on it. Know that you’ll never be disappointed by it, because you’ve been washed and cleansed by Jesus. You belong to him. You are connected to him more deeply than you can now understand. By his grace, one day, you will understand and then you’ll give him thanks and you’ll praise him all the more.

Thank you, Jesus for taking my sins away. Amen.