

If I Regard Iniquity in my Heart

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 66, and reading at verse 18.

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. As we often know it, if I had regarded iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me.

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. Now, I suppose it's true to say that there are few themes or topics that make us feel more uncomfortable than hearing or discussing the topic of sin.

It's not that we say to ourselves, oh, well, this shouldn't be preached, because we know that it should. But the reason why it makes us feel so uncomfortable is that it forces us to probe and to look in to our own lives.

And as we do so, and as our life is held up to the light of God's Word, we are brought to see how far short we come.

[1 : 17] We are brought to see that there is within us so much failure, there is so much twistedness, there is so much deceit, and that we are so far removed from what God wants us to be.

So that when we do come to the Word, particularly if we are convicted by the Word, and that's what I would want to happen today, is that when we come under the Word, that we may be convicted by it.

I would hate that anybody here today, when we think about what the psalmist is saying here, and about regarding or cherishing sin in our heart, that we would begin to think of other people.

Because, you know, that's one of the, I suppose it's part of what sin is. That sin makes us deflect, as it were, away from ourselves and to other people.

So that rather than stopping to home in on ourselves, we begin to think about other people. And that's what the Pharisees were always doing.

[2 : 32] And that is one of the things they hated about the Lord Jesus Christ. Because they spent their time looking at others and judging others. Jesus came along and made them stop, or tried to make them stop judging others and begin to judge themselves.

And they couldn't cope with it. They didn't like it. And that's part of what sin does. Sin doesn't want to look at our own failure, at our own mistakes, at our own problems, the issues of our own life, but straight away begin to focus upon other people.

And the moment we do that, we are immediately showing just how sinful we are. And God takes note of that. And God is seeing. And God is saying, well, there it is.

Is that not so much evidence in the life that the sin is so great that they cannot even begin to look in on themselves straight away?

Begin to look at other people. But when the Word convicts us, and as I say, that's what I pray that the Word will do, always that it should be convicting us, it will bring us in repentance to the Lord.

[3 : 48] And that is the Lord's aim, is that we will come realizing our failure and coming in the God-given way, in the provision that God has made, where we're able to come and ask the Lord to forgive us.

And when we come with genuinely sad hearts, genuinely broken hearts, the Lord will forgive us. That's a great thing. That's what the Bible holds out to us.

And the Lord doesn't want us just to be convicted of sin and leave us in that state. He wants us to be convicted in order that we will repent of our sin and that we will be forgiven.

And the Lord is the Lord who delights in forgiving, because He is a God who delights in mercy. Now, this particular psalm is quite an interesting psalm, because it comes in two parts.

Now, the first part really is what we could say it's choral to the choir master. It says at the beginning, a song or a psalm to the choir master. And it's as if a great congregation, the first 12 verses, were singing, because the language, actually, that you find it in these first 12 verses is in the first person plural.

[5 : 05] It's us and our. And it's as if this congregation were gathered together. And it is this togetherness of people all joining together in praise and recognizing what God has done.

But then from verse 13, the psalmist, it's as if he becomes an individual. And he is now writing in the first person singular. And it becomes very personal.

And it's the I. I will this and I will that. It's kind of the I and the me. Now, as you see, he's a psalmist here who cannot but praise the Lord.

And he's somebody who wants to tell people what great things the Lord has done. And we find that in verse 16. Come and hear all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul.

Isn't that lovely? That's what that psalmist wanted to do. He wanted to share with people and, as it were, to give out a bit of personal testimony. You know, often when people think about testimony, they seem to confine it just to the moment when a person was converted.

[6 : 15] And they think, well, that's it. Here is the way the Lord worked in a person until that person came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Our testimony never stops.

And if a person's testimony stops when they were converted, then you have to say to yourself, well, there's something not right there. Because it's always moving on. Our testimony is testifying to just what the psalmist is saying.

There, come and hear all you who fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul. Psalmist has so much to tell about how the Lord has worked in him and done for him and all the different experiences that he has enjoyed as God has personally dealt with it.

And it's a great thing when we're able to tell and to share with others some of these great experiences that we've had. Now, this particular psalmist here, as it moves on, he then, as it were, highlights two of the integral parts of prayer.

And in verse 17 it says, I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue.

[7 : 36] And that is always a vital part of prayer, is that we praise God. We were created to praise.

Praise. It is probably the great work. It will be part of what occupies our time in heaven.

Will be in all our serving, in all what we, the work of heaven, there will be constant praise. It is the language of heaven.

Praise. Whenever we go to the book of Revelations, one of the things, one of the pictures that we're always proud to see is that those, the redeemed, those in glory, are continually praising.

And the people of God in this world should be praising as well. And prayer, there always ought to be praise. Praising God for who he is.

[8 : 35] For who he is. And we will notice, if you go through the Bible, that God responds to praise. Might be worthwhile sometimes looking at that very thing.

But you look at some of the people in the Bible, and it's when they began to praise God, we find that God begins to work.

You look at it in the life of Jonah. You can look at it in the life of Jehoshaphat. You can look at it in the life of the Apostle Paul. You can look at it in the life of Solomon. And at critical times in our life, when things were going bad, and yet, despite the pressures that they were in, when they began to praise God, God would...

Just take, for instance, the Apostle Paul in the jail in Philippi. When he and Silas were locked in the inner prison, and their feet were in these stocks or chained in a very painful way, and their backs were open and bleeding from the terrible beating they had got, it tells us that the other prisoners heard them, and they were praising God.

They were singing praise to God. They weren't singing, and they weren't full of joy, because their backs were bleeding and they were sore. That wasn't what caused them to praise.

[10 : 01] But the Lord had given them such a sense of his own presence. And as they had suffered for him, the Lord gave them an abundant sense of his grace.

And they responded by singing, singing praises to him. Because elsewhere, remember how the Apostle, in fact, writing to the church in Philippi, he says, Rejoice always in the Lord.

It's not just rejoice, but it's rejoice in the Lord. You can always rejoice in the Lord. And as they rejoiced in the Lord, the Lord did something wonderful.

He brought the earthquake. You remember the earthquake that came, so that the prison began to shake, and all the doors were opened. And that's when the Philippian jailer, remember how he came to know the Lord.

But it was at that time of praise. And I read a great quote somewhere, Praise changes things. Well, of course, it's God who changes the things.

[11 : 04] But it's God's response to our praise that changes things. And that is why we should always, always, always have praise as an integral part of our prayer.

But then the second area of prayer that the psalmist highlights is in verse 18. And it's this area of the iniquity and the sin. And he says, If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

To cherish iniquity in our heart. Now, as the A.B. would have, I think it's to regard iniquity in our heart. And I think here gives us a closer idea of what it is.

Because sometimes people think, If I regard iniquity, that is, in other words, If I ever think about iniquity or give thoughts to it, The Lord will not hear. And that can be slightly misleading in the sense that many of God's people do think a lot about the sin that is within their own heart.

And they think about it, Not in a way where they're taking delight, But in a way of sorrow. And so, we don't want to make it absolutely clear that that is not what has been spoken about.

[12:22] Nor does it speak about, does it mean, when we are tempted to sin. Because there's a very fine line between temptation and sin. We must never automatically think that temptation equals sin.

It doesn't. Our Lord Jesus Christ was continually being tempted. He was tempted in all points. And yet, He was without sin.

He didn't yield to the temptation to actually sin. There was no sin within Him. So, while He was tempted, He didn't sin. So, we've got to realize that temptation does not equal sin.

Although it's a very fine line, That we cross from temptation to sin. And I'm just stressing that fact is because some people who are tempted, And they're being tempted and tempted and tempted in various ways.

And they think that because they're being tempted that they are sinning. So, we've got to make sure, we've got to come to try and understand, That temptation in and of itself does not equal sin.

[13:31] Although, as we said, It's very easy to cross the line from temptation into sin, Where we begin to give in to the temptation. And these temptations can come in every shape and form, About everything.

From being tempted regarding God Himself. And there are many Christians who are tempted to doubt. You can look at it in so many different ways.

We don't even need to start looking at all the things wrong with our own lives as such. You might be here today as a believer. And you believe in God.

And you believe in Jesus Christ. And you follow Christ. And you love Christ. And yet today what is really upsetting you is that you're sitting here, And you're being tempted at this very moment to doubt the existence of God.

And you're saying to yourself, Because of that temptation, I cannot be a Christian. A Christian could never think in this way. But you see, there's a difference between being tempted.

[14:35] And we've got to realize that Satan comes and he tempts us. And sometimes he's at us and at us and at us. And Jesus makes it very clear that there will be times when Satan, as it were, has a field day.

There was a time in Peter's experience. And Jesus said that to him. He said, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, Just in the way that it's been shaken this way and that.

Bombarded by temptation. Maybe you're doubting the goodness of God. Maybe you're doubting the ability of God to keep you or keep your family.

There might be loads of temptations that you have today about God. And it's so upsetting to you. And you're saying to the Lord, I don't even want to think this way.

Forgive me, Lord. But you see, where the sin comes in is where we begin to lay hold upon that thinking. And then begin to wonder and say, I wonder if that's right.

[15:41] If we start going down that road, then we're beginning to go into the realms of sin. But if we're being tempted, let us remember that temptation does not equal sin. But then we have to cross over and see what it's actually saying.

So what does it mean then? So that if I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me. Well, I believe when we cherish something.

Now, you know what? If you cherish something, it's something that you love. Something that you want to hold close. Something you might want to caress and keep tight to yourself.

And in a sense, that captures the idea that that is the kind of idea that is spoken of here about what we're wanting to do with sin. Scripture talks about besetting sins, but it might not necessarily be in this particular instance a besetting sin as such.

But it is here you have sin. And it's sinful. You know that the way your mind is going and what you're dwelling upon, what it might be a desire.

[16:53] It might be a desire that is completely wrong. And you're nourishing it. And you're enjoying it.

And you're developing it. And you're wanting it, as it were, to grow. And this is the sort of thing, it's beginning to take over in your thinking.

It's becoming part of you. Because the Bible says this, As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. So that if sin is being nourished and encouraged and built up within our heart, straight away we're told, the Lord is not going to listen to us.

And why does the Lord take our heart's sins so seriously? Because just as we said, As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. People can think lots of different things about us.

But the Lord knows us exactly. The Lord is able to probe in. And he sees what goes on in our mind. He sees what we're thinking right now.

[18:04] He understands everything about us. He knows why we do the things we do. He knows our reactions and our responses.

He reads us like an open book. There's nothing hidden about us. And he says, As a person thinks in his heart, so is he. And the problem with heart sin is that if we develop it and cause it and nourish it, it's only a step from developing and nourishing it within our heart until it breaks out in our life.

That is what happens so often. Achan, remember how he saw and he coveted and then he took.

It began, he saw it, then it began to grow in his mind. It began to grow and fester in his heart and then he had to take it. It was the same with David when he saw Bathsheba.

He saw her. And the warning signs were given because he actually, he had obviously spent time gazing on her and this began to grow and he made inquiries as to who she was.

[19:21] And he was told, she's somebody else's wife. But you see, it had grown, developed, sin had so taken hold upon him that nothing was going to stop it. broke out from the heart into the life.

Judas had this problem with money. It was his God. And when he was offered the 30 pieces of silver, that money glistened brighter than Jesus ever did in his heart.

And in fact, Jesus said to Judas just before he betrayed him, go and do what is in your heart. Jesus was seeing into the heart of Judas.

And he said, go and do what's in your heart. I'm seeing what's in your heart because it's just going to break out into your life. So that is why the Lord takes very seriously what is within our heart.

As we said, as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. And so we have to be, we have to be careful about these things.

[20:26] And we see the awful, the awful result that if we take this sin and we chew over it and we nourish it and we encourage it, that it's going to wreck our communion and our fellowship with the Lord.

That there's going to be, we're going to pray. Now, the thing is this, that if we are, if we are living in sin, if we are developing and nourishing this sin, if this has become part and partial of our lives, then we're not going to enjoy communion.

We're not going to enjoy fellowship with the Lord. But you know, the Lord convicts us of this. And I believe that as these things might begin to nourish and develop within our heart, the Lord will speak to us.

There will be the still, small voicing, that's wrong. Stop that. His word will convict us and show us it's wrong.

Providence will convict us and show it, show it is wrong. And you know, there's nothing worse for the believer than to be in the place where there is silence from heaven.

[21:46] Where heaven's, heaven is as brass. And you're praying and getting nowhere. But you know, the wonderful thing is this, that the Lord will change everything the moment that we begin to deal with it.

And the Lord doesn't play games with us. And the Lord doesn't, you know, it's wonderful. The Lord doesn't say, oh, well, that's the way you've been. Come back to me in another two years and I might listen to you.

No. The moment we are convicted and that we are brought into repentance of our sin, the Lord begins to listen.

And he begins to deal with our problems. And that is the great and the wonderful thing. Because, you know, you may be saying to yourself, well, why, why do we deal, why do we go on and on about this?

Because God takes sin so seriously. If you and I today could see the holiness of God, if we could understand the pure holiness of God and his absolute hatred, not just intolerance, his hatred of sin, and if we could see the fiery judgment of God that is held up above sin and of how he is going to crush and destroy eternally sin and all sinners who are not in Jesus Christ, it would almost unhinge a reason.

[23:20] But we are not seeing it. But sometimes the Lord will give people a little glimpse of his wrath. Sometimes where the law will strike home and a person will feel condemned and undone and they will cry out to the Lord, Lord, have mercy upon me.

sin. The Lord wants us to know his hatred of sin. But of course our problem, our big problem is that we are sinners.

And we side with sin. We tolerate sin. We accept sin. And the bottom line is that we often love sin. And that is what the Lord is trying to do within us is break our love for sin.

and it is an ongoing lifetime experience. And thankfully the Lord is patient and he's compassionate and he's gracious.

And we must seek that the Lord will help us and give us the strength and the grace not to be defeated but to be overcomers. To overcome evil with good that we may seek to trust in him for his help and his strength and that we might come to experience deliverance and forgiveness all the time.

[24:45] My dear friend, it's worth it to know the smile of heaven in your soul. To know that God's favor is towards you.

To have that fellowship with himself. It's worth more than anything the world can give. To have that peace. And we can only experience and know that when the channel is open and clear.

Not clogged by the sin that we love and cherish but that the sin that we're seeking to mortify and put to death by the power of God's spirit working within us.

Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray that as we examine ourselves in the light of the word, we pray that we might be willing to confess our sin and that we might know the cleansing and the forgiveness that is found therein.

Help us, Lord, to be open and honest with thyself. And sin is so deceitful that it will parade itself in so many different ways. And we will see sin sometimes as no big deal.

[26:06] Oh, Lord, give us tender hearts. Give us a sensitive spirit and give us, Lord, to look to thyself at all times. Bless us then and part us with thy blessing this day.
Do us good and forgive us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.