

The second verb, **“renew,”** is used in the O.T. to speak of completely restoring buildings that had been leveled to the ground. So also, it is God alone Who has the power to renew His saving work within us from the ground up! For this rebuilding He uses His “Means of Grace” – the Gospel in His Word and Sacrament. In a few minutes we will receive that rebuilding power in His Holy Supper.

III.

But you may say, “I have prayed the offertory prayer Sunday after Sunday, and I have received the Lord’s Supper hundreds of times, and still I fall into sin. What shall I do? Answer: Keep on sincerely praying this prayer. For this is the prayer of one who trusts the saving power of God!”

If we are serious Christians, we are tempted to throw up our hands and say, “What’s the use? I am beyond help!” But this is just what Satan wants us to think. Where in God’s Word does He ever promise that we Christians shall reach perfection on earth? Let’s not forget the confession of Paul regarding his own earthly struggle against sin: **“O wretched man, that I am,”** He said, **“Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”** I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord!”

Paul was never satisfied with himself! If you are also never satisfied with yourself, but are regularly begging God to create a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within you, then God is already working by faith to produce the very fruits of faith for which you are praying. Otherwise, you could not sincerely pray such a prayer!

Just remember that you can do nothing apart from Christ and His gospel-power in Word and Sacrament. The Lord’s Supper is for you once again today to help you walk in a new life of holy love for your Redeemer.

As you pray, **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,”** you should know that this promise of God to His O.T. people recorded in Ezekiel 36 (25-28) is also yours: **“From all your filthiness . . . I will cleanse you. A new heart also I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you . . . I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them, . . . You shall be My people, and I will be your God.”** Amen.

In the Name of Jesus, Dear Fellow Redeemed by His blood,

More than fifteen years ago President Bill Clinton committed an immoral act in the Oval Office. When he was asked why he did it, he answered, “Because I could.” People across the nation were puzzling themselves over the question of how a man with his intellectual gifts, wealth, power, and honor, could stoop so low, sin against his wife and dishonor his office as the leader of our country.

I say, people were “puzzling themselves,” Because it really is no puzzle to those who know human nature and human history. When I think of President Clinton, I think of King David of Israel, who wrote the familiar words of our text.

In his day David had far greater wealth, honor, and power than our former president. David was even a Christian, a believing child of God! Yet he disgraced himself before God and his nation by the sins of adultery, deceit, and even murder! David did what he did because he could! How frail human nature is!

But what about us, my Christian friends? How strong are WE spiritually? In Romans 12:1, the apostle Paul urges us and all Christians to **“present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God,”** because this is our reasonable service of worship.

That is what we promised when we were confirmed. That is what we promised when we assumed our offices as pastor and council members. And again, in the past two Sundays we heard the teachers of our children promise to give themselves diligently to their ministry and to live godly lives.

But how can we begin to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices to God, if we really know ourselves and our own frailty? Surely God Himself is our only help! And that is why we pray the OFFERTORY – the “Create in Me” – after the sermon on Sunday mornings. The OFFERTORY is a

PRAYER FOR RENEWAL.

I.

It is the prayer of one who knows the power of sin. Young children are often quick to learn how to hide their sins from Mom

and Dad. I know I was. But when we cover the guilt of our sins to escape the punishment we deserve, we easily forget the power of sin. Listen to what Paul says about the power of sin in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

In Romans 7 Paul says that sin is **"at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death."** Again, he says of himself: **"Sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment killed me."** In Romans 6 Paul asks: **"Do you not know that to whom you give yourselves up to obey, his servants you are . . . whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"** In other words, the more we yield to the motions of sin within us, the more we become the servants of sin – slaves to our own sinful desires and habits – which leads to death!

For example, the more we yield to our flesh's desire to hold on to our money for ourselves, the more it becomes the one thing for which we live. Instead of making money our tool and servant for the glory of God and the good of others, we can become like the miser who becomes a slave and worshiper of money!

The same is true of the process by which the child of God may become a child of sin and hell by yielding himself to the adulterous desire of his sinful, natural heart. There is no better example of this terrible fall from God than the record of David's sin with Bathsheba.

We are told in the second book of Samuel that David's temptation **"happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah.** But David stayed at Jerusalem."

It has been said that "idle time is the Devil's workshop." This means that we should not allow our minds and bodies too much rest or leisure. Last week I said that at any given time, "everyone has his or her place" – the place he or she should be. David should have been with his armies, fighting their common enemy.

But that night he was taking an evening stroll on the roof of his palace when he saw a beautiful woman bathing. David ought to have fled the temptation. Instead, he gave in to his sinful thoughts. The downward process went like this: David asked around until he

found out who the woman was. Then David sent for her to join him in the king's house, and he fulfilled his sinful desires with her.

Then David's enslavement to the power of sin began to seek ways of covering up his sin! Read 2Samuel chapter 11 when you get home today. Take note of David's schemes which ended in the murder of Bathsheba's husband, his faithful servant, Uriah.

During the terrible months that followed, David did not address God as His Father. He felt only the heavy hand of God's wrath and judgment upon him. David joined the ranks of those who do not repent of their sins, but live in them, and try to justify their sins by various human arguments. David had no peace with God. If he had died at this time he would have perished in hell! The king had come to know the power of sin.

But God was merciful and sent the prophet Nathan, who led David to sincerely confess his sins and trust again in the mercy of His Savior. It was then that God's Spirit inspired David to write this Psalm 51, which has become so familiar to the Christian Church. The first nine verses are a fervent prayer for forgiveness. Then, beginning with v. 10 we have

II.

The prayer of one who knows he is powerless against sin: **"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."** When we pray like David for a "steadfast or firm spirit" we are asking for the power of the Holy Spirit to walk with a determined step along God's way, casting off every temptation to sin. We pray that all our thoughts may be once again directed toward God and to His glory without distraction.

Only God is able to give us a clean heart and a steadfast spirit. Look at the two verbs in our verse. **"Create"** is the same word used in Genesis 1 where we are told that **"in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** What did God have to work with when He created the universe in the beginning? Nothing!

So also, in our offertory prayer we are not asking God to work with us, as if He only needs to polish up our hearts and minds. We are begging Him to completely sweep out our evil thoughts and desires and create from nothing a clean heart within us! If we cannot pray this prayer from a sense of complete emptiness and nothingness, then we cannot be helped!