

Psalm 51:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Analysis

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. This is perhaps Scripture's most famous prayer for regeneration and sanctification. David recognizes he needs not merely forgiveness but transformation—a heart recreated by God's creative power and a spirit renewed to pursue righteousness.

"Create in me" (בְּרָא־לִי/bera-li) uses *bara*, the verb for divine creation (Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning God created'). This word describes creating something from nothing or making something utterly new—work only God can do. Humans can form, fashion, make, or build using existing materials, but only God creates (*bara*). David asks God to perform creative miracle in his heart comparable to creating the universe.

This demonstrates profound theological insight: moral transformation requires divine recreation. Self-improvement, willpower, or resolution can't produce a clean heart. The human heart is 'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked' (Jeremiah 17:9). Fallen humans can't fix their own hearts any more than they could speak worlds into existence. Only God's creative power can transform depraved hearts into pure ones.

"A clean heart" (לִבְּ טָהוֹר/lev tahor) specifies what David needs created. *Lev* (heart) in Hebrew thought represents the center of personality—mind, will, emotions, character. It's not merely feelings but the core of who we are. *Tahor* (clean, pure) is the ceremonial term for ritual purity (used in v.7). David needs inner purity,

moral cleanliness at the heart's deepest level—not external conformity but internal transformation.

"Renew a right spirit within me" (וְרֹוחַ נָכֹן חָדֵשׁ בְּקָרְבֵּי) parallels and develops the first request. Chadesh (renew, make new) differs from bara (create)—it means to restore, renovate, make fresh. Ruach nakhon (a steadfast spirit, right spirit) indicates stable, upright disposition—not wavering or compromised but firmly established in righteousness.

Together these requests acknowledge:

1. David's heart is so corrupted it needs recreation, not repair
2. Only God can perform this miracle
3. Transformation must be both initial (clean heart created) and ongoing (right spirit continually renewed)
4. True repentance seeks not merely relief from guilt but change of character—becoming the kind of person who loves righteousness and hates sin.

Historical Context

This prayer anticipates the New Covenant promise in Ezekiel 36:25-27: 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean...A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.' What David prays for individually, God promises to His people corporately—supernatural heart transformation.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 describes the New Covenant: 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.' External law written on stone is insufficient; God must write His law on hearts through internal transformation. This happens through the Holy Spirit's regenerating work, creating new hearts and renewing right spirits in believers.

Jesus told Nicodemus, 'Ye must be born again' (John 3:7). Regeneration—new birth—is God's creative work producing spiritual life in those dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-5). It's not human decision or willpower but divine creation: 'which were born,

not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' (John 1:13). The same creative power that spoke the universe into existence recreates human hearts.

Paul describes believers as 'new creatures' (2 Corinthians 5:17): 'old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' This echoes David's prayer for a created clean heart. Regeneration is radical transformation, not gradual improvement. Titus 3:5 calls it 'the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost'—supernatural cleansing and renewal.

The Reformers emphasized regeneration precedes faith. We don't believe and then receive new hearts; God creates new hearts enabling us to believe. This exalts grace—salvation is entirely God's work. We contribute nothing but our sin; God provides everything: new hearts, renewed spirits, faith to believe, grace to persevere. This prayer expresses Reformed soteriology: acknowledge total inability, plead for divine intervention, trust God alone to transform.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Why does David use the word 'create' (bara)—the same word used for God creating the universe—and what does this teach about the nature of heart transformation?
2. How does this prayer demonstrate that genuine repentance seeks not merely forgiveness but transformation of character?
3. What is the relationship between the 'clean heart' God creates and the 'right spirit' He renews within believers?
4. How does this Old Testament prayer anticipate New Covenant promises of regeneration and the New Testament doctrine of being 'born again'?

Interlinear Text

מַדְשָׁנָה כְּלָיָה וּמְרֻחָה לְבָבָךְ בָּרָא לְיִם אֱלֹהִים
and renew a right spirit and renew in me a clean heart Create O God

H2318 H3559 H7307 H430 H1254 H2889 H3820

בְּלִבְנֵיכֶם

within

H7130

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 11:19 (Spirit): And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:

2 Corinthians 5:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Matthew 5:8 (References God): Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Ezekiel 18:31 (Spirit): Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Romans 12:2 (References God): And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Acts 15:9 (Parallel theme): And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Titus 3:5 (Spirit): Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

1 Peter 1:22 (Spirit): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Jeremiah 32:39 (Parallel theme): And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

Proverbs 20:9 (Creation): Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?

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