

THOU DIDST IT SECRETLY

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The doctrine of repentance is in some churches misunderstood. Classical Dispensationalists teach that repentance is necessary for forgiveness, but is not sorrow for sin together nor a resolve to sin no more. They teach that it is merely a change of mind about Christ, a change from unbelief to belief, and has nothing to do with good works. The Church of Rome teaches that with the sacrament of penance, sorrow for sin is necessary for absolution, and that “absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.” So the sinner “must ‘make satisfaction for’ or ‘expiate’ his sins.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1459) The Protestant view is different from both of these. The Protestant view is that repentance is sorrow for sin and a resolve to sin no more, and that it brings complete forgiveness. The Christian who has sinned against another person must seek that person’s forgiveness, and, if possible, make amends. Even though God has forgiven the sins of the penitent Christian, there may be unavoidable consequences of his sins. These are the natural results of choices made against the wise and righteous law of God. Moreover, God brings certain consequences to turn his children from their sins, and to teach them not to sin again. As king Solomon wrote in the Proverbs, “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.” (Proverbs 3:11, 12)

King David is a sad example of this. God chose Saul to be the first king over Israel, but, by his rebellion he proved himself unworthy. So, God replaced him with David. The prophet Samuel said to Saul, “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.” (1 Samuel 13:14) In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul explained to his countrymen what it meant that David was a man after God’s own heart: “And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.” (Acts 13:14) David was a good man, and a good king. There was, however, the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Before David was made king over Israel, he suffered persecution at the hands of king Saul. In his persecution, he was humble, and always trusted in the Lord. When he ascended the throne, however, it seems that, as is so common for those in power, he became lifted up with pride. Although he had more than one wife of his own, he was not content with them, and he coveted the wife of another. While Uriah the Hittite, one of David’s mightiest warriors, was away waging war for his king, the king took the wife of that good man, and made sure that he died in battle. In sending Uriah to die, David did to him what Saul had once planned to do to David. (1 Samuel 18:17) The Scriptures say, “The thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” (2 Samuel 11:27)

David believed that he had covered up his sin, but God would not ignore it, and he sent the prophet Nathan to expose it. Nathan went to the king, and presented to him a case for his consideration. There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds, but the poor man had only one animal, a ewe lamb. He had bought it, and raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from what little food the man had, and would drink from his cup. The man would hold it in his arms, and it was to him like a daughter. A traveler came to stay with the rich man, and the rich man, not wishing to serve a sheep from his own flock, took the poor man’s sheep, and served it instead. (2 Samuel 12:1-4) The king’s response to this story is not at all surprising. He was incensed, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” (2 Samuel 12:5, 6) Nathan said to David:

Thou *art* the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with

the sword, and hast taken his wife *to be* thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst *it* secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. (2 Samuel 12:7-12)

God had greatly blessed David. He had anointed him king over Israel and had preserved him through Saul's persecutions. He had finally removed Saul, and had given David all that Saul had possessed, even the kingdom. The Lord said he would have given him even more. How could David then have betrayed the Lord's trust, and committed such grievous sins against Him? David had despised the commandment of the Lord, which was to despise the Lord who gave the commandment.

For more than ninth months after David sinned he had hardened his heart and refused to acknowledge his sin. Now with Nathan's words he saw, as if in a mirror, the sinful man he was. He finally confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD." This took great humility and courage on David's part, because he deserved to die; indeed, his very soul was in peril. The prophet reassured David that his sins were forgiven, and that he would not die. Nevertheless, his sins would not be without consequence. David had for so long refused to acknowledge his sins, but they had become publicly known, and had given the enemies of the Lord occasion to blaspheme. Therefore, David, although forgiven, would suffer a grave and public punishment. God would demonstrate to all that even the king may not sin with impunity, and so God would silence the blasphemers. David's kingdom would be ruined, and the agents of its ruination would come from his own house. David's sin was secret, but his punishment would be in the open for all to see.

The first casualty of David's sin was his own conscience. Before he confessed his sin, he became bitter, and his heart hard. The law of Moses says, "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep." (Exodus 22:1) This is the law to which David appealed in the case Nathan brought before him. The law of Moses requires restitution for theft; it does not require death. But David mercilessly decreed that the man who took the sheep must die. Moreover, David was hard of heart in his dealings with the Ammonites. When Joab, the commander of David's armies, conquered the Ammonite city of Rabbah, he sent word to David to come to the city so that he might have the honor of taking it. David did come and he did take the city. He took it, and after he took it he massacred the inhabitants. The Scriptures say, "And he brought forth the people that *were* therein, and put *them* under sows, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln." (2 Samuel 12:31) It seems that he put some of them through fire as they had put their children through the fires of Moloch. He showed them no mercy. The Ammonites were themselves a cruel people, and had once greatly insulted David when he had attempted to make peace with them. (2 Samuel 10:1-5) Perhaps David wished to make an example of them, so that the world might see that he was no one to be trifled with. In a similar way, God would make an example of David.

The law of Moses required a man who stole a sheep to make a fourfold restitution. But David had killed a man and stolen his wife. How could he make restitution? He could not. But he would suffer a fourfold loss. First, he lost the son Bathsheba conceived by him. Nathan told him, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that is* born unto thee shall surely die." (2 Samuel 12:13, 14) David went home, and the child did become sick. David fasted and prayed, and lay upon the floor all night, but, seven days later, the child died.

After this, David's kingdom began to crumble. Amnon, whose mother was David's wife, Ahinoam, greatly desired his sister, Tamar, whose mother was David's wife, Maacah. With the aid of his cousin, Jonadab, Amnon hatched a plot to lie with Tamar. He feigned sickness, and when the king came to see him, he asked the king to send Tamar to feed him. The king did as Amnon asked, and when Tamar came to him, he grabbed her and told her to lie with him. She refused, so he forced her. Afterward, Amnon hated her, and sent her away, her protestations notwithstanding. When she told her brother Absalom what had happened, he told her not to let it

trouble her, and he began to plot, not only his revenge upon Amnon, but his rebellion against the king. When David learned what Amnon did, he was very angry, but he did nothing, perhaps because he had suffered no civil penalty for his own sin. After two years of nursing his grudge, Amnon finally set his trap. He planned a grand celebration of the annual sheepshearing, and he invited the king and his court. David declined, however, not wishing for Absalom to incur so great an expense. So, Absalom made request that Amnon, the heir apparent, attend in his stead. David was suspicious, but, having no good reason to deny Absalom's request, granted it. Amnon would represent the king at the feast. Absalom gave instruction to his men that when Amnon had drunk much wine, they must kill him, and so they did.

Absalom fled the kingdom to his mother's father, and with him he found refuge. After three years, when David's anger had assuaged, he was reconciled to Absalom, but Absalom planned to stage a rebellion against his father the king. Two years Absalom lived in Jerusalem and plotted, all the while gaining the favor of the people. Finally, Absalom struck, and the king and his court had to flee for their lives, but the king left behind ten concubines to keep the house. Ahithophel grandfather of Bathsheba, gave Absalom counsel which would both secure his position of power, and avenge Uriah and Bathsheba: he told Absalom to take to himself his father's concubines. Such an act would make the reconciliation of David and Absalom impossible, and those who followed Absalom would have to follow him to the bitter end. "So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel." (2 Samuel 16:22) Thus was fulfilled the word of the Lord when He said, "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst *it* secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." (2 Samuel 12:11, 12) David and Absalom went to war with each other, and Absalom was killed.

Years later, when Solomon ascended the throne after the death of his father David, Adonijah, his brother and rival, asked Bathsheba to make request for Solomon to give him Abishag the Shunammite for a wife. Abishag had married King David when he was old, although they had not consummated their marriage, and after David's death, she remained part of the royal court. For Adonijah to ask Solomon to give her to him was a great presumption, and effectively a claim to the throne. Solomon answered Bathsheba, "And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he *is* mine elder brother." So king Solomon had Adonijah put to death.

David could never make restitution to Uriah for what he did; but God did make him pay. David lost four sons in tragic ways. Nevertheless, Nathan said to him, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin." David repented, and so God had forgave him. In his repentance he wrote the Fifty-first Psalm. In that Psalm he confessed his sins, and took full responsibility for them. He pleaded with God to forgive him, and to change him. He understood that sacrifices alone do not remit sins; repentance is necessary. He wrote, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:16, 17)

The Scriptures say that David's heart was perfect before God, and that "David did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." (1 Kings 15:3-5) Yet his kingdom never did recover from his lapse. Some of his descendants were far worse sinners than he. Yet, one of his descendants was far better than he, even perfect. That one is Jesus of Nazareth, who has offered a perfect sacrifice so that those who repent of their sins may be forgiven.

Let us strive not to sin. If we do sin, let us be quick to repent with a heartfelt repentance. Having repented of our sins, let us be assured of God's forgiveness. If we have offended any, let us make amends. If there are painful consequences of our sins, let us bear them with God's grace, and let them be reminders of our folly, that we may not sin again.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. *Amen.*