

TANGLED IN SIN

2 Samuel 12:1-14

Objective: To help us choose to seek God's forgiveness and a new start by confessing our sins.

The overall theme of this series of lessons is "Finding Stability in a Turbulent World." There is enough turbulence that just happens because of a whole raft of reasons outside of our control and sphere of influence that we need to be careful that we don't create even more turbulence for ourselves by bad decisions on our part. It is bad enough to make a bad decision when the choices of what to do are not very clear, however, it should be beyond comprehension that we would ever make a bad choice when "good" and "bad" alternatives are blatantly obvious. The sad reality is that it happens! People (all of us) sometimes make bad choices knowing that the choice they make is an absolutely wrong choice. What is the difference in an "absolutely" wrong choice and a "relatively" wrong choice? Simple answer is this: An absolute choice is one that is made in the light of absolute truth or an absolute injunction. A "relative choice" is one that is made without the benefit of having any absolutes upon which we can rely. In the grand scheme of things we could categorize all our choices under one (or more) of the following: Absolute Truth (AT), Strong Conviction (SC), Personal Preference (PP). (I guess a fourth category could be "I don't care.")

Personal Observation: It makes life so much simpler when we can classify those items that belong under Absolute Truth under Strong Conviction and Personal Preference, also.

If I mention names such as Wilbur Mills, Marion Barry, Gary Hart, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert we think of people who were doing things they knew to be wrong and yet were not willing to stop or correct the wrong until they were confronted with the facts of what they were doing.

In the 1960s Wilbur Mills was a powerful Congressman who was forced to give up a successful career because of alcohol abuse and his dalliances with a call girl. Marion Barry was elected mayor of Washington, DC for a second term though he was filmed using cocaine and was convicted of a felony. In the 1980s Gary Hart had his aspirations to be president brought to a halt when he was found to be openly unfaithful to his wife. We still remember the problems of TV evangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert.

Wrong doing on the part of these people exacted a severe price. These did not think they would ever have to face up to nor answer for what they were doing. Most of the time when people do something wrong, they do not believe it will ever be brought to light. God has promised that nothing will be hidden. That which is spoken in secret will be shouted from the housetops. *Nevertheless, our motivation in refusing to do wrong should not be to avoid being exposed. Our motivation should be that we want to please God in all we do.*

Even David, who is described as "a man after God's own heart" had difficulty in doing what was right. He was tempted and at times succumbed to temptation. One of the more famous stories in the history of Israel is about David's affair with Bath-sheba. We know the story of how David saw Bath-sheba bathing and as he watch, he was tempted. David did not deal with this temptation properly. Instead of dismissing what he saw from his mind, he allowed himself to continue to think about it and finally he was trapped in sin's snare. In James' letter (1:14-15) he warned about the progression in going from temptation to lust, from lust to sin and from sin to death.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. James 1:14-15 (NASB95)

The place to stop sin is in the temptation stage. We cannot avoid temptation; however,

we can refuse to entertain it. I think it was Martin Luther who said "we cannot keep the birds from flying over our head, but we can keep them from building a nest in our hair."

This may be simplistic: The first line of defense is to recognize where a temptation should be categorized: AT, SC, or PP. This requires that you have a good foundation of the basics of what is "truth." Many people do not know what the word of God says on various choices that can be made and even if they know what is written, they may not be willing to recognize that word as absolute truth. They will rationalize that the Bible is an ancient book and doesn't really apply to our situation today. Some will even question the right of God to tell us what to do.

In the incident described in 2 Samuel 11 David was familiar with the "Law of the Lord." However, he was not walking in that law to the extent that God had intended even before the Bath-sheba incident. It was not God's intent that men should have multiple wives and concubines. This was a practice that was acceptable in the culture of that day. Being acceptable in the society or culture does not make it right. If we skirt around a particular truth with practices that are questionable, then we are, in effect, giving a foothold to the enemy to build up strongholds in our lives. It is somewhat like letting the Jebusites co-exist with the tribe of Benjamin in Jerusalem. The Jebusites took over. It was so gradual that it became "acceptable" to have them there and no one really seemed to care that they were in control of the city.

The fact that David had multiple wives and concubines made him more susceptible to the temptation that confronted him. Notice that the problem started with a seemingly benign act of covetousness. He had a yearning to possess something (someone) belonging to someone else. Talk about acceptable sins! We covet with impunity. We feel no sense of guilt from having broken the tenth commandment. But, just look where it led. Covetousness led to adultery, which led to deception (lying), and was followed up by murder, and eventually taking the slain man's wife to be his own (stealing). We could stretch the argument to conclude that David set himself up in place of God in deciding what was right and what was wrong. He was known as a man after God's own heart and in all these acts he (in effect) took God's name in vain. In Ephesians 5:5 covetousness is equated with idolatry. What started out with covetousness, arguably ended up breaking eight of the ten commandments. The remedy, of course, is to take steps as soon as possible to recognize the sin and stop it, confess it, and seek forgiveness. The longer sin is allowed to remain (co-exist) in our lives, the more damage it will do. The more we try to cover up the evidence of sin, the more damage that will result. Ideally, we could hope that David would have realized the problems with multiple wives and having a harem. Could he have raised the question "How is this not adultery?" (This is the problem with trying to fight traditions when we forget that God's people are to be different from the world around us.) Can you think of things we do (in our lives or even in the church today) that are contrary to the commandments and principles of the Kingdom of God?

There were exits all along the way that David could have taken. The earlier the exit the fewer consequences and impact on everything around him.

The first exit would have been to "not look." David did not take the exit and opened himself up to temptation. This was a case where personal preference trumped strong conviction and maybe absolute truth.

The next exit point would have been to realize that covetousness leads to all manner of other sins and then to have even made the wise choice that he did not need another woman to complicate his life. Since David did not take this exit he continued down the wrong road. He sent for the woman to come to him.

Another exit was available at this point. He could have demonstrated a concern for Bathsheba and given her some “fatherly advice” to take some precautions that others would not see her taking a bath. At this point, David was not thinking about anything other than satisfying his wants. We realize that he failed to take the last “safe exit” that was available to him. Going beyond this last safe exit would cause him to lose many options that might have been open to him. There is one thing about sin we should never forget. Although the choice to sin is ours, we never get to say what the final consequences are going to be no matter how well we try to plan things in advance. When we choose to sin, we always give someone else some control and influence over our lives they did not have before. Sin is a kind of voluntary enslavement. We are the slaves of the one we choose to serve. In the words of Joshua, “Choose you this day whom you will serve.”

Let’s go beyond the obvious regarding the last paragraph and the arguments presented there. The above almost comes across as it is OK to “look but not touch.” That may be a good argument for the physical aspects of life. However, it is **not** a good conclusion with regard to the spiritual and mental (or emotional) aspects of our lives. When we contaminate our minds with such powerful images, then we give up some control in our thought life. The images are there in our minds and they will impact our imaginations and our thoughts. The outcome could be (has been for some) voluntary enslavement also known as addiction.

What is the next exit opportunity after David had sexual relations with Bathsheba? Options now have become very limited. In the words of James, the lust had literally conceived in that Bathsheba was pregnant. Sin brings us to either confession or cover-up. We usually try to weigh the choices in the balance. Here was a man, who loved the Lord, who chose to take the path of cover-up, because he was afraid of what he might lose.

Rather than call Uriah back from the front to cover up his sin, he could have chosen to value what God thought about him more than what others thought about him, or worrying about Uriah’s reaction. If he indeed had been concerned about God’s reaction to his sin, he would have instead confessed to Uriah and asked his forgiveness immediately after he had confessed to God and asked for His forgiveness.

But at this point in time, he was involved in self preservation. What God thought about him was secondary to what he wanted others to believe about him, what he wanted to think about himself, and how he desired to preserve his own reputation.

Have we ever covered up sin to protect ourselves? Sure we have! We all have. At the root of such hiding is SELF and not God.

When self preservation (as opposed to self sacrifice) becomes the bottom line, then we will find ourselves in a downward spiral that will **not** have a good outcome. Every step along the way that is taken will lead to greater entanglements.

What would have happened if Jesus had chosen self preservation? He would not have gone to the cross and the consequences would have been disastrous for all the world. What we will see in the life of David was the disastrous consequences for those in “his world” of having chosen self preservation after committing sin.

We have no way of knowing how many people had already figured out what was going on by the time Nathan was instructed of the Lord to confront David. You would think that the household servants, the person who was sent to “invite” Bathsheba to the palace, the general who put Uriah in harms way – all these could figure it out. Even if no one knew, God knew and He found it to be evil. Because of this, Nathan was sent to David with a story of injustice regarding a rich man and a poor man and his lamb. We see this story in the early verses of 2 Samuel 12.

¹ Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, "There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. ² "The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. ³ "But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. ⁴ "Now a traveller came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." 2 Samuel 12:1-4 (NASB95)

This carefully crafted parable captured the essence of what David had done. It was designed to leave David no room for rationalization for the sins he had committed. We don't need to go through each one of the points of the story to show the parallel to what happened in real life. Notice that the story does not even get into the deception of trying to hide the evil deed nor does it have any element of the murder of the poor man. Nathan went just far enough with describing an evil act (taking the lamb and serving it to his guest) to evoke a predictable response from the king who thought of himself as a fair and just ruler and protector of the people.

⁵ Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. ⁶ "He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." 2 Samuel 12:5-6 (NASB95)

Isn't it amazing how much easier it is to spot sin in others, than it is to see it in ourselves. David's indignation was severe in that he thought that anyone doing such a terrible thing ought to die for it. David could sit in judgment against a man that had stolen a lamb but could not properly assess his own crimes of adultery and murder. We can be very objective about things that happen to someone else, but cannot apply that same objectivity to our own situation. David's reaction to Nathan's story showed that he knew the difference in right and wrong.

⁷ Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ 'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!' 2 Samuel 12:7-8 (NASB95)

When Nathan said, "Thou art the man," I would imagine David felt as if he had run into a brick wall. David was probably thinking that no one knew what had happened. When Uriah had been killed and the period of mourning was over for Bathsheba, David married her and she eventually had the baby. I guess he thought he had gotten away with his scheme. However, nothing escapes the eyes of God and His judgments are sure.

God reminded David of all the benefits he had been given and God would have given him more. There was no need for David to want someone else's wife, he had wives of his own. At times we see people who have more money than which they know what to do and they will do illegal things to get more.

⁹ 'Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. ¹⁰ 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 2 Samuel 12:9-10 (NASB95)

The real problem David had was in relationship to God's word. The verdict was that David was guilty of despising the commandments of the Lord. In the 10th verse, David is accused of despising God. We cannot reject God's word without rejecting God. If David had maintained the word of God in the forefront of his life and been resolved to never go against the commandments of God, then this tragedy would have never occurred. If we don't make obedience to God's word a priority in our lives, then we are simply asking for trouble.

¹¹ "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give *them* to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.' " 2 Samuel 12:11-12 (NASB95)

At this point, David was struck with the fear of the Lord, because he knew that God had the power to make all these things the prophet was prophesying to come to past. He had no idea at the time, than in taking another man's wife, he was putting his own wives in jeopardy. He had no idea that in giving that death note to Uriah, that he would find himself fleeing for his life from the sword.

The judgment that came against David not only affected David but also those close to him. The sword would not depart from his house (family). This is surely a high price to pay for a moment of pleasure.

¹³Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴"However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." 2 Samuel 12:13-14 (NASB95)

If we genuinely repent of sin, God always is willing and ready to forgive us. Once David stopped rationalizing what he had done, he confessed his sin to God and asked for His forgiveness. God heard his prayer, forgave him, and restored the relationship. We need to realize though that the consequences of sin stilled remained though David was forgiven. The child died, some of David's sons turned against him, and the peace he was enjoying came to an end.

When confronted, David did seek God's forgiveness. What about the "new start" that was mentioned in the "objective" of this study. It may have been a new start, but it was certainly down a different road than the one he had been traveling. An important lesson for us to realize that is seldom emphasized is that there are consequences that result from sin, both forgiven and unforgiven . We read in 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We can see from what happened to David that the forgiveness restored the relationship but it did not erase the consequences of the sinful acts.

We can learn from David's experience. Though we sin, we should never try to rationalize that sin. The path to restoration is confession, repentance and forgiveness. Because even forgiven sin has consequences, obedience is better.