

Guilty Oppression

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We sometimes have a peculiar perspective on sin. We view particular sins as especially grievous, but think nothing of things that are actually much more damaging. As an example, let's look at an event in the life of King David. David, as you know, was a great spiritual man, but he did have some personal failures. What we remember most about this is the fact that he committed adultery with Bathsheba. This indeed was expressly against the will and law of God. But what David did afterwards was even worse.

David's big sin was not committing adultery, but in destroying people's lives trying to cover it up. David perhaps didn't even have a problem in his own mind until he got a little message from Bathsheba that she was pregnant. Their mischief would be impossible to hide because Bathsheba's husband, the great warrior Uriah, was out fighting for David. He was one of David's chief soldiers, one of the special group of thirty. David couldn't just admit his guilt at this point, as long as he could think of a scheme to keep from being found out. His first plan had to do with bringing Uriah back from battle so that he could spend time with his wife. Once this was done, the baby could be claimed as his. Hopefully the time factor would not be too noticeable.

So David brought Uriah back under the guise, I'm sure, of inquiring as to the status of the military campaign. He provided Uriah with every opportunity to visit his wife, even to the point of trying to make him drunk so that he wouldn't know what he was doing. But Uriah was such a fine soldier that he just couldn't accept pleasures when his compatriots were out in the field of battle. So he returned without doing what David so desperately needed him to do.

This first plan only involved lying, which some might think to be on about the same level as his original sin. But this didn't work, so David increased the level of evil a notch or two. He decided that Uriah had to be killed. Of course, he could have just had someone to murder him, but that might have been too suspicious when David later married Bathsheba. David was clever enough to know that it would only be natural for a soldier to be killed in battle? So he sent a note, and had Uriah deliver it himself, which told Joab the commander of the army to put Uriah in the heat of the battle and withdraw from him. Now David had an extremely loyal following and should have known the power of loyalty. He should have known that Joab and his men could not have just left Uriah to be killed. So Joab fulfilled his king's request at the cost of other good fighting men.

David finally gets what he wanted. Or what he thought he wanted. But was his secret kept? Joab had to know David's reason when David finally married Bathsheba and the child was born a few months later. But Joab's loyalty to David probably caused him to keep quiet on the subject. David thinks that he has gotten away with it until the prophet Nathan comes to tell him a little story where a rich man steals a poor man's only sheep. In one sense this only deals with the act of adultery, but in another sense the oppression of a powerful man is shown for what it is. David himself is so outraged at the act of oppression described here that he demands justice. And that is when David begins to truly understand his guilt.

So many times we don't see all of the other problems that are caused by those attempting to suppress their true guilt. Sometimes even those who confess the root sin keep trying to mask the magnitude of their entire situation. I've noticed that those who are known to be guilty continually trash other people. This is just an indication of not being able to deal properly with sin; the act of pushing other people down makes the guilty think that they look better. And how about anger? This is used many times to ward off the inquiries which are probing for the truth. It is a classic behavior that those who have been unfaithful are very aggressive and angry towards the one who was sinned against. And how about forcing the spouse to cover things up as well?

We must learn to admit our sin and go on without hurting people anymore. We make many mistakes because it is not our primary goal to keep from causing pain. We are too interested in our own lives. David learned from his guilty oppression and wrote the very beautiful Psalm 51:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

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