

The Wages of Sin is Death

2 Samuel 12:1–31

The Thirteenth Sermon on Second Samuel

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True believers can fall into sins that “greatly offend God.” True believers can fall into sins that “grieve the Holy Spirit.” True believers can fall into sins that “suspend the exercise of faith.” True believers can fall into sins that “severely wound the conscience.” True believers can fall into sins that lead them to “lose the awareness of grace for a time.” Does this sound true to you? Or does this sound impossible to you? Does this make you scared? This is how the theologians at the Synod of Dort described believers and sins like David’s in 2 Samuel 11–12 (CD 5.5).

I want to begin by asking you why is this chapter important to your faith and life? It’s so important because as a Christian you need to know the depth of your sin nature. You need to know what you are capable of. You need to know how bad you really are. “But I know I’m a sinner; why dwell on bad news?” The deeper you know your sins the higher you will magnify God’s grace. The weaker you know you are the stronger you will know God is. As J.C. Ryle said, “A right knowledge of sin lies at the heart of all saving Christianity.” Again: “...the more we see our own sinfulness: the nearer we get to heaven.”¹

¹ Ryle, *Holiness*, 1, 12.

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As we turn to 2 Samuel 12 we see this in God's judgment of David and God's mercy to David. We see this in God's displeasure towards David's sin and in his pleasure in being faithful to his promises. Let's follow the story and see it in three movements:

1. *The Lord's Correction*
2. *David's Confession*
3. *The Lord's Covenant Keeping*

May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth of his Word today.

The Lord's Correction

David has sinned in chapter 11 and now comes *the Lord's correction*. These two chapters are arranged in such a way that the opening scene of chapter 12 lies at the heart.² David has done his deeds, now the Lord does his. And you see this in verse 1: **And the Lord sent Nathan to David**. In chapter 11 David had been sending, but now it is the Lord's turn! Nathan first tells a parable so that David will be led to his own conclusion about the matter: **"There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor"** (v. 1). David is the rich man and Uriah is the poor man. **"The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought"** (v. 2). David describes Uriah's love for his "lamb": **"And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink**

² Scholars have shown that chapters 11 and 12 are a chiasm. See Davis, 151; Leithart, 237.

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from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him” (v. 3).

Then comes the problem: **“Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him” (v. 4).** The narrator tells us that **David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man** and then he applied Exodus 22:1: **“As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity” (vv. 5–6)** Notice that. David knows the miniscule points of the law but he missed the obvious coveting, adultery, and murder! Children, whenever you point your finger at someone else you’re pointing three back at yourself!

Now comes the punch line. In the parable the word “man” is used four times. Then David uses it twice. Its seventh and climactic use is by Nathan: **“You are the man!” (v. 7)** Nathan holds nothing back! Nathan speaks truth to power! Nathan speaks not generally but particularly to David! Judgment has been pronounced. We all need this, brothers and sisters. We all need personal correction of particular sins by one another.

The Lord drives home his correction by contrasting David’s taking of Uriah’s wife with his own giving of grace to David: **“I anointed you...I delivered you...I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives...[I] gave you the house of Israel and of Judah” (v. 8).** One of the ways God humbles us is through reminding us of all he has done for us.

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Because of David's sin recounted in verse 9, the Lord's correction would come in two forms: first, David's house would be a house of war (vv. 10–12). Not only would this be true in David's day, but as we go on to read of the history of the kings, we see this tragedy. Second, David's child by Bathsheba would die (vv. 14–23). Time doesn't permit me to speak on these verses now, but you can listen to my sermon from March 30 in the evening on children dying and our assurance of their being in heaven where I dealt with this text.

David's Confession

This correction of the Lord leads to *David's confession*: “**I have sinned against the Lord**” (v. 13). I mentioned at the beginning the serious sins we are capable of falling into and the results of that falling. What did our forefathers say was the remedy to get us out of the pit into which we have fallen? How do we go from “greatly offend[ing] God” to pleasing God? How do we go from “griev[ing] the Holy Spirit” to being led by him? How do we go from “suspend[ing] the exercise of faith” to powerfully exercising it? How do we go from “severely wound[ing] the conscience” to healing the conscience? How do we go from “los[ing] the awareness of grace for a time” to experiencing it anew? Think about it for a moment. What's the key to unlock the door to spiritual renewal? What's the remedy for bringing healing? The answer might surprise you? It's “genuine repentance” (CD 5.5).

What is repentance? There are two New Testament words for repentance. One speaks of a change of mind while the other speaks of a change of direction.

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What makes this change genuine? First, there is a personal responsibility: “**I have sinned.**” David’s repentance is not, “But Bathsheba was on the roof without clothes in the clear of day.” David’s repentance is not, “The devil made me do it.”

David takes personal responsibility. As we sing on Good Friday:

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee!
‘Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee;
I crucified Thee.³

Second, there is acknowledgment of the true offended party: “**I have sinned against the Lord.**” It’s not, “I’m sorry you feel sorry.” It’s that I have violated the commandments of the Lord God of the universe. We sing, “Could my zeal no languor know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.”⁴ It’s not about feeling sorrow; it’s not about creating emotion; it’s about genuinely acknowledging offending God and genuinely acknowledging that he alone can save.

How we need this genuine grief for our sins and this genuine repentance from them before the face of God! We confess our sins every Lord’s Day as a people, but we need to be struck anew, again and again, at how holy God is and how vile we are. We need the scales ripped off our eyes so we can see that apart from Jesus Christ our true status before God is utter peril. If the nations are like a drop in a bucket, what are we; what are you; what am I?

³ From the hymn, “Ah, Dearest Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended.”

⁴ From the hymn, “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.”

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The Lord's Covenant Keeping

But there is good news. In all this we also see *the Lord's covenant keeping*. Nathan assures David, "**The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die,**" although, as we just saw, his son dies in his place. But another is given in his place.

Why is David spared? The Lord has made a covenant with him. The Lord has made a covenant with the world to bring it salvation through a Savior.

So when we turn to the final section of this chapter that looks so odd and anti-climactic to us, we have to read it in the light of the Lord's covenant promises to David. The Ammonites are defeated, there is peace in the land, and the Lord's grace will continue to be poured out upon his people. His grace will be poured out upon us in Jesus Christ, whom the Lord sent through the line of David.

And even after he sends this Savior, our sinful nature is so powerful, so pervasive, that we are still capable of "greatly offend God," "griev[ing] the Holy Spirit," "suspend[ing] the exercise of faith," "severely wound[ing] the conscience," and of "los[ing] the awareness of grace for a time." Let this be a warning to you, brothers and sisters. And should we fall, the Lord will discipline us because he loves us. And when he does, the remedy is repentance. And when you repent, you will experience afresh the faithfulness of your God despite your unfaithfulness. Hallelujah! What a Savior! Amen.