

Section from *The life of David* by Arthur Pink

The question has been asked, can a person who has committed such atrocious crimes, and so long remains impenitent, be indeed a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and an heir of everlasting glory? Can one spark of divine life exist un-extinguished in such an ocean of evil?" Were we left to our own unaided judgment to make reply, most probably every last one of us would promptly answer, No, such a thing is unthinkable. Yet in the clear light of Holy Writ it is plain that such things *are* possible. Later, David made it manifest that he was a truly regenerated person by the sincerity and depth of his contrition and confession. Yet, let it be said that, no man while guilty of such sins, and before he *genuinely* repents of the same, can have any warrantable evidence to conclude that *he* is a believer; yea, everything points to the contrary. Though grace be not lost in such an awful case, divine consolation and assurance is suspended.

But now the question arises, *Why did God* permit David to fall so low and sin so terribly? The first answer must be, To display His high and awe-inspiring *sovereignty*. Here we approach ground which is indeed difficult for us to tread, even with unshodden feet. Nevertheless it cannot be gainsaid that there is a marvellous and sovereign display of the Lord's grace toward His people in this particular respect, both before their calling and after. Some of the elect are permitted to sin most grievously in their unconverted state, whilst others of them, even in their unregenerate days, are wondrously preserved. Again; some of the elect after their conversion have been divinely allowed to awfully fall into the most horrible impieties, whilst others of them are so preserved as never to sin willfully against their consciences from the first conviction to the very close of their lives (Condensed from S. E. Pierce on Hosea 14:1).

This is a high mystery, which it would be most impious for us to attempt to pry into: rather must we bow our heads before it and say, "Even so, Father, for *so* it seemeth good in thy sight." It is a solemn fact, from which there is no getting away, that some sin more before their conversion, and some (especially those saved in early life) sin worse after their conversion. It is also a plain fact that with some saints God most manifests His *restraining grace*, and with others his *pardoning grace*. Three things are to be steadily borne in mind in connection with the sins of the saints. God never regards sin as a trifle: it is *ever* that abominable thing which He hates (Jer. 44:4). Second, it is never to be excused or extenuated by us. Third, God's *sovereignty* therein must be acknowledged: whatever difficulties it may raise before our minds, let us hold fast the tact that God does as He pleases, and "giveth no account" of His actions (Job 33:13).

A second answer to the question, Why did God permit David to fall so fearfully and sin so grievously? may be: that we might have set before our eyes the more clearly the awful fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Unmistakably plain as is the meaning of those words, uttered by him who cannot lie, yet how very slow we all are to *really* receive them at their face value, and acknowledge that they accurately describe the natural state of every human heart—that of the Man Christ Jesus alone excepted. But God has done more than make this bare statement: He has placed on record in His Word illustrations, exemplifications, demonstrations of its verity—notably so in allowing us to see the unspeakable wickedness that still remained in the heart of *David!*

Third, by suffering David to fall and sin as he did, God has graciously given a most solemn warning to believers in middle life—and elder Christians also. "Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against sin. David was so; his great surprisal into sin was after a long profession, manifold experiences of God, and watchful keeping himself from his iniquity. And hence, in particular, hath it come to pass that the profession of many hath declined in their old age or riper time: they have given over the work of mortifying sin *before* their work was at an end. There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit. The command God gives in Colossians 3:5 is *as necessary* for them to observe who are toward the end of their race, as those who are but at the beginning of it" (John Owen).

Fourth, the fearful fall of David made way for a display of the amazing grace of God in recovering His fallen people. If we are slow to receive what Scripture teaches concerning the depravity of the human heart and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, we are equally slow to *really* believe what it reveals about the covenant-faithfulness of God, the efficacy of Christ's blood to cleanse the foulest stain from those for whom it was shed, and the super-abounding grace of Him who is "the Father of mercies." Had David never sinned so grievously

and sunken so low, he had never known those infinite depths of mercy which there are in the heart of God. Likewise, had his terrible sin, his subsequent broken-hearted confession, and his *pardon* by God, never been placed upon divine record, not a few of God's people throughout the centuries had sunk in abject despair.

Fifth, to furnish a fatal stumbling-block to blatant rebels. "It is certain that thousands through succeeding generations have, by this fall of 'the man after God's own heart,' been prejudiced against true religion, hardened in infidelity, or emboldened in blasphemy; while others have thence taken occasion to commit *habitual wickedness* under a religious profession, and with presumptuous confidence, to the still greater discredit of the Gospel. It should, however, be considered, that all these have been, previously, either open enemies to true religion, or hypocritical pretenders to it: and it is the righteous purpose of God, that stumbling-blocks should be thrown in the way of such men, that they may 'stumble, and fall, and be snarled, and taken, and perish.' It is His holy will thus to detect the secret malignity of their hearts, and to make way for the display of His justice in their condemnation. On the other hand, thousands, from age to age, have by this awful example been rendered more suspicious of themselves, more watchful, more afraid of temptation, more dependent on the Lord, and more fervent in prayer; and by means of David's fall, have, themselves, been preserved from falling" (Thomas Scott).

God, then, had wise and sufficient reasons, both for permitting David to sin so heinously and for placing the same upon imperishable record. Nor has any opposer or despiser of the Truth any just ground to sneeringly ask, *Are those* the fruits of grace and faith? We answer, No, they are not; instead, they are the horrible works of the flesh, the filth which issues from corrupt human nature. How strong must those inclinations be to evil, when they, at times, succeed in overcoming the oppositions of truth and grace dwelling in the heart of an eminent saint of God! And in the light of the context (2 Sam. 11:1, 2) how it behooves us to watch against the *beginnings* of negligence and self-indulgence, and keep at the utmost distance from that precipice over which David fell; begging God that it may please Him to deliver us from all forbidden objects.

But this incident presents another difficulty to some, namely, how to harmonize it with the declaration made in 1 John 3:15: "Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." It is really surprising that so many have experienced trouble in reconciling this with the case of David: as usual, the difficulty is self-created through ignoring the context. In 1 John 3:11 the apostle takes up the subject of the Christians' love one for another, whereby they make it manifest that they are *brethren* in Christ. The world (1) loves them not (2) hates them (3) will murder them whenever they dare—as Cain did Abel. But no real Christian has *such* a hatred in his heart against any "brother" in Christ. Nor had David. Uriah was not an Israelite, but an "*Hittite*" (2 Sam. 11:3; 1 Kings 15:5)!

In conclusion, let us point out some of the solemn lessons which we may learn from this sad incident. 1. Beware of the *beginnings* of sin: who had imagined that taking his ease when he should have been at the post of duty on the battlefield, had led to adultery and ended in murder? 2. See how refusal to put one serious wrong right, preferring concealment to confession, gives Satan a great advantage over us, to lead into yet worse evil! 3. Learn therefrom that there is no security in years, and that no *past* communion with God will safeguard us against temptations when we are careless in *the present*. 4. How fickle is poor human nature: David's heart smote him when he cut off Saul's skirt, yet later he deliberately planned the murder of Uriah. 5. Mark what fearful lengths pride will go to in order to maintain a reputation before men. 6. Behold how callous the heart will become once the strivings of conscience are disregarded. 7. Though we may succeed in escaping the wrath of our fellows, sin always meets with the displeasure of the Lord.¹

¹ Pink, A. W. (2005). *The life of David*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.