

The Cover-up

Father Abraham – Part II

Romans 4:6-8

Introduction

Over the last several months in America, our attention has been riveted to one exposure after another of prominent people and prominent corporations that have gone bad. They have either been indicted for or are under suspicion of juggling the books, outright theft, kick-backs, money laundering, and insider trading. Above all, there are incredible stories of complex and detailed cover-ups.

One recent story revolves around a well known woman who apparently sold the shares of stock she owned in a company, just before the financial troubles of that company “hit the press” and their stock value plummeted. She finally relented, under legal pressure to comply, and turned over her phone records and emails. However, the officials soon discovered that certain phone numbers and emails had been blacked out.

Frankly, the national pastime seems to be the cover-up of sin.

So rampant is the infidelity and deception of married men and women toward their spouses and children, that a company, called “The Alibi Agency,” makes a profit by helping to create an alibi for their clients. The *Atlantic Monthly* recently reported that this company will furnish ticket stubs for the theater performance to which you said you were going and they will print fake invitations and programs to the social and business events that supposedly kept you away from home. Their advertising proudly promises, “We can tailor make an alibi to your specifications . . . our aim is your peace of mind.”¹

The Cover-up Strategy

So, what are some common ways that we try to cover up our sins?

Deny, deny, deny and then, admit to only having made a mistake

1. Part of the cover-up strategy is to deny, deny, deny and then, when you are finally caught, admit to only having made a mistake.

One recent example is the Pulitzer prize winning author who was exposed as having spun a web of tales about his military career, his achievements on the battle field, and his acts of heroism in combat. He told his students at the university where he taught, that he had led a division of men into combat and that they had succeeded in their mission. The truth was, he was teaching history at West Point at the time. He even lied about the kind of high school athletic achievements he had accomplished. When he was caught, he said, “Even the best life can include some mistakes.”

Deny, deny, deny and then, when you are finally caught, admit to only having made a mistake.

According to one recent survey, approximately sixty percent of corporate professionals admitted anonymously to some sort of exaggeration on their résumé. If caught, the average man would say, “Well, I made a wrong choice,” or, “I made a mistake.”

There would be no mention of words like, “deceiving” or “lying”.

Deny, deny, deny and then, blame someone else

2. Another aspect of the cover-up strategy is to deny, deny, deny and then, when proven wrong, blame someone else as being the bad person.

This strategy, ladies and gentlemen, began all the way back in the time when the first man and the first woman, to ever walk the face of the earth, sinned. When God came to hold them accountable and uncover their sin, Adam gave the very first excuse recorded in human history, “It’s the woman’s fault.”

However, the tragedy was not just that Adam blamed his wife, the deeper tragedy was that Adam implied that God was ultimately to blame. Look at Genesis, chapter 3, verse 12,

[Adam] said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate.”

In other words, “If You hadn’t given her to me, I wouldn’t have sinned.”

Then the Lord looked at Eve and said, in effect, “Okay, let’s see if *you* can admit you’re a sinner.”

So, He said to her, in verse 13,

... [Eve], what is this you have done? ...

Eve then blamed it on the serpent. And that line of defense is popular to this day. It says, “The devil made me do it.”

This also was an implicit accusation against God, because God created the serpent. In fact, God created Satan who inhabited the serpent. So, ultimately, it is God’s fault.

We would never blame God for our sin, would we? “Lord, if You hadn’t made me this way, I wouldn’t fail so much in that area,” or “Lord, if You had only taken care of that issue or that need, I wouldn’t have had to take matters into my own hands.”

That is really another way of saying, “Lord, it’s Your fault!”

Deny, deny, deny and then, blame someone else.

Cal Thomas wrote, in a recent *World Magazine*, these words,

Isn’t anyone responsible for anything anymore? Apparently not . . . we’re all victims now and anything bad is . . . somebody else’s fault.

He cites several cases pending today, including the man who was ordered to cut down a diseased tree in his yard because it posed a hazard to power lines and traffic. So, the man backed his van up to the tree, put a ladder on top of the van and began to cut down the tree . . . when some falling branches knocked him off his ladder and onto the ground where he hurt himself, he sued the city – it was their fault. [It was not his fault that he did not know any better, it was the city’s fault].ⁱⁱ

That case reminded me of one that I read several years ago. It was the story of a high school girl who tried out for the varsity football team. She was allowed to try out, as the school officials were afraid to turn her down lest she sue the school district. In the very first scrimmage she was hurt. She still sued the city’s school district, for more than one million dollars. She, along with her parents, claimed, in that lawsuit, that nobody had, “warned her of the physical dangers inherent in the sport.” She did not know you could get hurt playing football.

Perhaps the most unbelievable case I have heard in a long time, is of the fifty-six year old New York man who is currently suing several fast food chains. He claims they contributed to the weight gain that led to his heart attack. According to this man, the fast food restaurants created an addiction; a craving that overpowered him. Therefore, he is suing McDonald’s, Burger King, Wendy’s, and Kentucky Fried Chicken for causing his heart attack due to all that bad food. [By the way, never mind that all four fast food chains serve salad. Evidently, he became addicted to the bacon and Swiss double whopper and the “biggee” fries and the super sized Mountain Dew.] But, it was not his fault.ⁱⁱⁱ

Deny, deny, deny and then, first, admit to only the least amount, or second, find someone else to blame for your addictions, greed, deceptions, perversions, and, in general, sinful behavior.

Admit to the sin, but deny being a bad person

3. Another way of covering up sin, and something we hear more than ever, is for the person who is caught in a crime to say, “Yes, I did something bad, but I’m not a bad person.”

The *Chicago Tribune* a few months ago, reported that a disgruntled man walked into a restaurant in Elgin, Illinois, carrying four guns. He opened fire, killing two and wounding sixteen others. At his trial

he was unrepentant. When his attorney asked if he felt any remorse, he said,

As ironic as this sounds, I'm a passionate, giving person. I like to think I'm a pretty good person. I'm not one to hurt anyone that doesn't provoke me.^{iv}

This was ignoring the fact that he wounded and maimed people he did not even know.

So, this is a cover-up by saying, "I did something evil, but I'm not really an evil person."

Deny, deny, deny and then, say that the sin is not sinful

4. There is a fourth way to cover up sinful behavior and it has become the most popular of all. In the cover-up of sin, whenever you are caught, simply say that it is not sinful.

Deny, deny, deny and then, say that it really is not so bad after all. In fact, do not even deny it, instead, applaud it; endorse it; say that it is the way to live. Wear sin and evil as a badge of honor.

The classic example is the homosexual community. They hold their annual "gay pride" parades and have their "gay pride" month. And in their pride, they say that sexual perversion between men with men and women with women is not sinful – it is a reason to be proud.

This method redefines moral right and wrong in an attempt to overcome the guilt of sin and the pain of a guilty conscience.

Judith Brandt recently wrote a book, sub-titled, *Your Guide to Infidelity and Extramarital Etiquette*, which is receiving rave reviews. She said in an interview,

If you are going about your business in a discreet way [in other words, if no one catches you in your infidelity] and you are continuing to take care of your wife and children [in other words, if you put food on the table and clothes on their backs and act like you really love them and care about them], then there is no reason to feel guilty.

In other words, you have not done anything wrong. You can actually be a discreet fornicator. You can use proper etiquette while you destroy someone else's life along with your own. She went on to actually state, in the interview, that adultery can actually provide some short term benefits.^v

Paul has already described, in Romans, chapter 1, the atrocity of this kind of cover-up. In fact, he says it is the worst kind of all. He says, in effect, that the gutter of depravity; the bottom of the sewer of sin, is when a person, or a society at large, not only commits sinful acts, but approves of that sin and applauds that sinful behavior in others.

He writes, in chapter 1, verse 32,

. . . they not only do the same [these sinful acts], but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

He says that is the bottom rung of the ladder as you descend into the pit of depravity.

Listen to the warning that Herbert Hoover, our thirty-first President, gave to future generations, when said, seventy years ago,

[The strength of our nation] lies in public sensitivity to evil. Our greatest danger is not some invading army . . . our greatest danger . . . is a public tolerance of scandalous behavior.^{vi}

In other words, the greatest danger facing any culture is the cover-up of sin. The cover-up of sin by:

- saying it was just a bad choice,
- blaming it on someone else,
- saying that you are really not an evil person, or
- worst of all, saying evil is not really evil.

The truth is, mankind has been involved in some sort of cover-up of sin, ever since sin entered the human experience.

King David – Master of Cover-up Illustration of Salvation As a Free Gift of God

Now, in an attempt to show the awful depravity of the human mind and heart; to reveal that salvation has to be the free gift of a gracious God, Paul has brought to us, in Romans, chapter 4, the illustration of Abraham, the great Patriarch of the Jewish people. Abraham was a former pagan who was chosen by God, yet a man who had a terrible time telling the truth.

Having illustrated the grace of a saving God in the life of the famous Patriarch, Paul will now illustrate the grace of a forgiving God in the life of a famous Monarch. If Abraham was the beloved

Patriarch, and he was, then David was the beloved Monarch. However, as great and beloved as David was, he was an even greater sinner. King David was a master in the game of cover-up.

For that reason, Paul will use David as an illustration, along with Abraham, that God justifies a man or woman apart from works. Notice what he writes in Romans, chapter 4, verse 6.

just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works

In other words, the life David lived was so sinful at times, that it should be obvious to everyone that God justified David independently of the way he lived.

To the Jewish reader, Paul was opening up a wound by mentioning David in this context. The Jew, like everyone else, not only wanted to cover up his own sins, but especially those of his forefathers. And above all, he wanted to cover up the sins of David. The Bible, however, is unrelenting in exposing the cover-up of sin.

In order for us to appreciate this, the words of David, quoted centuries later by Paul, in Romans, chapter 4, we have to go back in time to, perhaps, the most famous cover-up in biblical history.

II Samuel, chapter 11, sets the stage. Look at verses 1 through 4.

Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged [surrounded] Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

(God is making sure the servants tell David she is a married woman. This should have stopped him cold. Continue to verse 4.)

David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.

One night, and it is over. The Bible does not inform us whether this meeting between David and Bathsheba digressed to some form of kingly coercion, or if bribery or intimidation was used, or if it was cruel rape. We are simply told that she came and she went back home, implying that David now wants life to resume as normal.

Not so fast, however. Continue to verse 5.

The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

At this point, David has a choice. He can confess his sin and do whatever is necessary to accept the consequences of his sin, or he can try to cover it up.

Four steps to David's cover-up of his sin

He chooses the cover-up. There are four steps in his cover-up.

Bring Bathsheba's husband home from the battlefield

1. Step number one was to bring Bathsheba's husband home from the battlefield.

David will make sure that Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, spends the weekend at home with his wife, so that her pregnancy could be attributed to him. Look at verses 6 through 10.

Then David sent to Joab [the General], saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet."

(That is the Old Testament way of saying, "Take the weekend off and relax." Continue to verses 8 through 10.)

And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. Now when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"

Uriah, by the way, then delivers a rather courageous reminder to King David. In fact, some commentators believe that Uriah knew something

was up, that all of this attention was a little too obvious. We cannot be sure. Look at verse 11.

Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing.”

Get Bathsheba’s husband drunk and send him home

2. So, David moves to step number two, which we are told in verse 13.

Now David called him, and he ate and drank before him, and he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord’s servants, but he [still] did not go down to his house.

When you read this passage, you can almost begin to feel David’s panic. This man just will not go home to his wife. And, if he does not, it will not be long before he knows that she has become pregnant and he is not the father. He has been on the field for months and there are months yet to go. He will know it was someone else.

By the way, it is clear now, to the reader, that David has shared this scheme with Bathsheba and she evidently, has become a part of the cover-up. Why not tell her husband what David did? Why not tell the truth? She is now in the process of deceiving her husband.

Make sure Bathsheba’s husband never comes home

3. So, the third step in this cover-up is to make sure Uriah never comes home.

Look at verses 14 and 15.

Now it came about in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, “Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die.”

Skip to verse 17.

The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David’s servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died.

One of the unknown details in this tragic deception and now, murderous plot, is the fact that Uriah was actually one of David’s most loyal soldiers. In fact, if you trace Uriah’s history, you discover that he joined David before David became the king. He banded together with David at the caves of Adullam. Uriah was one of the first thirty six men to come and join with David. He was with David out in the fields. He suffered with David when David could give him nothing in return but the promise of a future kingdom. He fought side by side with David. He walked into Jerusalem with his glorious king.

Now, Uriah, this trusting friend, would be double-crossed and betrayed as a result of David’s cover-up. Let me give a principle relating to this:

Covering up sin, instead of confessing sin, multiplies the devastation, once it is discovered.

There is the devastation in the life of the husband who did not know. There is the wife whose life is ripped to pieces, upon discovering a husband’s secret life. There are children whose trust in their father or mother is smashed to pieces. Lives are literally ripped apart when that magazine is uncovered or that phone number is discovered.

Let us call it what it is – it is *sin* and no one is to blame but the *sinner*. It leads to the destruction of lives. There is no such thing as adulterous etiquette. There is no such thing as sinning discreetly. And, in the life of David and Bathsheba, it is the betrayal of a man who loved them both.

Chuck Swindoll wrote a story in one of his books that I have in my library. It is the tragic story of a couple who had been married for twenty-five years. They had three grown children who loved them dearly. They were blessed with financial resources, such that they could finally begin dreaming about a lakeside retirement home. They began looking for one and found a lake front home being sold by a widower. They liked it, so they returned home to plan and to think.

Then, out of the blue, this wife and mother announced to her husband that she wanted a divorce. He went numb. Then, angry, he said, “How could you be conceiving this plan? We have been married twenty-five years and are looking for a retirement home. How could you be nursing this scheme?”

She responded that she had not been, that this had been a recent decision. He asked, “Who?”

She told him that it was the owner of the lake front home. She had run into him, inadvertently,

after looking at his home, several weeks after they had met to discuss the purchase of the home. They had had a quick lunch together. That had led to another lunch, and another . . . She said to her husband that she was now in love with this man and was not turning back. Not even their grown children, who hated the idea, could dissuade her.

The day came for her to leave and the husband was walking through the kitchen on his way to the garage. He stopped and looked at her, and said, "I guess this is the last time."

His voice sort of dissolved into sobs. She felt awkward, hurriedly gathered her things, and drove to meet this man. Two weeks after moving in with him, he was seized with a heart attack. This new lover of hers, lingered for a few hours and then, died.

In just two weeks, so many aspects of their lives were irretrievably destroyed. Trust was destroyed; the future was bleak; the prospects of grand-parenting were now clouded with guilt; the potential of reconciliation was now a story of unbearable sorrow and pain.

Marry Bathsheba

4. David is not through with his cover-up, by the way. He takes another step in his deceptive scheme. Bathsheba is as involved as he is; she is as deep in this scheme as he is. David's fourth and final step in his cover-up is given to us in verse 27a.

When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife . . .

Uriah's grave has not even grown grass yet. Can you imagine David, as he stood at the memorial service of his faithful soldier, delivering a eulogy for his faithful friend Uriah? And, if that is not bad enough, it seems like David is going to get away with *murder*.

David's cover-up uncovered

But God has been overlooked. Look at the last part of verse 27.

But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Ladies and gentlemen, in David's cover-up, and in ours, we tend to forget the presence of God. We get involved in sin and we look this way and we look that way, but we forget to look up.

Now, frankly, I am not sure how secret David's sin was. There is a year of time between II Samuel chapter 11 and chapter 12. One author suggested that the palace gossips are talking and that a few cynics are probably muttering around the kingdom, "David's gotten away with sin."

During that year, however, a prophet of God, named Nathan, has been watching and listening. He has also been working on a story, by God's own inspiration. Then, he comes to David, as we are told at the beginning of chapter 12. For the sake of time, let me paraphrase it for you.

Nathan tells David a story. He says, "David, there was a very wealthy man who had herds and flocks. He was prosperous. And, there was this poor little man who had only one lamb. His children played with it. It ate the scraps from the table. They loved it. One day, company came to this rich man's home and he wanted to roast a lamb. He did not want to take one of his many and he noticed the poor man's lamb. He took the lamb from the poor man, killed it, and served it to his guests."

David virtually comes off his throne and shouts, "That man deserves to die!"

It is interesting that David said that, as Jewish Law only required restoration, not death! But David says, "That man must die."

What did the rich man steal? A lamb. What did David steal? A wife.

Then, Nathan, perhaps pausing long enough to let David's words echo around the palace walls, pointed his finger at David and said, in verse 7,

. . . You are the man! . . .

Suddenly David is exposed! The cover-up is uncovered. David is guilty of covetousness, adultery, lying, and murder.

Conclusion

Paul will use David, in Romans, chapter 4, because David's case is hopeless. And so is the case of all of humanity. As Romans, chapter 3, verse 23, tells us,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Paul, in Romans, chapter 4, says, in effect, that David is one of God's greatest evidences that salvation is a free gift. It is not given to perfect people, it is given to terrible sinners – sinners who stop covering up and confess.

David will write a song that we call Psalm 32, which Paul quotes from in Romans, chapter 4. Listen to what David says life was like during those days of deception and cover-up. Look at verses 3 through 5 of Psalm, chapter 32.

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. [Then] I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; and You forgave the guilt of my sin.

Now, in Romans, chapter 4, verse 7, Paul pulls, from that Psalm, David's opening lines. It is poetry

that speaks of a man who has ceased covering up sin and fully confesses.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered.

By the way, this word "covered," is a wonderful Old Testament truth, yet the principle remains today – do not ever expect God to cover for you what you will not uncover for Him. Continue to verse 8, as Paul continues to quote from David's Psalm.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.

There is no more cover-up. There is instead, the liberation and joy that comes from full confession.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/25/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Cullen Murphy, "A Hand for the Head," Atlantic Monthly (Apr., 2000).

ⁱⁱ Cal Thomas, "We're All Victims Now," World Magazine (Aug. 10, 2002), p. 27.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 27.

^{iv} Lee Eclove, Chicago Tribune (Nov. 20, 2001).

^v Judith E. Brandt, interviewed by the Chicago Tribune, cited in PreachingToday.com.

^{vi} Torch Magazine, (Summer, 2002), p. 10.