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President Bill Clinton's Regret Or, A Scriptural Look at True and False Repentance

"For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world
worketh death"
(2 Corinthians 7:10).

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Preface

After being questioned by a grand jury concerning his private conduct while President of the United States, President Bill Clinton addressed the people of the United States of America on nationwide television on August 17, 1998. In that short speech, he admitted to a "relationship" with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern (a government employee). President Clinton said that this relationship "was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong." He did not stop with this admission, but proceeded to call this relationship, "a critical lapse in judgment and a personal failure on my part for which I am solely and completely responsible." With this unprecedented admission by a sitting President, he added, "I misled people, including even my wife. I deeply regret that."

Why should we take note of the moral conduct of this world leader, for whom we are enjoined to pray? "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We should examine his moral conduct because "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Not only does President Clinton's conduct set an example for the people of America, but he advertises to the world a standard for truthfulness and moral purity-- or, the lack of it.

King David and President Bill Clinton

Both King David and President Clinton can be similarly compared.

First, God placed both of these men in their respective offices. King David was taken from the "sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My [the LORD's] people, over Israel" (2 Samuel 7:8). Likewise, Bill Clinton came from humble beginnings, raised mainly by his mother. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1).

Second, both King David had and President Clinton has the leadership of professedly Godly nations. Is it any wonder that the famed Liberty Bell of Philadelphia, that announced America's independence as a nation, is inscribed, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof"

(Leviticus 25:10)?

Third, both of these heads of state admitted to an inappropriate sexual relationship, where their governmental position was wrongly used to gain sexual favor. "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle... David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her... And David said unto Nathan, I have **sinned** against the LORD" (2Samuel 11:1-4;12:13). President Clinton admitted to an inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky without using the words "sexual relationship" in his televised speech.

Fourth, both attempted to cover their sin. King David resorted to murdering Uriah, Bathsheba's husband; while President Clinton lied (about 7 months earlier) that he had no involvement with Monica Lewinsky. This statement was recorded on nationwide television. "And he [David] wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die" (2 Samuel 11:15). Further, "Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince" (Proverbs 17:7).

Fifth, both were caught in their lies by God. Nathan the prophet was sent by God to show King David his sin. Nathan told a pitiful story of how a rich man took a poor man's lamb, instead of using his own. David was so angry at the rich man's conduct that he said, "As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die" (2Samuel 12:5). At that point, Nathan boldly proclaimed, "Thou art the man" (12:7). After Monica Lewinsky testified before the grand jury with immunity from prosecution, President Clinton was called in by Judge Kenneth Starr to give his testimony. Within hours of President Clinton's grand jury appearance, he gave his unprecedented speech of admission of his inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

Finally, both King David and President Bill Clinton admitted regret for their sexual misconduct. "And David said unto Nathan, I have **sinned** against the LORD" (2Samuel 12:13). President Clinton stated in his August 17th address, "Indeed, I did have a relationship with Ms. Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact it was wrong. It constituted a critical lapse of judgment and a personal failure on my part for which I am solely and completely responsible... I know that my public comments and my silence about this matter gave a false impression. I misled people, including even my wife. I deeply regret that."

What is True Repentance?

It is apparent that God's people should know the difference between true repentance and false repentance. Notice the actions of John the Baptist as he decried the lack of true repentance from some of those who came to be baptized. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for [literally, in keeping with] repentance" (Matthew 3:7-8).

Not just this great prophet-- who announced: "Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make His paths straight" (3:3)-- is to make this kind of judgment, but all the Saints are enjoined to "judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). [See our article, "Judge Righteous Judgment" for a development of this thought.]

Since King David was a head of state that was publicly caught in a sexual impropriety in the exercise of his office, we shall view the Scriptural evidence that indicated King David's true repentance from Psalm 51. This psalm is the highest form of evidence, i.e., Holy Scripture, that indicates that the penitent David was truly and still a "man after Mine [the LORD's] own heart, which shall fulfil all My [the LORD's] will" (Acts 13:22).

David not only admitted his sin, but humbly begged God for His forgiveness. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. **Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned**, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest" (Psalm 51:1-4).

David makes no attempt to point the blame at anyone but himself, unlike the initial reaction of Adam to being shown his sin. "And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Genesis 3:12). "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned" (51:4) indicates David's clear understanding that all sin is first and foremost against God Almighty, the Ruler of the Universe.

Justifying God, and taking sides against himself, demonstrates true contrition on David's part, i.e., "that thou mightest be justified" (51:4). Wholeheartedly throwing himself at the mercy of the Judge and embracing His judgment, David demonstrated genuine repentance, i.e., "and be clear when Thou judgest" (51:4). "He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His Truth" (Psalm 96:13).

David was so willing to accept the blame for his actions that he could not say, "For Thou art my hope, O LORD GOD: Thou art my trust from my youth. **By Thee have I been holden up from the womb**: Thou art He that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of Thee" (Psalm 71:5-6). Instead of joyfully laying claim that "by Thee have I been holden up from the womb" (71:6), he now contritely sees himself as only sinful-- "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).

Surely, King David sinned against man-- Uriah, Bathsheba, the people of Israel, etc.-- but he recognized the all-important necessity to secure the cleansing and forgiveness of the most important offended party-- God Himself. Notice all the things that David asks God to do to secure for himself true repentance.

"Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt **make me to know wisdom. Purge me** with hyssop, and I shall be clean: **wash me**, and I shall be whiter than snow. **Make me to hear joy and gladness**; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. **Hide Thy**

face from my sins, and **blot out** all mine iniquities. **Create in me** a clean heart, O God; and **renew a right spirit** within me. **Cast me not away** from Thy presence; and **take not Thy Holy Spirit** from me. **Restore unto me** the joy of Thy salvation; and **uphold me** with Thy free Spirit" (Psalm 51:6-12).

The result of true repentance is true forgiveness. A favorite New Testament passage that supports the certainty of God's forgiveness when we render to Him true confession is 1John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Also, the result of true repentance is the works or fruit of repentance that John the Baptist insisted upon seeing (Matthew 3). "Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee" (Psalm 51:13). Additional New Testament support for a clear demonstration of what we confess and believe-- including true repentance-- is from the Epistle of James. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18).

What is False Repentance?

Even as King David demonstrated true repentance, President Bill Clinton demonstrates false repentance. Let us examine the remainder of the President's short speech in light of Scripture to see clearly why President Clinton has not repented. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matthew 12:33). [See Charles G. Finney's "Lectures to Professing Christians" on "True and False Repentance" for an insightful and probing discussion of repentance.]

Even as true repentance is taking sides with God against yourself-- and thus, justifying God-- false repentance always finds someone with whom to share the blame. In this instance Kenneth Starr, the Office of Independent Counsel, has been selected by President Clinton in his short speech of regret, to help shoulder the blame for the "spectacle of the past seven months". "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

President Clinton has purposefully neglected the fact that had he not sinned in this extra-marital sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, he would not have needed to lie to God, his family, the country, and to the world, that he had no special relationship with Monica Lewinsky. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). The President has no one to blame but himself for his sin. Monica Lewinsky will need to do her own repenting, as well. "He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind" (Proverbs 11:29).

"The independent counsel investigation moved on to my staff and friends, then into my private life." These words by the President are searching for someone else to take the blame that he had previously announced in his speech for which he was "solely and completely responsible". This is the same thing as taking back your repentance, which means the original statement of repentance was not sincere. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2Corinthians 7:10). When anyone takes back their repentance, mark it down, they never truly repented. That is false repentance.

Whenever anyone begins a statement of repentance with "If I have hurt anyone, please forgive me."

That is **no** repentance at all. I do not say that President Bill Clinton used any such words in his speech; however, if others imitate such an attitude in their repentance, it betrays their heart's belief that they are not so sure that they have done anything wrong. How different from the "Godly sorrow" spoken of by the Apostle Paul! "For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a Godly sort, what **carefulness** it wrought in you, yea, what **clearing** of yourselves, yea, what **indignation**, yea, what fear, yea, what **vehement desire**, yea, what **zeal**, yea, what **revenge**! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2Corinthians 7:10-11).

"This has gone on too long, cost too much and hurt too many innocent people." All this is true, Mr. President, but had you told the truth in the first place and admitted your illicit affair, the length, cost, and hurt could have been far smaller. However, when sin is left unrepented, it only gets worse. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2Timothy 3:13).

"It's nobody's business but ours." Unfortunately, this is not true when the entire world is knowledgeable of President Clinton's extra-marital affairs. Perhaps we of America are the most ignorant of what has taken place in the White House. In the conduct of the Christian Church, the Apostle Paul advised that "them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1Timothy 5:20). How can the affairs of a nation be any different?

"It is time to stop the pursuit of personal destruction and the prying into private lives and get on with our national life." If only this speech by our President represented an aberration or anomaly of American moral conduct, but the truth is that it is more typical of conduct within the professed Church of Jesus Christ than anywhere else! Wasn't that the President and his wife that we saw leaving a church service, the day before we heard the speech? How can we return to this offensive pattern of Godless "national life"? "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it **first begin at us**, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (1Peter 4:17).

Conclusion

If America has had any true Godliness-- which, indeed, it **has** had-- then Scripture indicates that we will probably be the primary target to begin God's judgment, i.e., "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1Peter 4:17). This is not to say that America is better than the other nations of the world; but, we have had more opportunity and Light than most. "But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).

The sordid details of President Bill Clinton's sins are unnecessary to teach us that false repentance justifies self and condemns God and the Godly for even bringing up the subject of sin. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 17:15). Whether or not the political tide will turn against those who point out the errors of the President, the Judge of All the Earth will still do right (Genesis 18:25). "Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in Thy sight" (Psalm 9:19).

If the President of the United States is able to receive it: "Mr. Clinton, you need to follow the Godly example of King David and render to the Living God true repentance, for it is against God and God only that you have offended. 'Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance' (Matthew 3:8)".