**Seriously astray, but not lost**

Text: 2 Samuel 11-12:25

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** 2 Samuel 11-12:15; 1 John 5:16-18

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 439, 25, 32, 438, 525

**Series:** Canons of Dort (#15 – Articles 5:4-7)

**Theme:** Even though God’s elect may fall into sins which have devastating consequences in their lives, yet God will not allow His elect to lose their salvation but will again renew them to repentance and commitment to live for Him.

**Proposition:** Beware of the possibility of falling into sins with devastating consequences, but be assured that God will not allow any of His elect to be lost.

**Introduction**

Are all sins essentially equal or are some sins worse than others? There is a sense in which all sins are equal, in that they are all deserving of death, and they all break God’s Law and displease the Lord. James wisely writes “*whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point, has become accountable for all of it*” (2:10). Even the ‘smallest sin’ is a serious offense against God. Jesus said of God’s Law “*whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*.” (Matt 5:19).

Yet not all sins are equally evil, nor do all sins have the same degree of consequence for the sinner and for others. The New Testament contains a number of lists of sins which result in different outcomes – all of them bad to a greater of lesser degree, for example: “*evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness*” (Mark 7:21-22). A distinction is made by the Apostle John in 1 John 5:16-18 between: A sin not leading to death and a sin that leads to death

The clearest way to understand this is that: The sins that **do not** lead to death are those which are committed unwittingly, and which **do not** involve a rejection of God and his way of salvation. Whereas the sin that does lead to death is a deliberate refusal to believe in Jesus Christ, to follow God’s commandments, and to love one’s brothers and sisters in the Lord. This sin leads to death because it includes a conscious refusal to believe in the One who alone can give life: Jesus Christ the Son of God.

However, 1 John 5:16-18 has been interpreted by some to mean that some sins result in a weakening of the soul as with a sickness whereas some (more serious) sins result in a complete loss of salvation. These ideas were expressed by Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican priest who lived in the 13th century, in his work entitled ‘Summa Theologiae’ where he defined ‘mortal’ and ‘venial’ sins. A ‘mortal sin’ is said to be so serious that it separates a person from God’s grace whereas ‘venial sin’ is a lesser transgression that does not break one’s relationship with God, but merely injures it. These ideas later became official Roman Catholic doctrine at the Council of Trent - held between 1545 and 1563 in response to the Protestant Reformation.

The division of sins into these two categories of venial and mortal sins, forms part of the background to the 5th Head of doctrine: the perseverance of the saints, in the Canons of Dort. Article 5.2 refers to ‘daily sins of weakness’ that ‘cling even to the best works of the saints’. These are sins which are not deliberate, do not result in the loss of salvation for God’s elect – **not** because they are ‘lesser sins’ but because God’s grace ‘*once conferred upon (His elect) powerfully preserves them to the end*’ (Art 5:3).

Today, as we focus on Articles 5:4-7, we come to ‘serious sins’ – these are deliberate sins with very damaging consequences. Yet like ‘*the daily sins of weakness*’ these sins also do not result in the loss of salvation by God’s elect because ‘*He does not permit them to sink so deep that they fall away from the grace of adoption and the state of justification*’ (Art 5:6). Instead of His elect who have committed ‘serious sins’ losing their salvation, God ‘*renews them to repentance*’ (Art 5:7) and ‘*through His undeserved mercy …they neither totally fall away from faith and grace nor remain in their downfall and are finally lost*’.

When referencing saints who fall into serious sins, the Canons of Dort make mention of ‘*the lamentable fall of David, Peter and the other saints*’. This afternoon we’re going to see from the example of the ‘*lamentable fall of David*’ that God’s elect may at times be **seriously astray, but not lost**. We will do this under four headings:

1. The possibility of serious sin
2. The effects of serious sin
3. The securing grace of God
4. The renewal of God’s elect
5. **The possibility of serious sin**

The birth of a child is joyful event (ref. Ps 127:3). Uriah’s widow gave birth to a son to King David. She had been living at the King’s palace because previously David had ordered that her husband be purposefully positioned in the front line of battle against the Ammonites. The enemy archers had killed Uriah, as David had planned. Dutiful, faithful, loyal Uriah’s blood was on David’s hands even though this king had been in Jerusalem at the time of Uriah’s death. Uriah was dead because his wife had become pregnant through David’s adultery.

About nine months before this baby was born David had been walking on the roof of his house in the evening. He saw beautiful Bathsheba bathing and he was tempted. A glance became a gaze. Temptation led to sin (James 1:15). David committed adultery – unlawfully taking another man’s wife as his own. David thought he had succeeded in covering his tracks. Bathsheba bore a son which should have been good news. Yet, this was no cause to rejoice, as the Scriptures reveal: “*the thing that David had done displeased the Lord*” (2 Sam 11:27b). David had broken the commandments of God:

* 6th – You shall not murder
* 7th – You shall not commit adultery
* 10th – You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife
* 1st – You shall have no other Gods before me

David had made himself his own ‘god’ by rejecting God’s Law. He “deserved the sentence of death” on multiple counts. David was a ‘saint’, a set apart child of God, a servant of the Lord who Scripture describes as a ‘*man after God’s own heart*’ (Acts 13:22). He is included in the ‘heroes of faith’ in Hebrews 11 (v32). He is one of a ‘great cloud of witnesses’ (Heb 12:1).

His life reveals many great truths about the steadfast love of the Lord, and about the trials and sufferings that God’s children often experience in this life. His life **also** reveals the reality - which is the topic of Canons of Dort Article 5:4 – that ‘*saints may fall into serious sins*’. This article notes that God’s people, ‘*when they do not watch and pray, are not only drawn away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into serious and atrocious sins, but with the righteous permission of God are sometimes actually drawn away*’. Jesus said to His sleepy disciples in the garden of Gethsemane: “*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*.” (Matt 26:41).

The sad example of David’s fall into serious sin is a warning to you and to me. No matter how long we have walked with the Lord, no matter how much we have served Him and been faithful to Him in the past, we are constantly in spiritual danger of falling into sin. Not one of us is ever exempt from this ongoing peril in this life. Peter, like David, fell into serious sin. For Peter this was when he repeatedly denied Christ. From bitter personal experience, He counsels you and me: “*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world*” (1 Pet 5:8-9). Brothers and sisters in our Lord, saints like us can fall into serious sins – with devastating effects, which brings us to our second point:

1. **The effects of serious sin**

A vital lesson to learn in life is that actions have consequences: Ignore the need to study sufficiently and you will fail exams. Forget to fill up your petrol tank and in due course your car will stop. Cut yourself off from the means of grace you will wither spiritually. Actions have consequences - as the Scriptures affirm “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*” (Gal 6:7).

Parents often do their children a dis-service in trying to shield them from the consequences of their action by constant bailing them out. For example by paying overdue fines and bills or by not following through with consequences for broken rules.

God, our heavenly Father, is wiser than human parents. His servant Nathan brought to David’s attention the devastating future effects of the evil he had done: “*The sword shall never depart from your house*” (2 Sam 12:10); “*I will raise up evil against you from your own household*” (v11); “*I will take away your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour*” (v11). These prophecies were fulfilled: three of David’s sons died violently: Ammon (13:28-29), Absalom (18:14-15), and Adonijah (1 Ki 2.25). Evil did arise in David’s own family. For example Amnon’s rape of Tamar (13:1-4); Absalom’s murder of Amnon (13:28-29); Absalom’s rebellion against David (15:1-12). Absalom did take David’s wives and openly bring shame to him (2 Sam 16:21).

The kingdom of Israel greatly suffered through King David’s sin and He and Bathsheba both suffered personally. The first child born to them died after seven days. He had not yet been circumcised (This would have been on the eighth day). In addition to all these painful external consequences, David greatly suffered spiritually.

The Canons of Dort (Art 5:5) speak of the effects of serious sins: *“God is offended and they incur the guilt of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound their conscience, and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God’s favour”.* This is what David himself expressed about unrepentant sin in Psalm 32 (v3-4) that we sang earlier in this service: “*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*”.

For some of us, we may continue to experience the painful consequences of serious sins we have committed in the past. These may divide our family, strain our marriage, have led to financial difficulties, and/or struggles with addictions, depression and despair. Sometimes the Lord is pleased to allow us to reap some or all of the consequences of what we have sown in our lives, but as Canons of Dort 5:6 expresses ‘*God will not permit his elect to be lost*’. Which brings us to our third point:

1. **The securing grace of God**

Physical blindness is a disability. Danger may lie ahead in your path, but it is unseen. Spiritual blindness is a far greater disability because the danger is greater. David could see Uriah’s wife’s body from his rooftop. However, unlike Joseph in Potiphar’s house (Gen 39), he could not see the spiritual danger, so he did not turn away and flee to safety. David had been spiritually blind for nine months - not seeing his sin, although it should have been glaringly obvious to him.

Then Nathan presented the King with a case study of the abuse of power and privilege. A rich man with plenty took the only ewe lamb a poor man owned; one which was dear to the man and his family. David had a keen sense of justice - for others! David, as the King, was a supreme judge; difficult cases in his kingdom were brought before him. He declares of the ruthless, greedy rich man (v5) “*As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die*”. Hear the anger of David against the meanness and heartlessness of the rich man. Unwittingly, unknowingly – David condemned himself. The penalty for adultery and also for murder was death (Lev 20:10; 24:17).

Nathan was used by God to show David the sin which had remained somehow concealed/ shielded from David by David for nine months. He had supressed the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). The Judge of Israel was judged by God’s prophet “*You are the man!*” (v7). You are the mean, heartless, rich man who was given great honour, privilege and power. You are the anointed king over Israel, delivered from Saul who was trying to kill you, given care of Saul’s wives – his harem, given the house of Israel

How could David have been so blind? So blind to what was obvious? David’s heart was ‘*deceitful above all things, and desperately sick*’ (Jer 17:9). His heart was in essence just like yours and mine. How blind we too can be to our own sin. David could have had Nathan executed on the spot. David could have cursed God for the devastation His prophet promised would fall on him. David could have tried to make excuses for himself like Saul did (1 Sam 15:2-22) or like Adam before him (Gen 3:12). Instead, he simply said “*I have sinned against the Lord*” (2 Sam 12:13a).

In the words of Canons of Dort 5:6: *God, who is rich in mercy, according to the unchangeable purpose of his elec­tion, does not completely withdraw his Holy Spirit from his own even in their deplorable fall. Neither does he permit them to sink so deep that they fall away from the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin unto death or the sin against the Holy Spirit and, totally deserted by him, plunge them­selves into eternal ruin.*

God mercifully brought David to true repentance, eternally securing this man who had sinned so greatly. God did this by His securing grace and then by renewed Him, which brings us to our last point:

1. **The renewal of God’s elect**

It is hard to accept God’s truth when confronted with your sin, isn’t it? True repentance involves a loss of face, shame, personal humiliation. True repentance is hard, because it only comes when we open our eyes to what we are truly like. True repentance would leave us all utterly crushed and forever lost - apart from Christ.

David describes the background to his words of confession in Psalm 32 verse 5: ‘*I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin*’. In the words of Canons of Dort 5:7 David grieved from his heart with a godly sorrow for the sins he had committed.

Nathan brought God’s renewing grace and truth to David: "*The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die*” (2 Sam 12:13b). David received the comfort that God has forgiven Him. He was then able to go into the house of the Lord and truly worship (2 Sam 12:20). His relationship with God was restored. David received grace – the favour of a reconciled God so that He could again adore the Lord’s mercies and faithfulness (from CofD Art 5:7).

How was all this possible? Only through Christ who would later in history die for David’s sin and also for yours and mine, Brother and Sister in Christ. “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor 5:21). God always renews his elect to repentance so that not one of them will be eternally lost. Seriously sinful King David was once saved and is always saved.

Those who understand just how merciful the Lord has been towards them in Christ - whether their sins are more in the category of ‘daily sins of weakness’ or more ‘serious sins’ with greater consequences – They ‘*from now on more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling*’ (CofD5:7).

Are you uncomfortable this afternoon because you have been blind to your sin. Perhaps you have just recently seen yourself as you truly are? Perhaps you have done something/said something/thought something you know to be against what God has said is good/right/just? You need to know that God is gracious. He will forgive. Even if you are strayed far and your sin has brought devastating consequences. Turn back. Receive the profound comfort of God’s forgiveness in Christ. Receive the strength to endure the consequences of your sin and to continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling.

God renewed His elect, adopted son David. He blessed Him. Later on David was able to comfort his wife Bathsheba, who bore him a second son who did not die in infancy. David called this son, Solomon, which means “God is peace”. Nathan called this second son, ‘Jedidiah’ “beloved of the Lord” (2 Sam 12:25). The special favour of God was on Solomon, and therefore on David.

Repentant sinner, like King David, you are loved by God! This is grace. God preserves His saints, even when they go seriously astray – so that they are not eternally lost. “*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us*” (Psalm 103:8-12).

“*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:1).

In light of these glorious truths, go, like David and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

AMEN.