

VW a Vital Warning?

Saving badges was popular hobby in my childhood. Saving car badges was something of an elite version. To possess an MG badge was an achievement. I never had a VW badge but had it been so and I was looking at it when the news broke about Volkswagen's illegal practices, David's lament in 2 Samuel would come to mind, 'How are the mighty fallen' (1.19). Saul was a mighty man and head and shoulders above his brethren but suffered a fatal fall. There are significant parallels that tell us a great deal about our modern society and what is necessary to true recovery.

Saul's fall was the result of sin

In Saul's case his fall was a result of personal sin, though he was not the only sinner in Israel. God does punish nations and corporate bodies for institutional sin but behind it all there is personal sin. The moral culpability of nations and corporations arises from the human participants. It remains so today. FIFA, the international football association is regarded as being in need of reform or replacement but its fall is regarded as resulting from individuals' transgressions, yet to be proved, whether in concert or not. There are "lessons to be learnt" by politicians in government and executives in business from Saul's demise. Here are four key factors.

Saul's Interference with the sanctuary

Civil power went to Saul's head and when he thought himself above God's order in holy things he was reprovved by Samuel with the words, 'Thou hast done foolishly' (1 Samuel 13.13). God has his demarcation lines even in non-theocratic nations. Neither pope nor king is head of the Church or above God's Word and God's moral order. Jesus Christ alone is head of the Church, which he rules by his word. We judge it a fatal step by our government to meddle with God's institution of marriage.

Saul's disobedience to God

When Saul failed to slay Agag and allowed the people to take of the Amalekites' animals contrary to God's commandment, Samuel reprovved him saying, 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry' (1 Samuel 15.22,23a). In our age of relativism every man does what is right in his own eyes at all levels of society. The departure from God's Word in Western Society has seen the infection of deceit and dishonesty among politicians (the expenses scandal), banks (the financial crisis), sport (performance-enhancing drug abuse) and in business and economics (LIBOR manipulation).

Saul's disregard of spiritual counsel

Notwithstanding all of the counsel from Samuel the prophet and Jonathan his son, Saul persisted in his persecution of David. He would heed only those counsellors who agreed with him. It has a modern ring. The departure from Christian truth in Western Society has left our education system bereft of any clear moral standards for the instruction of the young. Consequently, a whole new generation has grown up for whom truth and morality are relative. It should not surprise us when this is reflected in industrial practice at the highest levels. The UK government now seems concerned to keep the truth out of our schools and universities regarding creation, the family and so on. Government seems intent on allowing only politically correct clergy to work in institutions of learning rather than facing the necessity for sound moral instruction.

Saul's Impenitence

Saddest of all was Saul's lack of repentance because God is gracious. Manasseh was exceedingly wicked but he repented and the Lord was gracious even to him. Saul, however, showed a solemn lack of repentance despite all the prompts to righteousness and mercy. As Western Society implodes our politicians seem more concerned to impose respect, not merely for those of different faiths but for their faith howsoever it might contradict Biblical teaching and Christian conscience. This came to an ultimate point with Saul when he acknowledged witchcraft and resorted, not to God and truth, but to the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28).

Saul's fall was costly for the innocent

The chief executive of VW has already gone and others might yet follow. There is also a wider impact upon car owners, motor industry workers, component suppliers, German national income and so on. A lot of innocent people are going to be hit in the event of massive corporate fines or business contraction. We note that Saul's sin impacted upon others not complicit in his moral decline, including Jonathan, David and Israel.

Jonathan suffered because of Saul's sin

Jonathan had been faithful to both father and friend. He endeavoured to reconcile Saul to David but in vain. It is often so that the momentum in high places cannot be stopped until tragedy changes things. It was so preceding the two world wars. The momentum in German politics could not be stopped. It resulted in colossal tragedy. Many innocent of war mongering lay dead on the field of battle just like Jonathan 'slain in *(his)* high places' (2 Samuel 1.25). At present no one knows where the fallout from corporate problems will end for pension funds, car workers, component firms and so on but we can be sure there will be casualties.

David suffered because of Saul's sin

Saul's injustices turned David's life upside down. He went from being a

respected contributor in society to a fugitive. The death of Jonathan was the loss of a trusted and well beloved friend and left David in 'distress' (2 Samuel 1.26). Christians who have taken to heart what has happened to Christian registrars at home and abroad, hoteliers, and open air preachers have cause to be apprehensive about the use of counter 'extremist' legislation for the 'un-British'. Lives are being turned upside down by government legislation and judicial interpretation in the name of equality and tolerance. The UK is producing its own 'distressed' believers.

Israel suffered because of Saul's sin

The circumstances at mount Gilboa impacted upon the entire nation. The king and his son were dead, the army was defeated and the nation was in disarray. The changed face of UK politics as a result of the last election and the outcome of the Labour leadership contest is scarcely coincidental. Dissatisfaction with our political establishment has been a major feature. Many voters feel marginalized and disregarded. Cohesiveness is in decline. Christians are marginalized and Evangelicalism dismissed. Lessons can be learned from the decline in cohesiveness that preceded the fall of Rome. Israel was only saved from her enemies after the defeat at Gilboa by uniting around a man after God's own heart. There must be a lesson in this for troublous times! We need as a nation to be drawing closer to God not getting further away. The answer to our woes is king David's greater Son, who David, in the Spirit called, 'my Lord'.

Saul's fall underlined the need for change

2 Samuel Chapter 2 begins with the words, 'And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord' (verse 1). This is a methodology that never fails for rulers but how many in the USA, Germany and the UK will seek to understand what God thinks about business crisis? Is it just a matter of fines or is there a duty of care to pensioners, workers and those who contribute to national income and whose standards of living are related to it? It is quite a conundrum and the relative "Enlightenment" morality will not do much to resolve it. What is needed is the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Some will say, you can't bring God into politics and economics but in our modern generation that apparently means that we cannot have absolute morality in legislation and business and this is destroying nations from within. Scripture takes a different view. Consider the following.

The importance of truth and righteousness in business activity

Christians have to steer a course that blends emotion and clear thinking, and care and enterprise when it comes to economics and social responsibility. Public authorities are not structured for business enterprise and the profit motive cannot resolve all crises. In the contest between Capitalism and economic communism, Biblical principles have become blurred. The New Testament Church *was* a caring and sharing community

(Acts 1.45) but *insisted* upon the right of private property and voluntary disposal of assets (Acts 5.1-4). Had not Abraham been a successful *entrepreneur* and yet a caring master? There was no contradiction. 'Profit' may have acquired a nasty reputation but at an accounting level it is merely the calculated result that demonstrates that income has exceeded costs and that the business activity is sustainable. Without profit (or 'surplus') calculations, and demonstrable earnings capacity the enterprise is a rudderless boat but profits must be *legitimately* earned. The steward was expected to be faithful *and* effective as the parables of the pounds and the talents show.

The importance of truth and righteousness in government

The primary function of government is justice and law and order by upholding what is right against that which is wrong, 'For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil' (Romans 13.3). We can be sure that the apostle's definition of good and evil was consistent with the Ten Commandments, which express God's holiness and will. The departure from God's standards in connection with the sanctity of life, the institution of marriage and the family and the disregard of the Lord's Day shows how far our legislators have departed from the standards to be invoked at the last judgement. Ethical decline in business is but one symptom of a legislative failure to uphold truth and righteousness.

The importance of truth and righteousness in individual conduct

In this David was exemplary except in the matter of Uriah and his wife Bathsheba. We read in 1 Kings 15.5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' Were it so in the workplace, deception could not gain a foothold to produce and hide corporate fraud.

Concluding thoughts

Politicians in prison and important businessmen disgraced serve as pointers to the direction of travel of our nation. It contrasts sharply with the purity, righteousness and love of Jesus Christ who was holy, harmless and undefiled. It underlines the necessity of his death in the place and stead of sinners. Truly, there was no other good enough to bear the price of sin and it is time that the nations recognized the Saviour's unique claims.