

Unlike the United States of today, the Korea of my youth tolerated paddling in the class. The students got what they deserved, and teachers administered with great efficiency. There were a few different degrees of paddling, however, and sometimes, one could not tell it from the garden variety of simple assault.

The middle school I attended taught abacus as one of its legitimate classes. I was not interested in learning abacus, of course. Not that I predicted its eventual demise by the emerging technology, but who wants to use abacus, when you could do with a calculator? Besides, every one was obsessed with the high school entrance exam, and everyone knew they were not going to be tested on the subject of abacus. Naturally, kids used the class time to touch up on other worthier subjects, such as English or Math, or read comics, instead.

As now I see it, the teacher was not a happy man. Once in a

while, an unlucky student was caught doing something he should not have, and that was when the teacher let loose his pent up anger. One day, a hapless student was severely mauled by the teacher. Back then, teacher was the king, and he could do virtually whatever he pleased with impunity.

A few days later, I noticed that the teacher stopped showing up in the classes. The students wondered what happened to him. About a month later, he showed up limping with a crutch, all wrapped in bandages. Then we heard the story. The last student he "paddled" happened to belong to a family connected to strongmen. And the family decided to return the favor in kind. From that day on, he never touched a single kid.

Once one finds oneself in the seat of power, one tends to forget that there is the greater power. That is exactly what King David did. Once he felt secure in his throne, he became lazy, and did not lead his army in the battles.

Instead, he spent his days in the palace. That was when he spotted Bathsheba taking a bath. If David was of the decent spirit, he would have made himself scarce. Instead, he became a peeping tom. Eventually, he forced himself upon her, knowing that she was the wife of his captain, Uriah the Hittite.

When she became pregnant, David tried to mask his crime by inviting Uriah to sleep with his wife. But the loyal servant would not go home and sleep with his wife. Instead, he slept at the gate of king's palace with his subordinates. Then David conspired to kill Uriah. David ordered his general Joab to put him up to fight in the recklessly dangerous combat maneuver. Uriah was killed, and the king thought the problem was solved. But God told Prophet Nathan that his problem just begun.

**G**od's reaction to this crime was immediate. God dispatched Prophet Nathan to David:

12:7 Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul;

12:8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more.

12:9 Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

12:10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

12:11 Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun.

12:12 For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

**T**here is something about power that makes those who seek it stupid. Somehow, when they believe that they are in that seat of power, they are convinced that they are exempted from the consequences of their own action. And then they discover a little too late that there is always the higher power than their own. Luckily, King David was a fast learner. When Nathan came to him, and told him the bad news, he did not try to muzzle the prophet, or to weasel out of the trouble by denial. He came clean right away: "I have sinned against the Lord."

That is one quality about David that God esteemed him. Even though he was a sinner, he accepted his own culpability, and confessed his sin. We have Psalm 51 credited to him, to have written it in repentance.

David was genuinely enraged, when he heard the story of the rich man taking a ewe lamb from the poor man. But he did not seem bothered, when he himself was committing such an injustice,

such a crime, by taking someone else's wife and then having her husband killed.

**T**he other day, I read about the interview that Bernie Madoff gave in his jail. He said that he was surprised that his scam lasted this long. That statement proves that he knew what he was doing was wrong. Yet he had no problem maintaining what he was doing, procuring luxury goods, and leading the opulent lifestyle. He may have been surprised, but he did not seem bothered by the injustice he was committing, defrauding and ruining the lives of those people who trusted him.

This seems to be the common illness among those who commit injustice: as far as injustice is concerned, people are sensitive to it, if others commit it; I am quite impervious to it, when I commit the injustice.

**T**hat is it. That seems to be the cause of so much injustice in this world. People loathe injustice, when others commit it, but they

like it, when they do it themselves. And this disease of stupidity seems to strike particularly those who find themselves in power. A few days ago, dozens of people in New Jersey—including, mayors, legislators, even rabbis—were arrested for having illegally taken or laundered money. They all were in the seats of power—smaller than the throne of a king, but nevertheless a seat of power—and it seemed that they were under the impression that they were exempted from the consequences of their own action.

God's complaint to King David was simple: God was offended, because the King "despised" God's word, to do evil in God's sight. For some reason, the God of the prophets, the God of Jesus, the God of the Old Testaments is sensitive to the way the persons of power interact with those who do not have power. God is offended when the persons of power abuse and oppress those who do not have power.

**T**hat we can understand. But why should God punish those who have not participated in King David's indiscretion: his wives, his children, his whole family, and the rest of his government?

It is not God who is punishing David here. God is merely describing through Prophet Nathan the enormous consequence which David's sin would cause in the course of history. Surely, David never thought there would be such a consequence, when he was devising his murderous conspiracy. That is what sin does: it makes the sinner stupid, and once sin enters, it causes a lot of consequences.

Because the King momentarily gave in to the sinful impulse, the consequence was having the sword never departing from his house. What is it like to go to the grave with the knowledge that your descendants will devour one another, long after you are gone, because of what you have done?

Viewed from another angle, God held accountable not just the King who committed the offence, but held accountable a host of people who were connected to the King: the King's family members and the King's government. Is it fair for God to sweep everyone into the same gutter of condemnation?

The cold reality is that when we are connected to a person who sits in the seat of power, we draw the indirect advantage by association. If we drew benefit by being associated with the power, then we also draw wrath by being associated with the power. God recognizes that fact, and applies the same standard to those who draw the benefit from the power. They are accountable, because injustice is always perpetrated by those who have power against those who have not. God holds accountable, therefore, those who have power, and those who are connected to the power and benefit from it.

Christians are called to a godly living. When we find ourselves

in the seat of any power, we need to realize that God called us to that particular position. God wants to use us to execute justice, when we wield the power and authority that comes with the position. We are expected to honor God, and stand up for the plight of the poor and the oppressed by utilizing that power.

The writer of Deuteronomy (5:33) records this promise of God:

You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land which you shall possess.

May God bless you and empower you, as you walk with God in your daily lives.