

Question: Why should we get so worked up about what public figures do in their private lives? As long as a person is honest and decent in public, isn't what is done in the privacy of home his or her own business?

Certainly we should always respect one another's personal privacy. Even the Bible warns us to "mind your own business" (1 Thessalonians 4:11 NIV). The problem is not the right to have one's own life in private or public. God allows freedom to make even wrong choices, though not without consequences. The problem is the attempt to separate private and public morality.

Moral compromise in any area of life, no matter how small or private, dulls the conscience's ability to resist compromise in all of life. Can a person who lies to his family be depended on to be truthful to friends, co-workers, customers or clients? Can a person who bends the rules of morality, right and wrong, in private be trusted not to bend the rules on the job? How do you separate the two? What assurance can you offer that a person who uses pornography in private will not lose his ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality and end up attacking an innocent child?

Jesus taught that public life should be an expression of what a person is in private. He said, "Be careful not to do your "acts of righteousness" before men, to be seen of men," rather let it be "what is done in secret" before God (Matthew 6:1-6). To hypocritical Pharisees he said, "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. . . . In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:25-28 NIV).

What a person does in private eventually will be reflected in public life. But even if it does not, God knows what we do in private. King David wrote: "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD" (Psalm 139:1-4). There is nothing hidden from the presence of God.

Fortunately, he is willing to help us make our private and public lives consistent with what he teaches us is good and right. King David of the Old Testament was guilty of adultery with the beautiful Bathsheba and attempted to cover his sin by having her husband killed. But when the prophet Nathan confronted him, David repented with great sorrow for his sin (Psalm 51). God forgave him of that past and continued to use him in his kingdom. Through the death of Jesus for our sins, our Lord God continues to forgive the past when the changes of repentance are demonstrated. Thus, the inner person and outward person become the same. However, he is always watching to see how we respond to his discipline.

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