

## Scandals

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There is nothing we Americans have come to love more than a scandal. Scandals, it would seem, are the new American past-time.

And although we pretty much love all scandals, there are some scandals we love more than others. It is perhaps unconscious; it is perhaps unwritten, but there is a definite popularity ranking among scandals. Ranking lowest are scandals involving business men and women. The crash of a corporation due to the greed and corruption of its officers holds for us a certain attraction, but the reason for its low ranking, in spite of the fact that this is the only kind of scandal that may actually affect us, is two-fold. One, this kind of scandal involves money, and there are things more fascinating to us than money – sex for one. And two, this kind of scandal is often hard to wrap your mind around if you have no background in economics. To fully appreciate a scandal, you need to be in a position to master the details.

Moving up a rank are the scandals involving professional athletes. There are a few scandals involving professional athletes that have to do with drug abuse of one kind or another, or gaming, but the scandals that are more prevalent, and that we prefer, are, as I intimated, the sexual ones. The sexual hijinks of professional athletes – the infatuated groupies, the down low behind the All-American image, again, hold for us a certain attraction. Still, these scandals receive a lowish ranking because we kind of expect it from professional athletes. It's kind of an extension of locker-room behavior.

Moving up another rank, and here we really start to get into it, are the scandals involving the stars. There are a few scandals involving the stars that have to do with imprisonment, but again we prefer the sexual ones. We love to star gaze in any event because we find the stars, or at least their fabricated images, so much larger than life - or perhaps so much larger than *our* lives. But when there's a scandal, we really get out the telescope. We are always eager to hear of good loving gone wrong, especially if it is due to infidelity.

We ascend to the top of the ranks with scandals, again, particularly sexual scandals, involving politicians and religious leaders. These are the scandals we love the best. This is because politicians and religious leaders are held to higher moral responsibility than professional athletes or stars. I suppose they should all be considered role models, but politicians and religious leaders more so. There is a general rule that we may perhaps apply to scandals: The greater the hypocrisy, the more we love it. This is because scandal requires outrage and indignation to really hit the spot.

Yes, we love scandals - the bigger, the better. Sure, we may pretend not to. We may voice sentiments along the lines of, "What's this world coming to?" But deep down we can't wait for another idol to topple. And it's not just the toppling of the idol itself. That's only when the fun begins. After that, there's not only the reactions of all the players, but the opportunity it holds for us for analysis, and the expression our impressions and opinions.

And because we love scandals so much, scandals have become big business. A few years back, investigative reporting was more for the sake of whistle blowing, but no one cares much about whistle blowing anymore. The Karen Silkwoods have had their day. Investigative reporting is now giving us what we want, and we want scandal. And thanks to the times in which we live, no one stands a chance against them. Their arsenals are loaded -surveillance cameras, tips, rumors, bank records, hotel records, cell phone records, texts, emails.... And it would appear that there is really no such thing as "delete." Texts and emails never go away. They have a longer half life than uranium.

The Bible, for its part, knows all about human fault and folly. Most of the biblical heroes, in fact, were involved in what we today call scandals.

To illustrate this, we could practically let the Bible fall open to any page, but let's begin where it all began - with Abraham. I guess Abraham gets a few brownie points for demonstrating, in the near sacrifice of his son Isaac, faith unparalleled in human history until the advent of Jesus Christ; but, as we know, all the brownie points in the world are not sufficient to expunge a scandal from the record. How about Abraham's conduct in Egypt? When he and his wife were forced to sojourn there during a famine, he became preoccupied that his wife's good looks would get *him* into trouble. As her husband, he might be deemed to be standing in the way of an Egyptian's desire for her. The upshot was that he delivered her up to Pharaoh's harem; and this to save his own hide. Or how about Abraham's *misalliance*, shall we

call it, with Hagar that produced, so to speak, a love child. I can just see the headlines. Actually, it seems like I *have* just seen like headlines.

In the interest of time, let's then skip over a generation and move down to Jacob. He was a serial cheater and a liar, his chief victim being his brother. Needless to say, his family life was a study in the art of sabotage. A while later he married two sisters, which if you think about it, is kind of sick. It seems one degree away from incest. He might even be incarcerated for that today.

But lay the patriarchs aside. There's just too much material in the Bible to dwell on them. Samuel, you might think, stood a chance to come out of it unscathed. He dominated biblical history for the whole of the 11<sup>th</sup> century filling variously the role of prophet, priest, and judge. He had a good, long career, really established himself, but the brownie point rule applies – recall: no amount of brownie points can expunge a scandal from the record. Near the end of his life he developed what could be labeled, “The Crotchedly Old Man Syndrome” and shot off his mouth revealing himself to be a cantankerous, querulous, even dangerous old fool. Doubtless, if present day comparisons are any indicator, that's how many of his contemporaries remembered him.

Or what about the Kings? They are really the limit. Take the big three – Saul, David, and Solomon. Saul was, to put it crudely, a nut job – a paranoid and murderous monster, whose deranged obsession for most of his life was to assassinate David. He ended up delivering all his sons up to death and then falling on his sword. Or David? He's proof that no man is above corruption. Shortly after God made him the father of Messianism, he impregnated the wife of a dutiful and loyal member of his personal guard. He then had a henchman murder him so as to get him out of the way. And then there's Solomon. Talk about the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Banishing silver, he permitted only gold in his opulent and lavish court. Of course he had to enslave his own people to raise the funds for it, but be that as it may.

I could go on, but we'd be here all day. Perhaps just one more. This one is too rich to pass up. The prophet Hosea married a well known whore, then spent the rest of his prophetic career crying tears in his beer over it.

Yes, the Bible knows all about human fault and folly -- what we today would call scandals. In fact, it puts our tepid attempts at scandal to shame. But there's one difference, and it's a major one. The Bible

never, ever calls it scandal or treats it as such. This is because the Bible traffics in realism. It is the greatest study in realism that humankind has ever or will ever produce. The Bible realistically discerns and so states that *we have all fallen short of the glory of God*. Even the cosmos itself, the whole theater of nature, groans in futility. The Bible realizes we all share a common condition. We are all up against it. We are all in it together. And so to scandalize, The Bible declares, amounts to nothing more than hypocrisy.

Just look at Jesus and the adulteress. There she was. They were all trying to scandalize her. But Jesus wouldn't have it; he wouldn't let them, even though she had just been caught in the act. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." And for the sake of hypocrisy, yes, but for a reason greater than that. It's because he knew that when his ministry was all said and done - when his life, and his death, and his resurrection had been accomplished -- that there would be no basis to scandalize anyone anymore, for he, (who was, parenthetically the most scandalous man who ever lived) would have redeemed us all. And this, he intended, would lead us to humility and mercy, and forgiveness towards one another.

Jesus Christ caught us all when we were falling. If we seek to be named by him, we must not scandalize. We must catch one another. Amen.