

The Great Detective:
Sin

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

“Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23*b*).

“The children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan...took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel” (Joshua 7:1).

“Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed...” (Joshua 7:11*a*).

“...It shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man. And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel” (Joshua 7:14-15).

According to these verses, sin is the greatest detective ever known to the human race. This

message reveals the shocking story of how one man's sin kept an entire nation from victory in a battle against their enemies. It also shows the measures God will take to deal with sin in the lives of His people.

1 Peter 5:10 reveals God as "the God of all grace." How can a God, Who only deals with His people in grace, take such extreme measures in dealing with sin? Can He ever cease to be the God of all grace? Absolutely not! "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

Chapter One

FAITH OBEDIENCE

Satan wages a strategic warfare in his attack against Christianity as he tries to prevent believers from thoroughly understanding the divine dimensions of faith obedience.

Few Christians have a problem with the principle of *mental assent*. Mental assent has never saved a single person, and it never will. It is simply believing—like the demons do—that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again. According to James 2:19, demons believe the Gospel, and they tremble, but they have never been saved. Therefore, it is possible for a person to profess to believe the gospel and never be saved.

He could be a pastor or an evangelist as those mentioned in Matthew 7:21-23. He may cast out demons, do many wonderful works across the world, and profess Christ as his Savior, and still never have been saved. This is re-

vealed later on in a person's life.

In Luke 8:18, Jesus tells us how it is revealed. God takes away from that one what he *seems* to have. If a man could live in sin and never be chastised for it, then he was never saved, even though he is a pastor. *If we can continue in sin and do not get chastised, then we were never saved.* That issue is between the individual and God.*

I have always loved knowing that before God, we can't get away with a thing. If we take a couple of steps over God's boundary lines, we sense God beginning to spank us though we may never tell another person. One thing about God: when He chastises, He does it perfectly because He was there when you sinned. He has full knowledge, and He knows why you did it, how many times you did it, and how much you have lied about it. To say the least, His judgment is perfect as He evaluates our lives.

Faith obedience is the greatest thing that a person can give to God. James 4:17 says that "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." If I know what is right and don't do it, it is a transgression (1 John 3:4). If it is sin and transgression to know what is right and *not* do it, then it is godliness to know what is right and to *do* it.

Purpose in Your Heart to Continue

After working long hours to prepare messages, I am always so thankful to see an overflow crowd in our church services. That's what it means to communicate with your pastor-teacher (Galatians 6:6). Gathering faithfully is a communication of love in response to the Word of God that he preaches. When people in my church tell me with their kind notes and personal messages how much the Word of God did for them in service, I thank God.

Spirituality is very simple. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." The key word there is "continue," a present active infinitive in the Greek. The active voice means that the subject acts upon the verb: the believer produces the action of continuing. The infinitive means you've purposed in your heart to continue.

Purpose in your heart that you will be one who continues. Purpose in your heart that you will not be a casualty or a member of the Laodicean church (Revelation 3:14-20). Decide that you will not be someone who is distracted with personal sins or involved in satanic evil. Purpose to continue in Jesus Christ's Word.

Many men are good husbands, and they will continue to be good husbands because they have purposed it in their hearts. Many ladies are godly wives, and because they have purposed it in their hearts, they will continue to be godly wives. Others in our ministry are good students and conscientious friends to God because they have purposed it in their hearts.

Every Christian who receives rewards at the Bema Seat judgment in heaven will do so because he made a decision, purposing in his heart to continue in God's Word.

If we continue in the Word then we are disciples, "learners" of the doctrines of Christ; *then* we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. God says, "There is a way to be free from bondage. There is a way to be free from carelessness, worldliness, and the fashions of this world. There is a way to be free from lust and self-centeredness; just continue in the purpose of My Word so that I can make you free."

If you know the Son, the Son will *make* you free indeed (John 8:36). Before that, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "He that followeth me" is a present active causal participle. A truth

caused it, so it's a causal participle (a participle which gives an underlying cause for an action). And according to Matthew 4:19, if we continue following Jesus, He will make us fishers of men.

A Faith that Serves by Love

In Galatians 5:6, external circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing to the Spirit-filled New Testament believer. Religious rites and ceremonial duties mean nothing. God desires a faith that serves by love.

Faith obedience must always bring me into serving. Therefore, when I hear the Word of God, it is crucial that first I enter into *faith*. Second, I must enter into faith *obedience* (Romans 1:5). Third, it's imperative that I enter into faith obedience that *serves* others by love. These three characteristics are so lacking in the Church today.

Instead of getting a divorce, a wife can serve her husband by love. The marriage is not a "slave and master" relationship. Certainly she can receive help through counseling if she's being abused or if her husband is committing adultery, but a woman has the privilege of glorifying God in her purpose on earth. Having faith in God's provision, obeying God's mandates,

and being filled with the Holy Spirit of God's love, she has a faith obedience that serves her husband by love.

Sometimes people want to be counseled when all they need is to obey—and usually they know that before they come for counseling.

“What do I do in this situation?”

“Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22). Obey as soon as you hear (Psalm 18:44). Have a faith that serves others by love, though they don't deserve it. That is what it means to be a good steward of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10); you give grace because you have received grace (John 1:16). Still, many people don't realize that living the Christian life without divine love leaves a person empty—unable to experience the grace of God.

Be Filled with the Fullness of God

One of the most unusual things that a Christian faces is the possibility of being empty while he is under the teaching of God's Word every day. An empty soul is like a vacuum cleaner that sucks in the dust from the world's system of demons. Because the soul is empty, it receives worldly spirits and projections from the atmosphere, and begins to be conformed to the world

That is why it is necessary to keep the soul filled with God's Word.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend [(possess)] with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Oh, what a privilege to have the love of Christ possess us on earth in three dimensions of time!—to have that love pass all knowledge of my past and my sins. What a privilege it is to be filled with all the fullness of God (*pleroma*) so that He may do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the operational power and ability that works in us. “Unto him be Glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (see Ephesians 3:20-21).

How can I remain filled with all the fullness of God? By continuing to hear the Word of God which produces faith (Romans 10:17).

Faith comes from hearing the Word of God—not first from reading it, but from *hearing* it. Then immediately that faith gives me the grace to obey what I hear, because of the Holy

Spirit's operation and divine ability. And when I obey (as soon as I hear), my faith begins to serve others by the same love that I've been rooted and grounded in. There is a manifestation of love because of my obedience to the Word through the activity of faith.

Occasionally I see Christians go through times of emptiness. Some people may be in Bible college classes every day, yet when they go through those periods of emptiness, their empty soul, like a vacuum cleaner, begins to suck in the dust—the vanity of the world—to fill the void. They are sublimating by socialization as they rationalize God's precepts. But God has called us to take in the categorical authority of His Word and meditate on it day and night.

**Read Salvation: Profession or Possession? by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications, 1997, to understand presalvation experience versus eternal security.*

Chapter Two

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

The seventh chapter of Joshua reveals that the three-fold process of faith obedience that serves by love was not functioning. Achan thought he could get away with something less than total obedience, “but the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing” (Joshua 7:1a).

Get the picture: God told the Israelites not to take a single thing out of Jericho, and anything they took would be called “the accursed thing.” Likewise, I must not take that which is of the world or that which is from the atmosphere as my possession, because it will become an accursed thing.

Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai to view the country and bring back a report. When they returned they said, “Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to

labour thither; for they are but few. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men” (Joshua 7:3-4a). “And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water” (Joshua 7:5).

When Joshua came back from the battle he “rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads” (Joshua 7:6).

Israel took the powerful city of Jericho, but then took it for granted that they would also conquer Ai. Instead, they were defeated and lost thirty-six men.

Joshua, however, did the right thing. He came back before the ark of God, tore his clothes, and put dust upon his head along with the elders of Israel. Then he asked God why this had happened (verses 7-9). In verse 10, “...the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?”

When I’m in my most intense relationship to God, privately, I go before Him and fall completely prostrate. Why? It happened all the time

in the Old Testament, and all I am saying is, “Oh my God, You are here! You love me. You have accepted me. I am Yours, and You are mine. Look at me. *Just look at me!* Creator, Redeemer, Lord God—look at me.” And that’s exactly what Joshua did.

Israel Hath Sinned

Though Joshua was not the one who sinned, God says in verse 11, “Israel hath sinned.”

I hope I can get this across to you, friends. I say it lovingly, I say it kindly, and I say it in frailty as a person who needs to grow continually, always guarding my heart. If we allowed fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and lesbianism to go on in our church, do you know what God would say? “Greater Grace in Baltimore has sinned.”

Someone may say, “But God, I’m not committing those sins.”

And God says, “Greater Grace *has* sinned because you are members of one another.”

That’s why we are so accountable to each other, and why we are so responsible to the Word of God. It has been said, “Just one life, it will soon be past, and only what’s done through Christ will last.” *Forgiveness is right around the*

corner. If the Lord marked iniquities, no one could stand. There is forgiveness with God that He may be trusted (see Psalm 130:3-4).

Yet, because we are one corporate organism, when one member sins, before the angels the entire church is guilty; however, the entire church doesn't have to be chastised to the same degree. If the church deals with the sin, they are left without chastisement. If the church does not deal with it, the church gets the same chastisement as a couple committing fornication!

Trying to straighten people out on issues of sin is not condemning them. On the contrary, it's loving them so much that you correct them before God has to chastise them. If a church hears the Word of God, believes in the Word of God, obeys the Word of God, and serves one another by love, then chastisement is avoided.

"Israel hath sinned" said God in Joshua 7:11. I don't want to have to go to God and hear Him say, "Greater Grace is living in sin," when the majority of us are not practicing any known sin.

Not only did God say that Israel had sinned, but He added, "They have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have

put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies” (Joshua 7:11-12a).

God is going to get right down to business. I do not care what anyone says, *if there are hidden sins and secret things going on among your members, you will not stand before your enemies*—and neither will any ministry.

Chapter Three

YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT

“Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel....In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households...*man by man*” (Joshua 7:13-14).

One by one, dear friends, they all had to come before God and before Joshua, God’s pastor-teacher.

Some people who teach the ‘doctrine of privacy’ fail to read verses such as this one, which doesn’t appear to offer much privacy. God declared in Numbers 32:23, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” And you can bet it will. It will find you out in your physical health. It will find

you out in your soul. It will find you out at the Bema Seat judgment.* Your sin will find you out.

The Principle of Accountability

“So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites, and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me” (Joshua 7:16-19). These verses speak of *accountability*.

Some women confess their sins to other women when they shouldn't tell anyone at all. Besides confessing it to God, they should only tell their pastor-teacher because of the principle of accountability.

If you're in bondage to a particular sin or you need to overcome something in your life, it's a great privilege to be able to say to your pastor, “I know you won't tell anyone. I know

you will keep it totally confidential, and I know you won't tell your best friend or your wife, as much as you love her." What you're saying is, "I want to be accountable to someone, because I'm extremely weak, and I won't lie to you because I know you won't tell one other person."

Joshua made Achan accountable. Though Achan's ultimate personal accountability was to the Lord Jesus Christ, Captain of the host, he was accountable to Joshua as his pastor-teacher.

"And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it" (Joshua 7:20-21). Then Joshua sent a messenger to Achan's tent to bring back the spoils.

The God of All Grace Judges His People

Imagine for a moment that you were there, as a stranger, to witness what happened to Achan and his family.

Something unusual is going on. The elders

of Israel are bringing out a man from the crowd. Then they stone the man until he dies. God is still the God of all grace, but now He's judging one of His people.

Next, a woman is brought out. You find out that she is the man's wife. The elders throw stones at her, until finally, she dies too. Then they bring the children out. *The children*. Again, the elders throw stones until the children are all dead. Finally, they bring the family's tent with everything in it, and burn it before the crowd.

You turn to the man next to you and say, "Sir, I am a stranger here. Could you please tell me what's going on? It seems so devastating that this man, his wife, and his children have been killed in front of all these people and all their possessions burned. Could you tell me why?" Then the man looks at you and says, "My name is Moses." (Remember, the law came by Moses, in John 1:17.)

"Your name is Moses? Well, why did you do this, Moses?"

Moses replies, "God said if we didn't do this, we would never win another battle. The children of Israel were told not to take of the accursed thing or they would be punished by death. But Achan deliberately disobeyed. He lived in per-

sonal sin and transgression. Therefore he and his entire family had to die.”

Sin Unto Death

Sin is a terrible thing. The thing I fear most is that when I teach a series in my church on the pure grace of God, someone will abuse the precious message of grace and lovingkindness thinking they can get away with it. But truthfully, sin cuts us off from fellowship with God. It brings us into divine discipline. And ultimately, if we do not repent, it brings us into physical death years ahead of time.

You may ask, “Was Achan really saved?” Yes, I believe he was. But he was disciplined by God and taken home years early.

You also may be wondering, “Why did God have to take his children?” Because, as the head of his family, Achan made a decision for his household, and God had to use that family to tell all the other families, “Don’t do this!”

Sin unto physical death is not just something God did in the Old Testament under the law. He took Ananias and Sapphira home early because they lied before God about how much they received through the sale of their land (Acts 5:1-11)—and that was in the Church Age, the Age of

Grace!

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, there was a man who was living in incest with his mother. In verse 5, Paul delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, “that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” That man was saved, and as soon as he heard Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church, he didn’t wait to think things over. He repented immediately.

Once the man had repented, God said to the Corinthian Christians, “Love him now. Don’t condemn him, or Satan will take advantage of you” (see 2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

There are some people who periodically go back into practicing sin and use excuses to justify it. Those who do that will not get away with it. Keep your vessel clean and pure for God! Be sure your sin *will* find you out.

**Read The Bema Seat: Presented in Joy or Grief? by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications, 1996, to understand how believers will be rewarded or suffer loss of rewards in heaven.*

CONCLUSION

Sin is not the easiest subject to preach on, but if I am going to preach the whole counsel of God, this message must also be preached.

Israel was not chastised as a nation, and neither was Joshua chastised, because he and the elders dealt with Achan and his family according to the Word of God. We too can deal with our sins on the basis of rebound—God’s Finished Work provision of grace (1 John 1:9). Obedience to God’s Word reveals a living faith, which is sponsored, motivated, and energized by God’s love at Calvary. Instant obedience to the doctrine of rebound keeps our relationship with God free of chastisement so that we can go on to pursue and conquer our enemies in the Promised Land.

May God bless us with conviction in His Word that leads to conversion, communion, and the communication of love that serves others in faith obedience.