

# How to Handle Hidden Curses Within the Camp

Joshua 7:10-15

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, February 19th 2023

## Introduction: Jimmy

A telemarketer called a home one day, and a small boy's voice whispered, "Hello?" "Hello! What's your name?" Still whispering, the voice said, "Jimmy." "How old are you, Jimmy?" "I'm four." "Good, Is your mother home?" "Yes, but she's busy." "Okay, is your father home?" "He's busy too." "I see, who else is there?" "The police." "The police? May I speak with one of them?" "They're busy." "Any other grown-ups there?" "The firemen." "May I speak with a fireman, please?" "They're all busy." "Jimmy, all those people in your house, and I can't talk with any of them? What are they doing?" "Looking for me," whispered Jimmy.<sup>1</sup>

That was a mother who was worried sick about her missing son. She couldn't find him and eventually called the police, and even the fire department showed up. That was a son who probably needed a good spanking. He put a lot of people at major inconvenience, and had done so deliberately.

## I. God gives plenty of opportunities for Achan to come clean early

And it's true that this story does not *exactly* parallel the story of Achan, which was much much more serious. But like Jimmy, Achan has made a lot of people search for him. Like Jimmy, he had inconvenienced a lot of people. Like Jimmy, Achan keeps hiding all the way through the story, even though God has given him plenty of opportunities to confess early. For example, in verse 14 God commands Joshua to wait till the next morning to start the search for the offender. He could have started that day, but I believe God started the next day to give plenty of opportunity for Achan to repent. And then God very deliberately uses a slow, ponderous method of narrowing down the search that would take a long time. He could have revealed Achan right away, but He chose not to. This too shows God's willingness to be merciful and wait. Yet Achan still remains in hiding. Next week we will see that *even when he is forced to confess his sin after God Himself has already exposed him*, he still hides by minimizing what he has done. It's not a true confession of sin. Rather than describing his sin as seriously as *God* does - namely, that he had loved what God had cursed, that he had admired what God had called an abomination, that he had broken covenant with God, and that his sin was indeed worthy of death, he simply says that he sinned by taking some spoil (a positive word) and that the spoil was very beautiful (another positive word). He was caught red-handed, so he had to admit to having done the deed. But even in his confession he is still hiding in a sense. It's even more irrational than

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<sup>1</sup> The Jokesmith, quoted in Bits & Pieces, April 1, 1993, pp. 3-4.

what little Jimmy was doing. Achan knows he is eventually going to get caught. But he still hides.

And this is so true to human nature. Shame keeps people from engaging in the kind of genuine confession that God will accept. Ever since Adam and Eve people have irrationally tried to hide rather than to confess. And the Scripture not only says such hiding is useless, but that it is also inconsistent with ongoing grace. It is useless because Jesus guarantees, “there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known” - *nothing*. That’s Luke 12:2. In Psalm 32:5, David (who also tried to hide like Jimmy and Achan) finally came to his senses and said, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden.” It was only *then* that he found favor with the Lord and he says that his iniquity was forgiven. So the first lesson that I want to pound home today is that it never pays to hide your sins. I can tell you from personal experience that you will be miserable and will lose the sense of God’s blessed presence. As God told Saul, “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

## II. Both individual and corporate sin made Joshua’s prayer inappropriate and ineffectual (v. 10)

But we discovered last week, that it wasn’t just Achan who had sinned. We looked at nine embarrassing failures of Joshua and the leaders. And thankfully, Joshua responds much better than Achan. He instantly repents and does the actions God calls him to do. Because I spent so much time on this last week, I will be briefer today. But notice the rebuke in verse 10. It is clear that God was not only upset with Achan; He was also upset with Joshua.

So the LORD said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?”

Gordon Matties says,

The command Stand up! (v. 10) implies that the actions reported in verse 6 are inappropriate. [We looked at why they were inappropriate last week. He goes on:] The Why? question is rhetorical, implying that Joshua’s evaluation of the situation is wrong.<sup>2</sup> [And we looked at what was sinful about Joshua’s evaluation. I won’t repeat that today.]

But it is clear that God’s concern was not just over Israel’s *corporate* guilt. There were some leadership failures as well. Not all commentaries agree that this is a rebuke, but most do.<sup>3</sup> Lawson says,

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon H. Matties, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Joshua*, ed. Douglas B. Miller and Loren L. Johns (Harrisonburg, VA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2012), 177.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Ziese (p. 167), Hawk (p. 116), Reimer (p. 386), etc.

Thus God answers Joshua with a rebuke (7:10). Rather than question God's guidance and faithfulness [which is exactly what Joshua did], Joshua and the elders need to understand that there has been a covenant violation.<sup>4</sup> [In other words, stop blaming God and start looking for the Jimmy who has caused so much inconvenience.]

Butler goes further and says that God rebukes Joshua for three things in verse 10: For his posture, for his prayer, and for his perspective of despair that shows lack of faith. And again, I outlined those things in much more detail last week. Now, there are legitimate differences of view, but in light of the nine things Joshua got wrong in the previous verses, I agree with the commentators who see God rebuking *both* Joshua *and* Israel. I think David Reimer sums it up well when he says,

The blunt "Get up!" (Josh. 7:10, 13) may strike modern readers as harsh in the face of Joshua's distress and abasement. But such a judgment fails to recognize the lack of fitness between Joshua's words and actions. Prostration suggests repentance and confession, but Joshua's prayer is one of presumption and complaint. Joshua seems to think the issue is one of the Lord's shame and the people's well-being. The Lord's reply indicates that Israel's guilt is the problem; thus what is required is not lament but repentance and a removal of the covenant-breaking offense so as to repair the damage it brought to the relationship between God and his people.<sup>5</sup>

The bottom line of this point is that sin had made Joshua's prayer both inappropriate and ineffectual. It think at least that is clear. Sin had made Joshua's prayer both inappropriate and ineffectual. So let's stop and apply just *that* concept to ourselves.

Can you think of any Scriptures which indicate that your prayers can be hindered by sin - whether your own sin or the sins of others? There are actually quite a few. And I am going to read you a sampling to show that Joshua 7:10 is not a wierd one-off situation that we can ignore. No, it demonstrates a covenant principle that can be applied rather broadly. Let me read 1 Peter 3:7. It says,

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

When a husband is disrespectful to his wife, fails to be understanding of her position, fails to treat her as a fellow-heir, his prayers will be hindered. God won't answer his prayers until he starts treating his wife better. And just as a sidenote, the word "likewise" says that

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<sup>4</sup> K. Lawson Jr. Younger, "Joshua," in Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 179.

<sup>5</sup> David Reimer, "Joshua," in Deuteronomy–Ruth, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. II, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 386.

the same is true of the wife. If the wife fails to be submissive to her husband, and fails to embrace her calling and service, *her* prayers can be hindered. So that's an example where our *own* sins can hinder prayer. And you can probably think of a bunch of other passages that point out the same problem.

What about the sins of others? Well, Jeremiah 7:16 parallels our passage. God told Jeremiah,

“Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you” (Jeremiah 7:16).

Until the people repented, Jeremiah's prayers that God would bless Israel were foolish. If you have relatives who are in obvious rebellion against the Lord, it is foolish to pray that God would bless them with anything other than repentance. God says, “I'm not going to hear you.” And you may disagree with this next application, but I don't pray or sing “God bless America” because it is obvious that America is rebelling against God in a high handed way, and such a prayer is working at cross-purposes to God's disciplines - disciplines which are designed to wake America up to repentance. I want America to repent, and *then* to have God's blessing.

The next verse is Jeremiah 15:1.

Then the LORD said to me, “Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.

It was not a situation of inadequate faith. Jeremiah had plenty of faith. It was a situation that God would not bless apart from repentance.

The next verse is Ezekiel 14:13-14.

Ezek. 14:13 “Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. 14 Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,” says the Lord GOD.

We will be seeing that it is not as if the situation is hopeless. There *are* ways to break the cycle of unanswered prayers. We'll get to that. But I just want to emphasize that there are times when God will not listen to our prayers, period. Of course, a few verses later we see that their own individual responses at least kept God's favor resting upon *them* as *individuals*. Praise God! That's encouraging. He tells Ezekiel,

“Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,” says the LORD God, “they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.” For thus says the LORD GOD: “How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem...” (vv. 19-20)

So those righteous people at least delivered themselves. But these passages indicate that the corporate effects of sin are not just seen in Israel. They are universal principles.

We could go through many passages, but I just want to show one more where a leader is stymied in His attempts to minister because of lack of faith on the part of those He is trying to minister to. The corporate dimension of unbelief can be seen in Mark 6:5-6. Here is Jesus, the perfect God-man, yet because the people had unbelief, it affected what He could and could not do. Mark 6:5-6.

Now he could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief...

Notice that it doesn't say, "He chose not to do any mighty work there," or "He didn't want to do any mighty work there." But "He *could* do no mighty work there." That illustrates the corporate effects of sin that we looked at under verse 1. Now, it didn't stop His work altogether. The passage says that he healed a few sick people. But if Jesus was hindered in His ministry by the lack of faith of His home church (and it was His home church of Nazareth that he was talking about), and if Joshua was hindered in his prayers by the people he was responsible for, there is no way that the officers of this church can be as effective as they could be if the people in this church are not repenting of their serious sins and following hard after God. This is why part of the responsibility of officers is to stir up the people to faith and repentance, to holiness of walk, to exercise of their gifts, to prayer. We rise or fall in this church together. And in verse 1 we looked at this corporate dimension in detail, so I won't say more on it now.

### III. God gives His reasons for hindered prayers (vv. 11-15)

But then He goes on to express his reasons for those hindered prayers.

#### A. Corporate guilt (v. 11 - note: "Israel," "they...they...they")

We will look briefly at the corporate guilt that we already looked at two weeks ago. Verse 11.

Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.

Is that jarring to you? God is going to say in verse 15 that it is only one individual who has taken the accursed things, yet here God says that Israel as a corporate group groups were guilty of that sin. If you didn't hear the sermon on verse 1, I would encourage you to listen to it or read it online. The way covenantalism avoids the extremes of hyper-individualism and collectivism is important to understand.

But it is also important to realize that not all sins are treated as being equally bad or as bringing about this kind of corporate guilt. Every Israelite had some sin at some time, yet those sins did not bring God's curse upon Israel. It was only when one man brought a

*cursed* thing into the camp that the corporate negative effects happened. So let's not overapply this passage.

Some pastors act as if there is no difference in how God treats homosexuality and how He treats gossip. Nothing could be further from the truth. John 19:11 speaks of greater sin. There are lesser sins and greater sins. Not all sins are alike. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus speaks of weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. In Luke 12 He speaks of degrees of punishment and says that more knowledge will require more culpability. Likewise, intentional rebellion is worse than irresponsibility according to Numbers 15. On so many levels it simply no true to say that all sins are treated the same way by God.

But let's just look at degrees of seriousness of sin that Jesus alluded to. Did you know that there is at least one sin that God will not forgive? Matthew 12:32 says, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." Let me list the stratification of the seriousness of sins that God lays out:

1. First, there is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven. It is *the* most serious sin - the *only* sin that cannot be forgiven.
2. But that same verse implies that all blasphemy against God is at least very serious. He highlights blasphemy above other sins. And we should treat blasphemy as very serious. I don't want to see it in a movie. Blasphemy makes me shudder, so I either don't watch the movie or watch it on clearplay, which can screen out those things. Blasphemy is up there in terms of how God treats sins. And God will not hold you guiltless if you trivialize what He holds to be super-serious. Reverence God's name.
3. Third, there are sins that require the death penalty, with murder being at the top of that list. Can a murderer be converted and forgiven on death row? Yes. That has happened many times. But the Scripture says that he still has to be executed. It shows that murder is a much more serious sin than gossip.
4. Fourth, there are sins that God pronounces curses against (and you can see one list of curses in Deuteronomy 27:11ff. These sins are especially cursed because of the societal damage that they bring about and/or the damage to the family. In that passage God curses children who treat their parents with contempt. Parents should not tolerate that kind of behavior. Why? Because it brings a curse, and everything that brings God's curse negatively affects covenant units. That passage says that God curses meanness toward disabled people like leading a blind person off the road so that he falls into the ditch and then laughing about it. He curses incest, and bestiality. That's why God calls these super-serious sins an abomination. And we need to treat them as an abomination that brings down God's corporate curse. Anything with God's curse is parallel to what Achan did.
5. Fourth, there were sins that were *crimes* that did not deserve the death penalty, but which impacted society so negatively that they were treated as crimes with

specified penalties. I believe that there can be forgiveness for categories 3 through 4, but that they need to be treated more seriously.

6. Then there were sins for which there was no civil penalty. They also need to be treated seriously, but you don't see the same negative repercussions upon society or covenantal units. Those are not the kinds of sins that Joshua 7 is talking about.

So to apply this Achan passage to every sin (as some people do) is not being sensitive to the context. It's not *every* sin that makes God abandon a church. It's a deliberate embracing of what God has *cursed* that makes God leave a church until there is repentance. The specific sin that Achan engaged in was a breaking of the covenant by taking something God had *cursed*. And it was because of its corporate impact due to the demonic legal ground that God treated it so seriously. And I believe there is corporate guilt in any denomination that beautifies what God calls an abomination - such as denominations that embrace Revoice, or grow soft on abortion, or other crimes that call down God's curse.

### B. Corporate consequences (v. 12)

But let's look next at the *results* of corporate sin. God's judgments don't just come on the individual. They come down on everyone who is in covenantal union with that individual (unless, as we saw two weeks ago, they resist the sin in some way).

Josh. 7:12 "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

If you were here when I preached on verse 1 of this chapter, you would have gotten an indepth look at how this works and at two false approaches to this subject, and how covenant theology helps us to have a balance. I won't repeat what I said on that Sunday. But do notice the seriousness of having an accursed thing within the camp. Verse 12 says that the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies. Second, they were doomed to destruction. Third, God would not be with them anymore unless they destroyed the accursed in their midst. It's super-serious.

But the word "unless" in that last clause also gives hope. There were actions that could be taken. They had to get rid of Achan and the accursed things that made him and his family accursed.

Can you see why Protestant churches used to take church discipline seriously and why most Reformed churches still do? Such discipline is designed to bring repentance to the offending member, and when that doesn't happen, it at least brings God's blessing on the congregation. But this is just reinforcing what we saw in detail under verse 1 - that there *are* corporate consequences to the sins that God has called out as accursed.

### C. Corporate action needed (v. 13)

So we've seen the corporate guilt, the corporate consequences, and verse 13 gives the corporate action needed. It says,

“Get up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.”

Two steps were required: first, everyone in the body needed to sanctify themselves or cleanse themselves through confession, and secondly, they needed to do something about the sin.

### 1. Step one - set yourselves apart by confession (v. 13a)

Let’s look at the first part of the actions required. Why would they need to sanctify themselves if they had not personally sinned? After all, they had already sanctified themselves just a few days earlier. The only answer I know of is that there is such a thing as corporate guilt. And this has been true since the time of Adam, in whom we all fell. Sometimes the corporate guilt that you need to be cleansed from extends from previous generations. Let me read you the reasons attached to the second commandment.

You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

In that verse you have the sin being visited to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God, but when they sanctify themselves, love and serve God, that curse can be broken. This reason is attached to *idolatry* because it is *especially* demonic bondage that brings this corporate dimension of sin into later generations. By embracing the accursed things, Achan was bringing the demonic into the camp. He gave legal ground to Satan. And it used to be in the olden days that any time a person became a convert, he systematically renounced any hold demons may have had upon him or her from their forefathers. They put it all under the blood. And notice that sanctifying yourself is not a one time event. They had already been sanctified, but we need to *repeatedly* confess sins since we continually find sin in the church. So sanctifying yourself is the first part of the solution.

Can you see why we Reformed people are so concerned that we confess our sins regularly? God doesn’t call us to be perfect. But He does call us to confess our sins, to hate our sins, to forsake our sins and to keep fighting against our sins. Don’t just go through the motions in the part of worship where we confess our sins. Take that time seriously. And do so in your families. Job knew that his children might engage in a cursed sin unintentionally, and it says that every day he offered up a sacrifice to cover those sins. We need to get used to praying covenantally on behalf of our families and on behalf of the church.

### 2. Step two - get rid of the accursed (v. 13b)

The second part of the solution is *dealing* with the sin and the sinner. Verse 13 says, “you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.”



Now, depending on which jurisdiction you are talking about, there are various ways that the accursed thing can be gotten rid of. Let me outline those:

*a) How this is done in the state*

In the state this is done by executing the accursed. The state does not execute people for every sin or crime - only for those God has authorized execution - a very small number of sins. If there is a crime that God considers to be so heinous that it deserves the death penalty, then *nothing but the death penalty* can remove that curse from the civil sphere. So even though there is no *herem* warfare today, and even though there isn't a one-to-one correspondence with *this* accursed thing today, the *principle* remains that God wants all abominations that He has cursed to be dealt with in the civil sphere. If they aren't, the civil sphere does not have God with it. His blessing is removed. We are no longer one nation under God; we are one nation in rebellion to God.

OK, so when our nation isn't doing what it should be doing, is there anything that *we* can do? Yes.

*b) How this is done in families*

Within a family, one should not financially support a son or daughter who is involved in what the Bible considers to be a capital crime. It doesn't matter that state doesn't consider it a capital crime; the family should. Now, obviously the family has no authority to execute children. That is in the jurisdiction of the state, and Deuteronomy 21 makes that clear. But the family should not tolerate a capital crime - that's the point. I know Christian homes that allow their sodomite children to live in their basements and to practice their abominations. That makes the whole family guilty. Nowadays it isn't considered to be loving to kick a teenager or older son or daughter out of the home if they have engaged in what the Bible considers capital crimes, but it *is* the most loving thing that parents can do. To force a son or daughter out of the home if they refused to repent of homosexuality, abortion, or even of abusing their parents (which was also a capital crime in the law) is the most loving thing that you can do. To coddle them means you don't care about their soul, which is in danger of hellfire.

Parents should not support what is under God's curse, whether they are doing it out of false guilt, unprincipled tenderness, peer-pressure, or some other reason. Why is it loving? Because it presses that son or daughter to God's standard, not man's, and it is *God's* blessing that you want to rest on them anyway.

Second, by requiring genuine repentance (not Achan's kind of repentance) you are making it clear that *grace alone* can reverse God's curse; *you can't*. And you don't want a restored relationship with a relative if God's curse remains upon him or her. You want true restoration that flows from repentance and faith. So that's how a *family* maintains God's blessing when one of its members is committing a capital crime; an accursed sin. If they can't force a person out, they can leave. But they don't want to be under God's curse. By the way, don't automatically assume that it's bad parenting that results in a kid like this. God was a perfect parent to Israel, yet He says that His use of the parental rod did not result in repentance in everybody. But He says that kicking Israel out of the home was His last act of

loving discipline. And it worked. It was His tough love that kicked them out that finally turned his sons into repentant sons who came back, submitted, and revered Him. Hosea 11, the first chapters of Isaiah and Jeremiah would be sample passages that indicate casting the son out of the home was the good parenting technique that resulted in repentance. But make sure you only do it for what God considers super serious sins.

*c) How this is done in the church*

How is this done in the church? God has authorized church discipline to keep the churches pure. That discipline has rules, checks and balances, and follows God's principles of justice strictly. But the end result is either repentance on the part of the Achan - in which case he is restored. And he is restored because the church is not the state. But if he doesn't repent, then at least the church is free of the troubler of Israel and the church can receive God's blessings.

By the way, it can sometimes take years before people repent after being excommunicated. One of the people that was excommunicated from our church was not even in our city anymore, but came to us repentant and wanting the discipline removed. We were delighted to do so because there was full-hearted repentance and thankfulness for the discipline. Gary forwarded me a note from pastor Bob Thune (a local pastor of an Acts 29 church) that gave the story of a person who initially was bitter over an act of just church discipline he had been put under, but seven years later returned and expressed repentance and thankfulness that they had stuck to their guns, had remained faithful to God's Word, and had disciplined him. It's hard to remain faithful when the world wants us to coddle offenders and "love" them unconditionally. But love has to be defined by God, not the world.

*d) How this is done in denominations*

But let's look at how this is done on a denominational level. Denominations exercise church discipline as well. And sometimes, when that is not possible, it becomes a reverse discipline where churches leave the denomination. I mentioned previously that over 1800 congregations have left the Methodist church because the mainline Methodist denomination has officially embraced homosexuality and abortion as virtues when God has called down His curse on both crimes. They left because to fail to do so would involve them in the corporate guilt and the corporate consequences of God's curse.

The same is true of denominations that tolerate a false Gospel. Galatians 1:8 says, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." There's that word "accursed" again. If there is something being embraced that God has cursed, you want to flee from that denomination. We aren't talking about every sin; we are talking about sins that Scripture says bring God's curse.

2 Peter 2:14 speaks of certain kinds of sins as being so serious that those who practice them are accursed. So when there are denominations that glory in the LGBTQ agenda (which God has cursed), or actively support abortion (like some mainstream Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist denominations have), then people have to leave. They don't have a

choice if they want God's blessing. What is true on a local church level needs to be practiced at that level too.

Let me summarize this whole section by showing that the New Testament calls for exactly the same kind of separation from the accursed things today as it did in the Old Testament. For the state, Romans 1:32 says that they are still worthy of the death penalty. So that would be in the jurisdiction of the state, right? That verse says that justice is the same in the New Testament as in the Old Testament.

But let's focus on the church jurisdiction. I'll just give you a summary of small quotations from passages that call us to separate from apostasy. Romans 16:17 says to "avoid them." 1 Timothy 6:3-5 says, "from such withdraw yourself." 2 Timothy 3:5 says, "and from such people turn away." Concerning heretics, 2 John 10-11 says, "do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil." 2 Corinthians 6:4-18 is a long passage calling for separation, but I'll just quote one phrase: "come out from among them and be separate" (v. 17). Romans 16:17-18 says, "watch out for them." Ephesians 5:11 tells us to "expose them." In 1 and 2 Timothy Paul identifies the dangerous people by name, exposes them, and calls them out (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:14). 1 Corinthians 5:12 commands us to "judge those" heretics. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 says, "Note that person and do not keep company with him." 2 Thessalonians 3:6 says, "withdraw yourself from every brother who" rejects Paul's words. Of those who play with sexual abominations, God says "not to keep company with" them (1 Cor. 5:9,11) and to "put away from yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13). 1 Corinthians 5:6 warns us that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And of those in apostate denominations, John says, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

I think you get the point. God takes the accursed Achans as seriously today as He did back then. Nor does he accept half-hearted repentance for such things. There must be a radical break with the accursed things before they are restored. Without it the whole church can be faced with the same defeat, powerlessness, fear, and absence of God's power that Israel faced in Joshua's time. This is God's covenant at work. And until God's principle of separation is taken seriously at the family, church, state, and national levels, there will continue to be negative consequences.

#### **D. But God wants individual restitution, not corporate restitution (vv. 14-15)**

So, what's God's goal in verses 14-15? His goal was to help Israel discover the individual or individuals who caused these corporate problems. God wanted *individual* restitution, not the corporate restitution of the collectivists. We dealt with this extensively under verse 1, so I just want to make some side applications here.

First, what do you do when you suspect that there is an Achan in the church but you can't figure out who? Let's make it concrete. One of the Achan-like sins that happens in a lot of American churches is the Jezebel spirit that I preached on in Revelation 2. Even though this Jezebel creates havoc in the church, she hides her devious work just like Achan did, and

people can't figure out what is going on. There is not enough evidence for church discipline, but the church is obviously suffering big time. What do you do?

Again, Achan is similar. He didn't admit to what he did until he was *exposed* by God's inspired revelation. Most commentators believe that this was either 1) the use of the Urim and Thummim or 2) it was God methodically revealing things to Joshua through his gift of prophecy. We don't have the Urim and Thummim today and we don't have inspired prophecy today. But it doesn't matter. God can expose an Achan today through His providences. Verse 14:

In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man.

What had to be in place for this process to even work?

**1. There needs to be a corporate willingness to hold individuals accountable (v. 14a)**

First, there had to be a corporate willingness of all Israel to hold the guilty individuals accountable. They didn't know who they were yet, but they were willing to be part of the solution. This implies that all the heads of the nation, the tribes, the clans, and the families were cooperative. They too wanted holiness in the nation. But let's say that we have zero evidence of what is causing God's wrath to be poured out. What do you do? I believe there are still some options:

1. We can ask God to judge. After all, it was God who exposed this person and called for the judgment. God can do that without our help. He can easily expose the sins of the people. Isaiah says that God can tear away the web of lies and deceit that they have constructed. But we need to *desire* Him to do that and *ask* Him to do that. And I think it is appropriate for the church to call down God's judgments upon secret idolators, whoremongers, and other cursed sinners until they repent. And over the years I have seen God bring remarkable judgments when we have done that.
2. Second, public officials can do as the city elders in Deuteronomy 21 did, and have a public expression of repentance; applying the blood of Christ to cleanse the city or the church from whatever is hindering it in spiritual warfare. We turn it over to Him because we don't know the cause.
3. Third, when God's favor departs from a church and when a family in the church can't figure out why - there is no known cause, the family can apply the blood of Christ to their family and ask God to at least protect their own family. Job prayed for his family's cleansing every day of unknown serious sins that might bring a curse.
4. Fourth, individuals can confess their own sins and ask God to avert judgment. They can seek counseling. They can support the officers.

5. Fifth, James 5:16 says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Mutual openness and confession of sin could lead to outward blessings.
6. Sixth, ask God to reverse the negative in your business or in your church through your own active godliness and ministry. Let me read Genesis 29:5.

So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

The whole house was blessed because of a slave’s righteous presence. Can you make a difference corporately? Absolutely. We talked about that in a previous sermon. And you might be skeptical and think that sin’s effect is more powerful than righteousness. But that is not the case. Paul says, “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” Over and over in the Old Testament you see one king making a huge difference in the kingdom. Or you see one individual making a huge difference in the household. In 1 Corinthians 7:14 God says that the whole family is sanctified by one believing member. That one believer’s presence has the potential of undoing all the corporate unrighteousness of the entire family. That should be encouraging.

7. And seventh, that brings up the power of blessing. I think we need to get more into the habit of pronouncing blessings on each other. We saw at the end of chapter 6 that there is a power in blessing - a power that should not be pronounced upon accursed Achans. That’s why 2 John 10-11 says, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” This is the corporate effect of greetings. You may have never thought of how greeting a JW with “have a nice day” is wrong, but God doesn’t want them to have a nice day as they seek to destroy the faith of others. Your wishes in greetings have power in them, and they need to be used wisely.

## **2. Note the corporate units of nation, tribe, clans, households, and then individual (v. 14)**

I won’t spend much time on the rest of verse 14, but I do at least want to remind you of all the corporate units within the nation. It mentions the corporate units of nation, tribe, clans, ancestral houses, households, and then the individual - man by man. Each of these units has some measure of accountability before God, and the leaders of each unit need to seek to take actions.

## **3. The family suffering with the individual who sinned (v. 15)**

But notice the covenant solidarity of the family brings curses to the whole family (at least on serious accursed sin issue) if members do not interpose or speak out. Verse 15 says,

‘Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.’

It is unmistakably clear that God blesses and curses corporately; sins have a corporate effect. Righteousness has a corporate effect. Blessings have a corporate effect. Lack of faith has a corporate effect. Again, because I dealt with this adequately when we looked at verse 1, I won't repeat myself here.

#### IV. Additional applications

But let me end by making some additional applications. First, the word “unless” in verse 12 shows the way out. Defeat can be turned into victory when we take that defeat to the Lord and resubmit ourselves to Him. The power that had been at Jericho was no longer with them, but once they were restored to the Lord, His power would return.

Second, it is better to pray poorly like we saw that Joshua did, than to not pray. It is interesting that God answers Joshua in the midst of praying. Yes, there is rebuke. But there is also direction and a way out that is given. Like Joshua, we should take our prayers to the Lord, however poor our prayers may be.

Third, be sure your sins will find you out. There is an interesting word in verses 14 and 15 that is translated as “take.” But literally it means to catch or capture or trap. The guilty person would be caught by the Lord or trapped by the Lord. We may be able to successfully hide our sins from our spouse, our church, and our business, but eventually God will make sure that we get caught. Why? Because He loves us and doesn't want us ruined by our sin.

The last application that I would make is that God disciplines Israel because He loves Israel and is for Israel. He could have just abandoned them, but He makes sure to orchestrate events in such a way that the people will turn to Him. They returned because they sensed God's departure. This may seem like a contradiction, but it is not. The Puritan writer, Thomas Brooks, wrote the following, and may we cling to this reality when we experience God's temporary withdrawals. Thomas Brooks says,

By God's withdrawing from His people, He prevents His people's withdrawing from Him; and so by an affliction He prevents sin. For God to withdraw from me is but my affliction, but for me to withdraw from God, that is my sin.

And therefore it were better for me that God should withdraw a thousand times from me than that I should once withdraw from God (Heb. 10:38-39). God therefore forsakes us that we may not forsake our God.

God sometimes hides Himself that we may cleave the closer to Him and hang the faster upon Him.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mute Christian, p. 198, as quoted at <https://www.theheritage.blog/blog/when-god-withdraws-from-his-people>

Brothers and sisters, if you are like Jimmy - hiding from God and from others who love you, realize that its not in your best interest to hide. Turn to the Lord and His blessing *will* return to you. Amen.