THE SIN WE HAVE LEARNED TO TOLERATE

Joshua 7:1–26

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When What We Hide Begins to Destroy What God Is Building

Theme: Repentance

INTRODUCTION: WHEN WRONG BECOMES NORMAL

Brethren, I want us to begin with a question this morning. What happens when a person does something wrong so many times that he no longer considers it wrong? What happens when a Christian lies repeatedly until lying becomes normal? What happens when a sister keeps gossiping until she considers it ordinary conversation? What happens when a brother cheats people in business and explains it by saying, "That is how business is done in Nigeria"? What happens when we become comfortable with the very things that once troubled our conscience? There is something dangerous about sin: sometimes, the greatest danger is not that we commit it, but that we gradually become comfortable with it.

The first time a person tells a lie, his conscience may trouble him. The second time, he may feel less troubled. After doing it repeatedly, he may begin to defend it. Eventually, he may even teach others that it is acceptable. The sin has not changed. The person's attitude toward the sin has changed. Consider a person who has a small wound. At first, the wound causes pain, and the person treats it. But imagine that he covers the wound without cleaning it. The wound worsens beneath the covering. From the outside, everything may appear normal, but the condition underneath continues to deteriorate. Covering a wound is not the same as healing it.

In the same way, attending church, singing hymns, offering prayers, and knowing Bible verses do not automatically mean that every area of our lives is spiritually healthy. We can look fine before people while neglecting serious matters in our relationship with God. Today, our subject is The Sin We Have Learned to Tolerate. I am not preaching this message because I believe one person in the congregation is worse than another. I am preaching it because God's Word requires every one of us to examine ourselves. Let us not listen to this sermon thinking about the person sitting beside us. Let us ask, *"Lord, is there anything in my own life that I have stopped treating as seriously as Your Word treats it?"*

Read 2 Corinthians 13:5:
"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." — KJV

The command is to examine ourselves.

Not our neighbours. Not our elders alone. Not the young people alone. Not the preacher alone.

Every one of us must stand honestly before the Word of God.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND: WHAT HAPPENED IN JOSHUA 7?

Before Israel entered the land of Canaan, God had delivered His people from Egypt, brought them through the wilderness, and led them across the Jordan River. In Joshua 6, Israel experienced a remarkable victory at Jericho. The walls fell, and the city was conquered. However, God had given Israel specific instructions concerning the things devoted to destruction and the items reserved for His treasury. The people were not free to take whatever they desired. Read Joshua 6:18–19. Joshua warned the people not to take the devoted things, and he explained that silver, gold, and certain vessels belonged to the Lord's treasury. Then we arrive at Joshua 7.

Israel went against the smaller city of Ai, expecting another victory. Instead, the Israelites were defeated, and men died in battle. Joshua was distressed and went before God. God revealed that Israel had transgressed His covenant because someone had taken what was forbidden, concealed it, and kept it among his possessions. Eventually, Achan was identified. In ***Joshua 7:20–21***, he confessed that he had seen a beautiful Babylonian garment, silver, and gold; coveted them; took them; and hid them in the ground inside his tent.

Notice the progression:
- He saw.
- He coveted.
- He took.
- He concealed.

Achan's downfall was not merely about possessing valuable things. It was about disregarding God's command, allowing desire to govern his actions, and hiding his disobedience. This account concerns Israel under God's covenant with them at that time. We must not take the specific judgment carried out under that covenant and assume that Christians today are authorised to punish people in the same way. The lesson for us is the seriousness of disobedience, the harm sin can cause, and the necessity of repentance before God. With that background, let us consider five lessons.

POINT ONE: SIN OFTEN BEGINS WHERE NOBODY IS LOOKING

Main text: *Joshua 7:20–21*

Achan did not begin his downfall by announcing to the whole camp that he intended to disobey God.

The process began privately. He saw something, desired it, took it, and hid it.

By the time the Israelites discovered what had happened, his private decision had already contributed to a public disaster. This teaches us something important: the decisions that eventually damage our lives often begin in moments when we believe nobody is watching.

1. The battle for obedience begins in the heart

James 1:14–15 explains that a person can be drawn away by his own desire, and that desire, when it conceives, gives birth to sin. Sin often follows a process. A person entertains an improper desire. Instead of rejecting it, he feeds it. He then finds an opportunity to act on it. Afterward, he may try to conceal what he has done. That is why Christians must learn to deal with wrong desires before they become sinful actions.

For example:
- A young person repeatedly entertains sexually immoral thoughts and begins seeking opportunities to act on them.
- A businessman begins by considering whether he can manipulate a transaction, then eventually deceives a customer.
- A Christian becomes jealous of another person's progress and begins making destructive comments about that person.
- Someone begins privately entertaining resentment until every interaction becomes an opportunity to hurt the person he resents.

The point is not that every temptation is itself the same as committing sin. Jesus was tempted but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). The danger comes when we entertain, nurture, and act upon desires contrary to God's will.

2. Private conduct reveals the character we are developing

Read ***Psalm 139:23–24***. David asks God to search him and know his heart. David did not merely ask God to examine his public reputation. He asked God to examine what was within him. Brethren, it is possible to be respectful in church and dishonest in business. It is possible to sing about love and harbour bitterness. It is possible to preach against immorality while secretly practising it. Our public appearance cannot replace our private obedience.

POINT TWO: SIN BECOMES MORE DANGEROUS WHEN WE JUSTIFY IT

Main text: *Proverbs 14:12*

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." — KJV

One of the most dangerous things a person can do is develop an excuse for every act of disobedience.

Instead of asking, "Does God approve of this?" we ask, "Can I explain this away?" We begin to measure our conduct by what other people accept rather than by what God has revealed.

1. Common excuses do not change God's standard

Consider some statements we hear in everyday life:
- "Everybody does it."
- "That is how things work here."
- "At least I am not as bad as that person."
- "God understands my heart."
- "Nobody is perfect, so there is no need to take it so seriously."

Some of these statements contain partial truths. Nobody is perfect, and God knows our hearts. But none of them gives us permission to continue knowingly practising sin without repentance. ***Romans 6:1–2*** asks whether we should continue in sin so that grace may abound. Paul's answer

is emphatic: "God forbid." Grace is not permission to become comfortable with disobedience. It is part of God's provision for our salvation, and it teaches us to reject ungodliness (***Titus 2:11–12***).

2. Comparing ourselves with others can blind us

Imagine a Christian who lies to customers but comforts himself by saying, *"At least I do not commit adultery."* Another person commits adultery but says, *"At least I am not a thief."* A third person spreads rumours but says, *"At least I attend every service."* All three are using someone else's wrongdoing to avoid examining their own. The question is not whether you can find someone worse than yourself. The question is whether your life agrees with God's Word. Read ***2 Corinthians 10:12***. Paul warns against measuring ourselves by ourselves and comparing ourselves with one another. God has not appointed another person's weaknesses as the standard for our conduct.

1. **Sin can damage trust**

Consider a husband who secretly misuses money meant for his household. He may believe that he is the only person affected because he is the one who made the decision. But his wife may struggle to trust him. His children may suffer because necessary expenses are not paid. The family may face difficulties that could have been avoided. Consider a trader who knowingly misrepresents the quality of a product. The customer may lose money, other customers may lose confidence, and the trader's reputation may suffer. Consider a Christian who spreads a false story about another member. Even after the story is corrected, relationships may remain damaged. Sin often has a wider reach than the person committing it imagines.

2. Spiritual leadership requires personal integrity

Church leaders, teachers, parents, and older Christians influence others through both their teaching and their conduct. Paul told Timothy in ***1 Timothy 4:12*** to be an example to believers in word, conduct, love, faith, and purity. A leader cannot expect people to take his teaching seriously if his conduct repeatedly contradicts it. Parents cannot effectively teach children honesty while deliberately deceiving others. Bible teachers cannot demand forgiveness while refusing to acknowledge their own wrongdoing. This does not mean leaders must pretend to be perfect. It means they must be willing to acknowledge wrong, repent, and live consistently with the truth they teach.

3. Sin may affect people who did not choose it

Children can suffer from the consequences of their parents' decisions. Congregations can experience damaged trust because of a leader's misconduct. Customers can suffer because of a business owner's dishonesty. This should make us more careful, not more self-righteous.

POINT THREE: HIDDEN SIN CAN HURT OTHER PEOPLE

Joshua 7:1-5 records that Israel suffered defeat at Ai following Achan's

disobedience. The account identifies Achan's act as a violation affecting Israel's covenant relationship with God. We should not use this passage to claim that every suffering a church or family experiences is caused by somebody else's secret sin. Scripture does not authorise that conclusion. However, the passage clearly demonstrates that individual disobedience can have consequences beyond the individual.

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POINT FOUR: REPENTANCE REQUIRES MORE THAN REGRET

Main text: ***Joshua 7:19–21*** Joshua questioned Achan, and Achan eventually acknowledged his wrongdoing. His confession identifies what happened: he saw, coveted, took, and hid. The passage shows the seriousness of Achan's disobedience and its consequences. It also invites us to consider the difference between acknowledging wrongdoing and genuinely turning away from it.

1. Call sin what God calls it

Sometimes, we use softer language to avoid facing the truth. We call dishonesty *"business strategy."* We call gossip *"sharing information."* We call bitterness "*protecting my peace*." We call sexual immorality *"a personal*

relationship." We call deliberate disobedience *"my own way of doing things."* We should not exaggerate our failures, but neither should we disguise them. If we have lied, we should acknowledge that we lied. If we have cheated, we should acknowledge that we cheated. If we have spread a false story, we should acknowledge that we spread a false story. ***Proverbs 28:13*** teaches that the person who covers his sins will not prosper, but the one who confesses and forsakes them will receive mercy. Notice the two responses: confessing and forsaking.

2. Repentance involves a change of direction

Read ***2 Corinthians 7:10***: *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." — KJV*

Not every kind of sorrow produces repentance. Worldly sorrow may focus on the consequences of being caught. Godly sorrow moves a person toward a genuine change of heart and conduct.

CONCLUSION: WHAT ARE YOU HIDING THAT YOU NEED TO CONFRONT?

Brethren, let us return to our opening question. What happens when a person does something wrong so many times that he no longer considers it wrong? His conscience may become less sensitive. His excuses may become stronger. His relationships may suffer. His spiritual life may deteriorate while his public image remains intact. That is why we must not treat tolerated sin as a small matter. Achan's story is a sobering reminder that disobedience is serious before God. His account should not make us suspicious of everyone around us. It should make us responsible for our own conduct. We cannot repent on behalf of everybody else. We must begin with ourselves.

Perhaps you have become comfortable with dishonesty.
Perhaps you have allowed resentment to remain in your heart.
Perhaps you have made promises to God that you repeatedly neglect.
Perhaps your public Christianity is stronger than your private devotion.
Perhaps you have wronged somebody and are waiting for the matter to disappear instead of making it right.
Or perhaps you have become so accustomed to a particular behaviour that you no longer ask whether it agrees with God's Word.
Today is an opportunity to stop defending what God calls us to confront.
Read ***Hebrews 3:15***:
"To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." — KJV