

# Sin In The Camp

*Dealing With Sin  
Among God's People*

*A Series Of Lessons  
by  
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# *Sin In The Camp*

## *(An Introduction)*

*“But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. ... And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and 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, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.” (Josh. 7:1, 10-12)*

Sin destroys lives. When sin enters into the camp of God’s people, the potential for destruction is not limited just to the life of the person who actually committed that sin. All are endangered by it. One man, Achan, sinned, and *“the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.”* Why it was so is a topic for another discussion. The practical reality is that it was so. The practical reality was that thirty six men died because of Achan’s sin. The practical reality was

that an entire nation was shamed and defeated in battle because of the sin of one man. The practical reality is that when sin takes root among God's people, all are in danger, and not just the one person who is most directly responsible.

This practical reality is not limited just to one age, one nation, or one dispensation. The human race was put on notice as to the spreading, destroying result of sin by the consequences of Adam's disobedience: "...*by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin...*" (**Rom. 5:12**). Achan was eventually condemned and stoned to death for his rebellion against God. That was what could be expected under the covenant of law. Condemnation is not the way sin is to be handled among God's people today. Thank God for the fuller revelation of grace! But the difference in how sin in the camp was to be dealt with under the old covenant, and how it is to be dealt with today, does not alter that practical reality that the sin of one carries the potential of bringing devastation, defeat, shame, and discouragement to many.

When Paul chided the Corinthians for refusing to deal with the sin that was occurring in their midst, he reminded them, "...*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (**I Cor. 5:6**). The whole assembly was in danger of being corrupted by that sin. In speaking to the church at Thyatira, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols*" (**Rev. 2:20**). The sin of one was defiling many; that church was warned of an awful judgment if they did not, as a church, repent. No, the nature of sin, and the ruin it brings to the people of God has not changed.

Shall we, then, overlook sin when it evidences itself within the church? Is it, as some would imply, a sign of a bitter, ungracious, or unforgiving spirit to say that once sin is recognized as being in the camp, it must be dealt with?

Perhaps our first concern when dealing with the sins of someone who is called a Christian should be the welfare of that person. Paul told the Thessalonians, “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*” (**I Thess. 2:19-20**). Of course, he was speaking to a people who were going on with God and laying hold of the fullness of the scripture, not to those who were in rebellion against their Lord and His word, but that same potential of being joy-bringers to our hearts and to Christ’s is in every child of God. If we delight in God’s people (and we should) we want to win them to God’s best. Jesus, after instructing His hearers to tell an erring brother about the error of his ways, said, “*...if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*” (**Matt. 18:15**). Love for God’s people is always commended and encouraged in the scripture, and the gaining of a brother should always be a preeminent desire.

And yet, coming back to the practical reality of what the sin of one can do to many, it is not loving, kind, or gracious to leave unrepented sin as an untended issue. The grief over the one and the loss of fellowship with that one can never outweigh the grief and loss that will follow as many are infected and injured. If the one will hear when admonished, the one is gained. If the one will not hear, and if separation must then follow, the many are protected. To ignore this is not grace. It is unkindness multiplied.

It is not pleasant to consider the separations that can result when God's children stubbornly cling to sin and self righteousness. It is even less pleasant to consider the barrier to our own fellowship with God if we choose to ignore His plain-spoken word on how we are to deal with a brother who will not be admonished and who will not repent. Jesus' teaching on how to deal with such an one was, "...let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." (**Matt. 18:17**). Paul's Spirit-given counsel was, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (**I Cor. 5:13b**). Sin is terrible. Most will agree to that fact, and will agree also that the sin itself should be judged. But sin does not exist apart from those who commit it. If a child of God will not acknowledge or abandon an open sin, then judging the sin will require a judgment upon the one who persists in it.

Some refuse that thought. Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, did not: "*For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed*" (**I Cor. 5:3**)—not just the deed, but the one who had done it. This is another practical reality. Sin cannot be truly dealt with in the abstract. Sin is a deed committed by someone. To deal with sin, the one who committed the sin must be dealt with. Our first desire is that the erring one will accept repentance and allow grace to be applied, but if repentance is refused, then the sin must still be restrained. Grace must then be exercised toward those who, if the "*wicked person*" were not checked in his or her course, would be spiritually damaged by that person's unrepentant presence.

May you find the thoughts and comments contained here to be a blessing, although the issue of

dealing with sin must always be a sad one. To see, to believe, and to act as God wishes us to do requires that we adhere to the scripture rightly divided. I trust that by God's grace you will find the following expositions on three passages of scripture fit that requirement.

# *Love That Covers Sin*

*“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”*

*(I Pet. 4:8)*

Covering sin is perhaps the highest manifestation of godly love toward an erring brother or sister. Love covers sin. If we do not acknowledge this, we reject scripture. If we do not practice it, we are found unfaithful.

There is a side of us that may not want to see sin covered, of course. To pretend otherwise is to ignore human nature. Petty resentments, old grudges, personal hurts—such things get in the way of God’s will if we let them. So too does the self-righteous streak that runs broad through the nature that is a part of old Adam’s legacy to his children. May we not give in to self-will and carnal inclination. May we rather yield to the word of God, the Spirit who inspired it, and the new-creation life that is in us by faith in Christ Jesus.

The task of covering sin may not be an easy one, however. Wanting to do a thing and knowing how the thing is done can be two very different issues. A four year old may want to drive the family car to the grocery store, with the sincere desire of saving his mother from having to go herself. But because the desire is not backed by knowledge, if it is put into action the result will not be at all what the child imagined. So it is with things spiritual. The Bible tells us what to do: cover sins. We yearn to obey that instruction when we see the tragedy of a fallen brother. That is good. But may our scripture-based desire



be backed up with some scripture-based knowledge of the how-to sort.

How a brother's sins can be covered is explained in **James 5:20**. "*Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*" Love's hiding of sin is shown here to be the converting of the sinner. (See also **Luke 22:32, 34**.)

Don't be put off by the use of the word sinner to refer to a child of God whose ways do not please the Lord. In **I Timothy 1:15**, Paul said, "*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*" Not, "I was chief," but "*I am chief.*" He was not even talking about the ongoing practice of sin. He told the Corinthians, "*I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*" (**I Cor. 9:27**). But Paul knew that the old sin-nature was still with him, so he called himself still "*chief*" of sinners. If that is the case, then surely the term "*sinner*" can apply to a child of God who willfully practices sin. Practical James did not speak primarily of spiritual standing, but of outward actions. One who runs is a runner; one who swims is a swimmer; one who sins is a sinner.

But coming back to our topic, how is the one who has slipped into sin converted from the error of his way? That is, how does love cover sins?

Not by pretending that the sin never happened, or that it is not important. Not by imagining that the passage of time is sufficient for the covering of sins. If those things were effectual in dealing with sin, Christ could have been spared the agony of the cross. God could have said that Adam had never sinned, and that sin had not been

passed down to the rest of the human race. God could have pretended that even if we had sinned, it didn't matter since He loved us. Restraining His holiness, He could have shown unjust kindness to us. He could have waited a thousand years or so, and then welcomed us into heaven because, after all, it all happened a long time ago.

God did not choose to use those methods because they would not have worked. Something very different was needed. If it does not work for God to do things that way, it is difficult to see how it could work for us to do things that way. The scripture show us a different plan.

Converting the sinner from his way does not mean overlooking sin. Love recognizes sin as a deadly injurious force that must be removed for the sake of the sinner. Love deals plainly and kindly with the one who has slipped into sin, seeking to effect the necessary "conversion" (a turning around from yielding to sin, and yielding to God instead). Unless that converting of the sinner from his way takes place, sin is not covered.

At this point, a sad truth has to be faced: not every sin will be covered. Every sin can be covered; the atoning work of Christ made that provision. Peter said not that love covers all sins, but that it "*shall cover the multitude of sins.*" We read of multitudes following Jesus; sadly, not all followed Him. We read of a multitude crying out against Paul that "he ought not to live any longer;" thank God, not all rejected that godly messenger. Love covers a multitude of sins. It covers every sort of sin that men and women might commit. It does not cover sin without a turning around of the one who has sinned.

Time is not the issue. Emotions are not the issue. The issue when love would cover sin is the turning around of the one who has sinned. This is God's pattern. May we not disagree with God, nor scorn His pattern as

insufficient for our cause. The choice is to follow His way or to devise our own.

“Are there really no other ways to cover sin?” one may ask. Well, yes, there are. In *Isaiah 30:1*, the Lord spoke to Israel against engaging in a human coverup of sin, rather than having sin covered by the means He appointed. “*Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.*” There is a covering of sin that is not of God, and does not proceed from His word. According to *Isaiah 30:1*, the result of that kind of sin-coverup, and the heart-desire that is behind it is “*that they may add sin to sin.*”

This is not to say that everyone involved in the wrong sort of sin-covering wants sin to increase. Many want the opposite. They do not know any better, but are deceived by those who do know better. Ignorance and a sincere desire to do good do not change the outcome, though. Remember our four year old who wanted to drive to the store? Would his innocence and good intentions protect him or others on the road from harm? Love reaches out to cover even the sin of trying to cover up sin by non-scriptural means. Yet, like every other sin, it can be truly covered only when the one engaged in it turns from it and submits again to the whole counsel of God.

The fact is, seeking to cover sins by any means other than converting (turning around) the one who has sinned is a failure to act in his best interest. “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*” (**Prov. 28:13**). If the sin has not been forsaken, and the erring one is allowed instead to make the sin seem not so bad after all, then godly love has not been exercised. By such means, he is turned from

God's mercy, and his failure to prosper spiritually is secured. Whatever result may be hoped for, this is the one God says to expect if we try to hide sin ourselves instead of following His way.

Saints, may we not be satisfied merely to tolerate or ignore sin. May we likewise not sit in self-righteous judgment against those who might be drawn back into godly fellowship. But may we never, ever imagine that we can do the work of God without obeying His word, and may we not imagine that good can result from methods God has rejected.

# *Kindness That Forgives*

*“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted  
forgiving one another, even as God for  
Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”  
(Eph. 4:32)*

Forgiving others as God forgave us is not optional. It is commanded. We are not under a system of laws such as those under which Israel operated, but God’s word is a word of authority to be obeyed, not a word of suggestion to be considered, and then accepted or rejected as we see fit. God has set a pattern of forgiveness, and He intends that His people should show forth this pattern in their own lives. Those who are unwilling to do so are outside of His will.

It is important for us to understand the pattern that God has established, then. In the instruction to forgive “*as God...hath forgiven,*” the word *as* carries the thought of just as, or according as—we are to forgive in exactly the same way and on just the same terms as God has forgiven us. His forgiving of us is truly a precise pattern for us to follow. If at your job you are shown how to operate a machine, you do not have the option of pushing buttons and pulling levers at random; you operate it as you were taught. A carpenter working on a new house must build it as the blueprint indicates; he has no right to improvise. How much less, then, do we have a right to say, “Oh, I get the idea. Forgive!” and then proceed to do it in our own fashion, according to the standards of human wisdom. We are to forgive, but we are to forgive “*as God...hath forgiven*” us.

How, then, did God forgive us? What was the basis

of the forgiveness we received? Were there any conditions attached? God does not forgive every sin and pardon every sinner. Read *Revelation 20:15* and *22:11*. Those who stubbornly cling to sin and reject God's way of forgiveness are eternally identified with and judged for their sins. What is the basis of the forgiveness we received? Why were we forgiven?

God did not forgive us because we deserved forgiveness. Forgiveness is a matter of grace. *Matthew eighteen* gives a parable of the forgiveness of debt. The fact that a debt was forgiven implies that it was not repaid. If it had been repaid, no forgiveness would have been needed. So it was between us and God. We did not make restitution for our sins; He forgave them. So it must be when we forgive others. We forgive, not because someone has found a way to make up for the wrong done. That would not be forgiveness. Forgiveness says, "Wrong has been done, and the one who did the wrong cannot undo it. Yet I have found a means to put the wrong away and to embrace the one who committed it."

God forgave us, not because of any good in us, but "*for Christ's sake*." For Christ's sake—that is the foundation of our forgiveness of others. Not that we see good in the offending party, nor that we love or like that person—not for any reason but "*for Christ's sake*." God loved us while we were dead in sin, but love alone was not the foundation of His forgiveness. In love He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us, and that became His reason for forgiving us. Sin is not excused by our Father. It was judged, and on that basis we are forgiven. On that same basis we can exercise love in righteousness and embrace erring ones: Christ died for them; Jesus paid for their sins.

Sometimes the process of forgiving is hindered. Sometimes a person is not forgiven, and the failure is not with the one who withholds forgiveness. Concerning God, the scripture says He is “*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (**II Pet. 3:9**). **I Timothy 2:3-4** speaks of “*God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (*NAS*). And yet despite His love and the provision made by Christ Jesus, some perish, not having received the salvation He provided. Their sins are not forgiven and they are lost eternally. The fault is not God’s.

The key is expressed in **II Peter 3:9** “*that all should come to repentance.*” Who is not forgiven by God? Those who do not repent. Paul, in **II Corinthians 12:21**, spoke of “*many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.*” That passage indicates that if they did not repent, Paul would not simply overlook their sin. If they did not deal with their sins, the Spirit gave witness to the fact that Paul would have to do so.

In some cases, it can be as wrong to forgive as it is in other cases to withhold forgiveness. If someone borrows money from you, I have no right to forgive that debt! David wrote in **Psalms 51**, after he had repented of his great sin in the matter of Bath-sheba and Uriah the Hittite, “*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.*” Even if we are hurt by another’s sin, the sin is against God. If He forgives, so must we; if the sin against Him is not resolved before Him, we have no right or power truly to forgive it. We are to forgive only “*as God...hath forgiven*” us. We can and should let go of the personal hurt, put away our fleshly anger, and

“forgive” in the human sense, but to put away the sin against God is not in our power unless and until the one who has sinned repents before God.

After Mark, the nephew of Paul’s dear friend Barnabas, showed himself to be unfaithful in his responsibilities before God, Paul refused to accept Mark as a member of the group that was to accompany him on his second missionary journey. Barnabas disagreed, and although Barnabas was a beloved brother, the gracious apostle felt so strongly about this that he actually parted company with Barnabas over it (*Acts 15:37-40*). Until Paul knew that Mark had settled it with God, he would not give Mark even a small a place of ministry. It was not his place to excuse what Mark had not cleared before God. Later on, though, Paul wrote to Timothy, “*Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry*” (*II Tim. 4:11*). He was eventually able to have full confidence in Mark again. Mark resolved the issue before God, and Paul welcomed him. That is the pattern God has ordained.

King Jehoshaphat was a godly man, but he was not wise in his choice of associates. He chose to ignore King Ahab’s unrepented wickedness, and joined with him in battle. (Consider the spiritual parallels.) Ahab died in the battle, and Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life. When he returned to Jerusalem, a man named Jehu came out and prophesied: “*Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD*” (*II Chron. 19:2*). Yet Jehoshaphat did not learn. He later joined in business with Ahab’s evil son and heir, Ahaziah. This time a man called Eliezer prophesied, saying, “*Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works*” (*II Chron.*



**20:37**). No work of God's people can prosper in God's eyes if it is entered into with those who walk in unrepented sins. It may prosper in worldly terms, but not in God's eyes.

Forgiveness, then, is more than overlooking sin. Forgiveness involves a cleansing of the sin, a cleansing that can only come as the guilty party himself or herself brings the sin before God according to God's own pattern. If we are dealing with more than a personal affront, with something more than hurt feelings (if we are dealing, in other words, with a matter that involves an offense against God) we are to forgive as God has forgiven—or not at all. If the erring one has reestablished fellowship with God, if the Spirit bears witness to a genuine repentance having occurred, then we must forgive freely and unconditionally. To do otherwise is disobedience. If, on the other hand, the sinning-one desires forgiveness without repentance, proudly and without a heart-change, let us wait in love together with God for that person to come to Christ for forgiveness. If we desire the spiritual well-being of the those who stray into sin, we must not trespass and injure them by taking shortcuts that are not according to God's will.

# *Spirituality That Restores*

*“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”*

**(Gal. 6:1)**

The call for meekness here is not to be taken lightly. Without meekness we cannot restore one who has been gripped by the power of sin. Sometimes, through a lack of meekness, Christians believe they could never do what someone else has done. That is self-righteousness. *Isaiah 65:5* speaks of those who said, “*Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.*” Does this sound like the speech of people who are willing to restore an erring one? May we never partake of that proud spirit.

A lack of meekness in regard to those who are taken in a fault can also be shown in another way. Whereas the self-righteous Israelites of *Isaiah 65:5* pushed the defiled soul far away and refused to restore, the Corinthians simply tolerated sin as if it were not important. Paul reprimanded them, saying in part, “*Ye are puffed up*” (*I Cor. 5:2*). The Bible warns that continued contact with unrepented sin in another’s life will entangle and defile us (*I Cor. 5:6a, 15:33; Heb. 12:15*). The Corinthians seemed to believe that they were so spiritual they were somehow immune, despite the scripture’s warnings. They seemed to share the attitude of those referred to in Isaiah, in that they did not believe they could ever do or be touched by what their brother had done. Because of this pride, they ignored their brother’s spiritual

need and continued to offer full fellowship to him in his defilement. They did not restore him.

What does it mean to restore someone? The Greek word translated restore means to complete, to repair what has been broken, to adjust, to put in order, to make one what he ought to be. Restoration does not mean accepting the way things are in someone's life; restoration effects a change in that life. The walk and testimony have been damaged; repair work needs to be done—not public-relations work, but genuine repair. Things out of order must be brought back into order. Habits that are wrong must be altered. Nothing less than this is spiritual restoration

We see a graphic example of restoration in ***Matthew 4:21*** and ***Mark 1:19***. Jesus saw James and John in a ship with their father, "*mending their nets.*" The word translated mending there is the same Greek word as restore in ***Galatians 6:1***. Torn nets are not restored by putting them back into the water and calling them good. They are restored by repairing the holes.

Who should restore torn nets? A child? The most inexperienced man on the boat? A child could not shift the nets to mend them; he would probably make a bad situation worse by tangling the nets while trying to find the problem. An inexperienced workman would miss problems a more practiced eye would see immediately. Unskillful repair with badly tied knots would allow the net to break again in the same place, and just at the time when the break could cause the most loss: when the net was full of fish. What a discouragement to all in the boat when a full net breaks!

Who should restore damaged lives? "*Ye who are spiritual,*" says the word of God. At best, the immature

and carnal will tangle the issues badly and leave the damage half repaired. At worst, they do not recognize the extent of the damage—they declare the problem resolved, and the one who has failed will be put back into place like a badly mended net, ready again to cause more loss and discouragement.

Remember also that time does not restore a torn net. Neither is the passage of time in itself a restorer of lives damaged by sin. To restore is to repair. How are sin-damaged Christians repaired?

Most often, thank God, prayer alone is sufficient when we see sin in the life of another; read *I John 5:16-17*. All can join in this work, although, frankly, the carnal are unlikely to do so, and the immature may not fully understand the depth of the need.

Sometimes, though, sin and corruption are stubbornly clung to; the level of reproach and open sin becomes extreme. Then, not just those who think they are spiritual, but those who are spiritual are needed. Paul spoke of the Corinthians as babies. John wrote about little children, young men, and fathers. There are differing levels of spirituality and development, and not everyone is capable of engaging in every spiritual work. Restoring a brother who is overtaken in a fault is not a task for the spiritually young, nor for those whose walk is influenced more by the flesh than by the Christ-life in them. People are not fishing nets, and sin is not a simple rip to be mended with cords and knots. Sin is dangerous, deceptive, and destructive. Those who partake long of its poison, even saved people, have taken sides with one who is a sinister deceiver. Do you remember when Jesus told Peter, “*Get thee behind me Satan*” (*Mt. 16:23; Mk. 8:33*)? Sadly, even believers sometimes work for the wrong side.

When they do, they begin to manifest the will of one who “*was a murderer from the beginning, and...is a liar, and the father of it*” (**John 8:44**). For their own protection, our Father does not ask His young ones and weak ones to do the dangerous work of dealing with such cases.

Who are these spiritual ones whom God instructs to restore a brother on whom sin and Satan have laid hold?

**I Corinthians 2:15** says, “*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*” Scofield renders it, “*But he that is spiritual discerneth all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man.*” The first part of the verse tells us why the spiritual are qualified to restore a sinning brother: by following the Holy Spirit, they are able to discern—that is, to examine closely, and make determinations about exactly what they are seeing. The second part of the verse tells us we cannot simply declare ourselves or anyone else to be spiritual. The Lord alone judges and declares who is spiritual. He can and will manifest such on a case by case basis, but He is the real discernor of spirituality.

This tells us that ultimately, only Jesus has the right to set His people in order, to declare whom He will use to restore someone who has been snared by sin. He is the head of the body, the church. He cares about the erring ones. He wants them mended, healed, restored to full usefulness and fellowship. Not one of us has the right to order things apart from His express direction. We can only look to Him as the head, trust His wise discernments, follow His leading by the Spirit, and cling to the pattern revealed in scripture.

How do the spiritual go about restoring one taken in a fault, then? Reread the last sentence of the previous paragraph. There is no set of rules. That would be law.

Instead, there is the headship of Christ, the leading of the Spirit, and the pattern of the scriptures. Sometimes prayer is enough. Sometimes a word of admonition suffices. Sometimes restoration begins with separation, as with the man at Corinth who had his father's wife (*I Cor. 5:1-13; II Cor. 2:6-8*). Sometimes, sadly, a stubborn heart spurns correction and refuses to be scripturally restored. In every case, the Lord Himself must lead. In no case has restoration occurred if the sin that caused the damage is not fully dealt with.

Whatever our stage of spiritual development, may we take the time to see our brother's need, may we remember what it means to restore one who is overtaken in sin, and may we accept the rightness of the whole counsel of God.



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