

A Godly Man in Wicked Surroundings

Elijah was a man who reached true greatness in the Lord's service. He was always ready to go where God would send him (**I Kings 18:1; 19:15**); to pray whenever prayer was needed (**I Kings 17:20, 21; 18:36, 37**), and to confront evil whenever confrontation was necessary (**I Kings 18:17-24; 21:17-19**). He was translated without seeing death, and he, along with Moses, was chosen to appear with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration.

The remarkable thing about Elijah is that he attained this greatness while living in a wicked and hostile environment. Had he lived in Judah during the righteous reign of Hezekiah or Josiah, we might not be surprised at Elijah's attainments. But he lived instead in Israel during the wicked reign of Ahab. He was subjected to the cruel intents of Jezebel. He was under constant harassment and threat of death. He became so discouraged at one point that he asked to die, but he never denied his God.

In this wicked environment Elijah was able to influence others. The widow of Zarephath was blessed through Elijah (**I Kings 17:8-24**). The multitudes on Mount Carmel were led to cry, "The Lord, He is God!" through his courageous efforts (**I Kings 18:39**). Elisha, his successor, must

By Bill Hall

have been greatly influenced by him. And even Ahab was brought to humility on one occasion, clothing himself in sackcloth as a result of Elijah's rebuke (**I Kings 21:27-29**). The message of Elijah is clear. You can live a godly life and influence others for good in a wicked and hostile environment.

When one hears the excuses people make today, it is obvious that Elijah's message is badly needed in this generation. People excuse their failure to teach others the gospel with, "People are so prejudiced around here they just won't listen"; when the truth is, little effort has been made. If they are approached about their ungodly conduct, they explain that "You just don't know how terrible the people are that I have to work around every day". If their children go astray their explanation is, "Our children are faced with pressures that we didn't have growing up". Such statements, repeated often enough, become to many a "license" to do wrong and a salve to soothe their troubled consciences.

We must throw aside our excuses and make up our minds to do right. Elijah could serve God in wicked surroundings. And so can we.



The North Charlottesville church of Christ

We Meet at the Piedmont Family YMCA
442 Westfield Road, Charlottesville 22901

Email: larryrouse@cvillechurch.com
Internet: www.cvillechurch.com

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (**Matthew 5:16**)

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Achan's Sin

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Fresh on the heels of an astounding victory at Jericho, the young Israelite nation, under Joshua's leadership, focused on the next objective in their campaign to capture Canaan - the land promised by Jehovah. Ai, a small town, was next on the list. Upon their return, the men sent to spy out Ai advised Joshua to send only two or three thousand men against Ai "for the people of Ai are few" (**Josh. 7:3**). The men of Ai turned the battle into a rout, chasing the Israelites back to where they came from, striking down thirty-six men in the process, almost completely demoralizing Joshua and Israel.

Joshua could not understand why God would bring them over the Jordan only to be destroyed by the Amorites. He poured out his heart to the Lord about the matter. Then the Lord revealed the reason for this defeat. Achan had taken spoils from Jericho, which were forbidden of the Lord, and had hidden them among his stuff. This sin had to be corrected before God would permit Israel to continue her conquest of the promised land. Achan, his family, and his livestock were stoned and burned along with the rest of his goods. What a price to pay for one sin.

After the matter was corrected, Israel, with the guidance and help of God, defeated Ai. (**Read Joshua 7 and 8.**)

Achan's case illustrates the power of sin. His sin caused a whole nation to suffer. "But, that was back then," says some-

one, "what about now?" The Hebrew writer compares sin back then and now: "For if the word spoken through angels (during the Old Testament era, see 1:1-eob) proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (**Heb. 2:2-3, read also Heb. 10:28,29**).

The case of Achan refutes three popular myths about sin.

Myth: One sin won't hurt.

How often have you heard it said that it won't hurt to do it just this one time - "it," meaning whatever sin is under consideration at the time? Achan's one sin hurt him greatly, along with his family, his nation and the cause of his God.

One sin does hurt. "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). Eve's one sin brought death to the whole world. Moses' one sin caused him to miss Canaan (Num. 20:7-13). Nadab and Abihu's one sin cost them their lives (**Lev. 10**), as did Uzzah's (**2 Sam. 6:1-8**) and Ananias and Sapphira's (**Acts 5**). The rich young ruler only lacked one thing to inherit eternal life (**Lk 18:22-23**), but lacking that one thing caused him to go away sorrowful. Simon the Sorcerer was said to be "poisoned by bitterness and bound by

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Larry Rouse
Evangelist & Editor

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iniquity" after committing one sin (**Acts 8:23**).

One who thinks that one sin will not hurt needs to be aware that one sin may very well be a launching pad for many other sins.

Joseph's brethren became envious of him. This fostered a hatred to the point they could not even speak peaceably to him. This was followed by conspiracy and bodily harm. They sold him into slavery; and, to cover up their crime, they lied to their father (**Gen. 37**).

David, a man after God's own heart, looked on a woman to lust after her. This led to fornication. Then, in a futile effort to cover his sin, he resorted to treachery and finally had the woman's husband killed (**2 Sam. 11**). Did his one sin hurt? He wrote, "My sin is always before me" (**Psa. 51:3**).

Apostasy from the Lord is taken one step at a time. Paul urges Timothy to preach so as to prevent apostasy, then explains why the urgency by showing how apostasy progresses. First, "they will not endure sound doctrine." Such people begin their downward slide into apostasy by becoming annoyed at sound preaching - preaching that truly reproves, rebukes and exhorts. Secondly, "they will heap up for themselves teachers" to scratch their itching ears. They will seek and find teachers to teach it their way - more pleasing to the ear and less negative toward sin. Thirdly, they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. Going, going, gone! They have completed the plunge into apostasy. But, where did it start? When they took the first step of not enduring sound doctrine.

Each sin that one does weakens his resistance to the next one until he finally develops a seared conscience.

Myth: One's sin is nobody's business but his.

Achan's sin affected the entire nation. It hindered their progress in capturing Canaan. His sin caused all the children of Israel to be rebuked: "But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things" (**Josh. 7:1**); "Israel has sinned, and they have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them" (**Josh. 7:11**). This sin caused the whole nation to suffer defeat: "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies" (**Josh. 7:12**). Achan's household was gravely affected by his sin (**Josh. 7:24**).

The fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5 affected the whole church. Paul asked, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" While it may be true that some sins, because of their personal nature, only hurt the individual and his relationship to God, all too

often an individual sin has a way of hindering the gospel of Christ and hurting other members of one's family and/or congregation.

Myth: One can keep sin hidden.

Achan probably thought that he had done a pretty good job of hiding his ill gotten gain. It was hidden in the earth in the midst of his tent - in the privacy and safety of his own home. God knew it all along and ultimately all Israel found out about it. Every diligent Bible reader today also knows about it.

Moses warned the children of Israel: "be sure your sin will find you out" (**Num. 32:23**). One can never sin and rightly feel secure in the belief that no one will ever know. There are too many ways for even secret sins to become known for one to depend on the protection of secrecy. We once heard the story of two preachers, traveling far away from home, stopping at a tavern and deciding to have a little drink. After all, they were so far away from anyone who knew them that their secret sin would never be known. Since no one knew them or that they were preachers no harm would be done. As they were about to leave they got into a mild argument about who would pay the bill. While they were discussing the matter, the bartender leans over and says, "That's all right fellows, we don't charge preachers in here." No, my friend, do not count on your sins remaining hidden.

Sin is never hidden from God: "And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (**Heb. 4:13**).

More often than we may realize our sin is not hidden from others. When Moses killed the Egyptian, "He looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." Still the thing was known (v. 14). We may be more transparent than we think. We may be seen when we are not aware of it. But, if no one on earth ever knows - God knows and will judge us according to the works done in the body, whether good or bad (**2 Cor. 5:10**).

One sin, not repented of, can make a big difference. Let us not have any illusions about it. Just one sin does hurt. Just one sin may very well hurt someone else. Just one sin may very well be found out by others. It is already known by the Lord, for sure. Let us be careful. Strive to avoid even one sin. When we do sin, we need to correct it immediately, to minimize the damage it can do to ourselves and others.

Achan, his family, and all Israel suffered from a sin that Achan thought he had carefully concealed. We should not go and do likewise.



A New Creature

By Stacey E. Durham

We were made in the image of God (**Gen. 1:27**), but that image was marred by sin. Now in Christ, we can be renewed to that image and begin again. Take the opportunity, be thankful, and praise God that you can be a new creature in Christ.

Anyone who has small children or has been around them very much knows that they are born with their own personalities and peculiar tendencies. In some ways, the personality that a child has at birth will not change significantly throughout his life. The sooner parents recognize this about their child, the better they will be able to train him in a way that is most suitable to his particular tendencies.

Even though children are born with some inherent characteristics, let us understand that children certainly are not born with the corruption and guilt that comes by sin. This is the false assertion of the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity and the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin. According to the doctrine of total depravity, man is by nature completely corrupt and incapable of any good whatsoever because of the sin of Adam and Eve. According to the doctrine of original sin, every soul inherits the guilt of Adam and Eve. The Bible does not teach these doctrines, but instead it teaches that each soul is accountable for his own actions alone and not those of others (**Jer. 31:29-30; Ezek. 18:2-4; Rom. 9:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10**).

In truth, corruption, evil, and sin are learned by mankind from the world. Notice **1 John 2:16** - "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." God does not send souls into the world preinstalled with these wicked tendencies, but these are the things of the world that corrupt the pure souls that God creates. Man is not sinful by nature, but he learns sin as a "second nature."

Thankfully, God gives us an opportunity to strip away the corruption that we have learned from the world and start anew. Notice **2 Peter 1:4** - "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." In this verse, the phrase "by these" refers to the things mentioned in the previous verse - "God's divine power," "everything pertaining to

life and godliness," and "the knowledge of Him who called us." By these things, we can undo the damage that has been done to us through the things of the world.

Because of this new start, the Bible often describes a Christian as a "new creature." For example, Paul wrote, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (**2 Cor. 5:17**). Similar messages are given in **Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:20-24, and Colossians 3:10**. Although a Christian is still the same person

as he was before He knew Christ, God has remade him with a new quality about him. His physical form is unchanged, but everything about his spirit is new. He has become a partaker of that "divine nature" (**2 Pet. 1:4**). In Christ, he "in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (**Eph. 4:24**). Rather than having a sinful "second nature" that he learned from the world, he learns a godly nature. The corruption from the world is taken away, and spiritually he is once again as he was when he was born - a new creature.

As a new creature, a Christian needs instruction and discipline. Like a child, he has much to learn. He will make mistakes that will require correction. Thankfully, God the Father provides the instruction and discipline that "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (**Heb. 12:4-11**). The love of the Father will cultivate within him the divine nature of which he is now a partaker.

Therefore, let us embrace this opportunity to start over. Our lives that have been ruined by sin can be saved and given a second chance to fulfill their purpose. We were made in the image of God (**Gen. 1:27**), but that image was marred by sin. Now in Christ, we can be renewed to that image and begin again. Take the opportunity, be thankful, and praise God that you can be a new creature in Christ.

