



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Volume 6 Issue 40

October 21, 2007

## The Attributes of Sin, Part 6

### Achan

The book of Joshua tells the story of Israel's defeat of Jericho and how Rahab the harlot and all her house were spared. And how subsequent to the defeat of Jericho Israel went against the small city of Ai where, because of the sin of Achan Israel was utterly defeated and how, afterwards Joshua bitterly complained against the Lord. It was because of Joshua's prayer that the Lord revealed to Israel Achan's sin.

Achan confessed his sin of keeping back items from Jericho which were devoted to the Lord and Israel stoned him. Yet most of you don't know the complete story unless you continued to read Joshua's account. It did not begin with Achan's sin of robbery. No, this was NOT where Achan went wrong! Rather Achan fell into sin when he allowed himself to lust after that which was God's. Achan confessed this:

Joshua 7:21, "**When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.**"

Achan's downfall came when he allowed himself to lust after that which wasn't his!

Now, why was this text recorded in the Old Testament?

Was it recorded to give us

- Choice bits of gossip about the household of Achan?
- Neat stories to tell around the campfire?
- Something to pity?

Just why was the account recorded? Asaph gives us some insight:

Psalm 78:5, “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.”

Paul gives us this insight:

Romans 15:4, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

The message of Joshua 7 was recorded so that you and I many not follow in Achan’s footsteps. It was written so that we may take heed and therefore do all that God commands us to do in every area of our lives. Thus, it was written so that

- We would stand firm in the grace of the Lord Jesus.
- We would continue to grow in our maturation as individuals and as a church body.
- We would be found faithful when Christ returns.

In order for God’s word to build our faith we MUST pay close attention to the many exhortations found in the narratives of the Old Testament.

1 Corinthians 10:11, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

Now of the many passages from which we could benefit, I don't believe there is a more serious nor pertinent call than that which is given to us in our text. We know that the passage before us contains a leap forward in redemptive history as the first king of Israel is presented to the people of God. And yet we also know that our text contains the sinful actions of Israel in rejecting God in favor of the rule of a man.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly we learn here not only God’s choice for the first king of Israel, but the elements and so “The Attributes” of the people’s sin.

Thus far we have seen these attributes of sin from 1 Samuel 10 that sin

- Knew No Shame, verse. 17.
- Was a Rejection of God, verses 18-19a
- Was Disappointing, verses. 19b-22.
- Looked so Good, verses. 23-24.
- Was not without Warning, verse 25a.
- Was Sanctified by God, verse 25a.

## **Sin Leads to Further Sin**

Now let us consider the seventh and final attribute of sin herein presented that it always leads to further sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 12:19 says as much

1 Samuel 10:25-26, “Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.”

At this point the presentation of Israel’s first king is over. From our perspective, Saul as the first king of Israel is worse than we could have expected (again consider the atrocities he would commit in the name of God). Yet from the people’s perspective, he is better than could have been imagined (good looking, tall, handsome, and... NOBLE!) Accordingly Samuel ended the ceremony and sent “each one to his house.”

Now quite naturally because there was not a capital city at this time, Saul went to his house at Gibeah where “valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him (NASB).”

This term rendered variously, band of men or *valiant men*, is also translated *brave men*, *strong men*, or *men of character, substance, and power*. The phrase designates an elite warrior similar to those in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and thus has reference to *men of renown*. It is interesting to note that almost every king of Israel had his core of *mighty men*, those most brave and yet most trusted.<sup>2</sup> This group of men was Saul’s elite army.

And so following the presentation of Saul, some of the most capable warriors of Israel attached themselves to the new king and so became the core of his mighty men. And yet not everyone supported the new king.

## Worthless Men

1 Samuel 10:27, “But the children of Belial<sup>3</sup> said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.”

The use of the term *children of Belial* reminds us of the phrase used before in connection with Eli’s children.<sup>4</sup> There we saw that of the twenty-seven times *Belial* is used in the Bible, it always is used in a negative way. The Septuagint translates it as lawless or witless. The term later would be used of Satan himself<sup>5</sup> As a term of derision, it is used in these passages:

Proverbs 6:12, “A naughty<sup>6</sup> person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.”

Here the writer uses the term in parallel with a wicked man. This naughty person is a worthless man that is not content to rest easy. He must ever and always be working or scheming so that controversy might arise. In fact, *belial* is used in parallel with a perverse man and a man of violence in this passage:

Proverbs 16:27-29, “An ungodly man<sup>7</sup> diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire. A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends. A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. ”

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<sup>2</sup> Compare also 2 Samuel 17:8; 23:8; 2 Kings 24:14; 1 Chronicles 29:24; Song of Solomon 3:7; and Jeremiah 26:21

<sup>3</sup> בליעל b@liya'al

<sup>4</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 2:12

<sup>5</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 6:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3

<sup>6</sup> בליעל b@liya'al

<sup>7</sup> בליעל b@liya'al

The picture here is of a muckraker who brings about turmoil for sport. He is not content unless others are miserable. According to Nahum the son of Belial is also a counselor of villainy.

Nahum 1:11, “There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked<sup>8</sup> counsellor.”

Here the picture is of a person who encourages rebellious thoughts against God. A son of Belial is therefore pictured as one who encourages anger, bitterness, and rebellion against the Lord. Accordingly we are not surprised to read that a worthless man is one who mocks justice.

Proverbs 19:28, “An ungodly<sup>9</sup> witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.”

The worthless man always finds a way to criticize what is right and just. It is not enough that he is opposed to God. He must live in a world that does the same.

And this is the nuance of *Belial*: worthlessness. That this expression is used of the men in our text indicates that they were not passively or quietly opposed to Saul; rather, their opposition was public, open, and shocking. In fact, notice how the text describes their action.

1 Samuel 10:27, “But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And **they despised him, and brought him no presents.** But he held his peace.”

This word *despised* is used in opposition to the words used in the Bible for *weight, honor, or glory*. Thus to despise is to accord it little weight. It always carries with it feelings of contempt.<sup>10</sup> In fact so detrimental was this attitude amongst God’s people that the person guilty of such irreverence was to be cut off from the body, i.e., excommunicated.<sup>11</sup>

When Saul was installed as king, the emotions of contempt and the bad attitudes gushed forth. Though the nation as a whole accepted him and the men of valor followed him, nevertheless there were some who were so disappointed that they looked upon him lightly and didn’t bring him any present.

Now, bringing a present was the customary thing to do in the ancient Near East in acknowledging the authority and honor of a king.<sup>12</sup> In fact, not to bring a gift when entering the presence of a king was tantamount to rebellion.<sup>13</sup>

Now from the outside looking in, wouldn’t we all have been on the side of this minority?

In fact, many of you have approached me and said the same thing, that you really thought these men were in the right. Think about it! At the time of Saul’s presentation as the first king of Israel, the king he was not out fighting battles or protecting the right of the weak or the infirmed rather he was hiding beneath the pile of coats which Israel had cast off when they arrived at Mizpah.

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<sup>8</sup> בליעל b@liya

<sup>9</sup> בליעל b@liya‘al

<sup>10</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 12:10, 19

<sup>11</sup> Compare Numbers 15:31

<sup>12</sup> Compare 1 Kings 10:25; 2 Chronicles 17:5 and Psalm 96:8

<sup>13</sup> Keil and Delitzsche, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 2, 1 & II Samuel*, page 109.

Again, this served as a very important attribute of sin which we ALL must see, it is always disappointing. When we considered this rather anti-climactic element, we rightly viewed Saul with disdain as we mused, “It was for this that God’s people rejected their covenant Lord?!”

Such always is the verdict when the Christian reflects back upon their sin when once they are restored! And so at the outset, I think we all side with this minority, we are all thinking “How can this one deliver Israel? How could Israel be so blind?”

So how is it that the word of God reflects so negatively upon these sober ones? In fact these were probably the only ones who did not get caught up in the moment by being wowed by Saul’s good looks.

Something very important happened while Samuel uttered the phrase recorded in verse 25. In between

“Then Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the Lord...” (verse 25a) **\*\*AND\*\*** “...And Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his house.” (verse 25b.)

Something very significant happened! Saul became God’s official choice for Israel’s first king. Prior to the “ordinances of the king” being placed in the presence of the Lord, Saul was

- A fool!
- An irreverent man!
- Spiritually ignorant of the things of the Lord!
- A man too much resembling the kings like the nations surrounding Israel.

BUT the moment the covenant contract was placed before the Lord, the moment Saul’s installation was ratified, Saul became God’s man and so God’s choice to lead Israel!

God did not choose Saul haphazardly or rashly. Approximately 400 years prior to this moment, God promised that there would come a day when HE would provide a king for His people, Israel.<sup>14</sup> And in 1 Samuel 10:1 God anointed this promised King, and here in 1 Samuel 10:24 Saul is publicly declared to be God’s choice. Truly, Saul’s selection as the first king of Israel was God’s choice from the very beginning.

This is why the valiant men whose heart God had touched accepted Saul as King. In fact, at this point we are reminded of David’s words in 1 Samuel 24. Though, David himself already had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel<sup>15</sup> Saul was chasing David throughout Israel seeking his death.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless when the Lord had given Saul into David’s hands, this is what the future king says:

1 Samuel 24:6-7, “And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.”

So it was in the case of Saul. The moment the “ordinances of the kingdom” were placed before the Lord

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<sup>14</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 17

<sup>15</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 16:13

<sup>16</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 24-26

this little tidbit of information changed the publicly expressed sentiment of the “worthless men” of verses 26-27 from being an accurate and understandable assessment with regard to Saul to being high treason against the Lord, punishable by death! This is also why these men are described as “sons of Belial” in our passage. Rather than accepting Saul as from the hand of the Lord as they should have done, they too fell into sin and so rejected that which God ordained.

The seventh attribute when it comes to sin is that it never exists in a vacuum and it always leads to further sin!

Let me ask you these questions:

- Were the men who publicly rejected Saul in this text guilty of sin? There is no question!
- Did these men have an understandable reason for their rejection of Saul? Indeed!
- And would these “sons of Belial” have acted this way had the nation not rebelled against God by choosing for themselves “a king like the nations”? No!
- So what was the soil from which their wickedness sprouted? The nations’ sin of first rejecting God!

Christian, do you see it?

Never is there simply an irreverent action; it always is accompanied by a host of ancillary activities and thoughts which poison the entire lump of dough! Sin’s name is legion and it is most akin to the leaven of yeast!

For example, look at the first few chapters of Genesis and view how sin spreads. In Genesis 3 we read of the first sin which entered into our world, the rebellion of Adam and Eve. The following chapters read like a list of “whose who” when it comes to sin.

- In Genesis 4:8 we read of the first murder!
- In Genesis 4:19 we read of polygamy.
- In Genesis 6:5 men’s hearts have become so evil that God destroys mankind and starts over with Noah and his family.
- In Genesis 9:21 we read of the sin of drunkenness.
- In Genesis 11 you have the mass idolatry of Babel.
- In Genesis 14 you have the evils of war.
- In Genesis 19 you have the first record of homosexuality.

#### SIN ALWAYS LEADS TO FURTHER SIN!

Consider the examples closer to our text. Consider how the wildfire of David’s sin spread throughout his home, life, and kingdom. David’s lusting in 2 Samuel 11:2 resulted in the further sins

- Adultery (2 Samuel 11:4) which resulted in...
- Deceit (2 Samuel 11:6-13) which resulted in...
- The intent to murder (2 Samuel 11:14) which resulted in...
- Murder (2 Sam. 11:15-17)! And yet it didn’t remain contained simply to David. No! His sin spread throughout the kingdom such that
- David’s general, Joab, was able to get away with murder (cf. 2 Samuel 11:18-21, 24-25).
- The ungodly within and surrounding Israel had occasion to blaspheme God (2 Samuel 12:14).

- David's family became fraught with conflict and death (2 Samuel 12:10).
- Israel transitioned from being a world power to struggling simply to keep itself from imploding as civil war threatened to tear the nation apart (2 Samuel 15-18).

All this happened because David allowed a sinful thought to fester in his mind!

And thus in our passage, when we read of the people of God rejecting the Lord and opting for an earthly king, we are not surprised to discover that this sinful action<sup>17</sup> didn't occur in a vacuum. Rather, it tainted the thinking of many in Israel such that when Saul became God's choice. Many did not submit to him as their king. Rather they publicly grumbled against the Lord's anointed and so became "sons of Belial."

Oh brothers and sisters, may God give us the grace to understand that sin never comes alone; it is always accompanied by numerous thoughts, inclinations, and actions which dishonor the Lord and plunge the sinner into ruin. Listen to God's description of the slippery slope of sin.

James 1:14-15, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Whatever else that can be said about this passage, notice at least this: Sin is never alone; it always brings with it a process of declination whereby the sinner goes from one degree of rebellion to the next.

Now as you learn about this today, what ought to be your view of sin?

I hope you see that it is a fire that must be avoided at all costs! Even the smallest of sins cannot be endured. Think of it. If I came to your home this afternoon, lit a little, insignificant match, and held it inches away from a drape, what would you say?

Then why do you allow so many "little, insignificant" sins to burn in your life?

Oh Christian, let us avoid sin at all costs! At the smallest temptation, let us flee! With the most insignificant thought, let us rebuke ourselves! May we "watch over our heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23)! May we ever and always remain "as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16)!

Yet how do we do this?

In closing I want to give a three-fold suggestion as we wrap up this series. As children of Christ, it begins by recognizing that we are not our own, but that we have been bought with a price. I love how Paul put it:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Truly we must ever and always be a people who trust Christ and so rely upon His sacrifice as our only hope and plea. Yet we must never forget that we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). As He has purchased us with the blood of Christ, it is His plan to use us.

And what vessel does God use?

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<sup>17</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 12:19

Only those vessels which He is purifying and so cleansing by His grace. After all, what is a “saint?” A saint is one of the primary words used to describe the Christian in the New Testament as someone who not only has been made holy by God, but also has been set apart unto a holy end and purpose. And so knowing the nature of our salvation, let us take up our cross and follow the Lord (Luke 9:23-24).

Secondly we must maintain our hope and so ever and always trust in Christ. Recall the words of Paul when he came face to face with the realization of the depth of his depravity.

Romans 7:24-25, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”

From this we conclude that where grace is operative, there is always hope! Thus as God warned Cain, “Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7). So we see that in trusting in Christ I need not despair. Victory is possible.

Third and finally, we must “get over” our sinful past and, with boldness and anticipation when it comes to the future, serve God! Again, sin breeds sin.

What good is it if I sin, confess it, hope in Christ, know His forgiveness but then I dwell upon the fact that I sinned? What good does it do to allow this sin to hold me back in my service for God? Why should this sin cause me to shrink back because of my guilt?

If we allow sin to conquer us we will become lame because of our past. We must recognize that all these responses to our past sin can become a breeding ground for more sin. We must recognize, as we saw last time, that God in His majesty and grace is able to use our sin unto His glory and our good. In the words of Joseph, we can say looking at our past, “God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

Or as Paul put it:

Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

And thus to look down upon that which God has sanctified for His purpose and our good is to be guilty of the same sin as the men in our text who despise Saul publicly and so became a “son of Belial” on account of our refusal to accept Saul as from the Lord.

You say, “What?! I’m supposed to delight in my sinful past?”

NO! You must accept it as ordained by God and so get beyond it in your service of Christ! In first Corinthians 15 we read a passage that Paul penned some twenty-five years after he was saved. Paul had time to reflect upon Christ, His kingdom, where he fit into it, and what he should do about his past. Notice that Paul wrote about his past sin.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the



grace of God which was with me.”

From this verse we see four things that Paul did with his sinful past.

1. **He was humbled by it.** “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9 NASB). It was hard for Paul to get puffed up in life for he let the world know what kind of a sinner he was. Accordingly, Paul never met a person upon whom he looked down. There was not an air of superiority in him. He had persecuted many Christians families whom he left without father, mother, and child. And so was Paul something to behold? NO! For his track record testified what he in his strength produced. Wisely, Paul never let this go. He always lived in the shadow of humility cast by his past wretchedness. And yet it didn’t end there, for when it came to his past Paul also
2. **Accepted it as from God,** “But by the grace of God I am what I Am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). This is great! Paul didn’t sit around grieving what could have been had he not been so evil. Rather, he understood that all that he was according to the will of God. And so rather than wasting time lamenting.
3. **Paul trusted Christ, and so got off his rear and served the Lord!** In the words of Boettner, when a man comes to an understanding of the sovereignty of God “he is girded with invincible strength. In a nobler sense than Napoleon ever dreamed, he knows himself to be a `man of destiny.’”<sup>18</sup> Such is the confidence that is our when it comes even to our past sin! It is as God ordained. Now get out of the way that I might serve Him! And that brings us to Paul’s third response to his past
4. **He used it as a prompting to love and good deeds in the kingdom of God.** “And His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul thought that if God could forgive me for so vile and wretched a sin, how can I not give myself to His glory and cause. If Christ lived 33 years for me, ought I not to live the rest of my life for Him. Indeed! Such ought to be our thinking as we reflect upon Christ. And yet we must do so NOT under the delusion that we could pay Christ back or thereby earn God’s good opinion of us ONLY by the “grace of God with me”- i.e., knowing that regardless of the past or present, it is well with my soul. And therefore out of love, we serve.

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, page 331

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on October 21, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church