

Corporate Sin

Following Others in Iniquity

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The word of the day is: *corporate*. We are quite familiar with this term in its business sense. We all know about corporate things and corporate situations. We hear it on the news, in advertising, and in our every day conversations about a company, or a product that it makes and sells. We all know this; to have corporations seems to be intrinsic in the American way of life.

The definition of corporation, in a business sense, is: of or pertaining to a corporation. That was a hard one, was it not? A corporation is defined as: a group of individuals created by law or under authority of law [it is a legal entity] having a continuous existence independent of the existences of its members and powers and liabilities distinct from those of its members. That was pretty difficult to grasp. It is one of those definitions that you have to say, "Huh?" and read again and again. But, normally, what it is saying is: A corporation is a group of individuals who are set up as a legal entity to be separate from their own, individual lives.

We usually recognize a corporation because it has a board of directors and it has a set of officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer) set up so that they can run this business. We know of huge corporations like AT&T, IBM, Microsoft, Kraft, Boeing, General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler; you name it, there are all kinds of corporations all over the country and around the world. Generally, they are associations of people who come together to make a profit by producing a product or a service that the people or the government will buy. Though, not all of them are for profit.

Church of the Great God (CGG) is setup as a non-profit corporation. There are thousands of other non-profit corporations around the country that are legal charities, religious organizations, or other bodies where they do not make a profit. They run on donations but they have set themselves up as a legal entity to protect themselves in case of a problem, fraud, or whatever. Like the definition poorly articulated, setting up as a corporation separates the individual participants' liabilities from the corporation's. Being separate from the corporation allows the individuals to keep from losing their shirts.

Corporate, which I said is the word of the day, is the adjective, the descriptive form of corporation, the noun. We have phrases that we hear all the time in the news like: corporate earnings, corporate greed, corporate liability, corporate communications,

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corporate advertising, corporate responsibility, corporate finances, and the like. There are a lot of things that the word corporate can be added to in this business sense.

Obviously, corporate describes an action or a certain feature of a corporation, this body of people who have banded together as a business. The etymology of corporation is interesting. It descends from the Latin “corporatus”, the past participle of “corporar” and it means: to make into a body. This is very clear; it came from Latin into English basically unchanged.

These terms that I just mentioned from the Latin, were formed from “corpus”. Corpus is the word “body. You know Corpus Christi, Texas? That translates to: the body of Christ. Of course, from this word “corpus”, we also get the word “corpse” which is a dead body, and “corps” as in Marine Corps.

At its base, corporate implies the actions of a body or a body in itself. The sense that we are interested in today is not the business sense; we are interested in something else. The definition that we are looking for is unified into one body or even a collective; a gathering together of people into a single group. The definition that I like most is: done by or characteristic of individuals acting together.

When we speak of people doing something corporately we do not necessarily imply them doing it in a business sense. People can do things corporately and have no kind of business idea in mind. They simply act as a group. They are united in their actions; they surge forward in their body. There is corporate movement there. All of these people did something in harmony; they did it as one.

Before, we heard the term “corporate greed”. Corporate greed does not necessarily mean that a corporation was greedy, it could mean that all of the investors on Wall Street, regardless of their corporate affiliation, whether they are sole proprietors, or they are independent, are all greedy. We saw that in the movie Wall Street, “greed is good” Gordon Gekko was trying to get everyone to jump on the greed bandwagon. He was, in a sense, gathering together a body of greedy people. The thing that held them together was their corporate greed. They were not banded together legally; they were just a body that had come together under the teachings of Gordon Gekko.

In the same way, corporate greed could also describe the crew of a pirate ship. They just found a treasure, they are looking down at the gold and jewels spilling out of this treasure chest; you can see the greed in their eyes. This is corporate greed but in this sense, the corporation, if you will, is the crew of a ship. In this sense, it does not have to be a corporation.

Corporate action can be a good thing; it does not have to be a bad thing like greed. It could be the spouses of astronauts expressing corporate relief that the space shuttle landed safely. I believe there was a scene from the movie, "The Right Stuff" where all the wives were in one house when some men went up to orbit the earth and the ladies were all tense and relieved when the men finally came back. You can see there that it is not a bad thing. This corporate action, the action of all these ladies waiting for their husbands to come home, was a good thing. It was relief that there had been no accident.

You can also look at it in terms of corporate jubilation. We see that every year at the end of the World Series especially if the home team wins. The whole stadium jumps up on their feet yelling and shouting because their team brought home the championship. There are all kinds of individuals from a variety of backgrounds but they came together in one body to watch this sporting event and they were rewarded when their team won. That is corporate jubilation. What we would normally say is, "The crowd went wild!" But, what we are describing there is corporate jubilation. Those people acted in harmony.

However, we Americans tend to be anti-corporate. We tend to be individualists, not corporatists. As a result, we tend to emphasize personal differences rather than commonalities. There is nothing wrong with unique traits and abilities; we all have them. God says that He has given us gifts, skills, and blessings and they make us different from one another. They are fine if we use them properly. The glorification of individuality, which we have here in America, often obscures group similarities because we are so focused on each individual that we do not see the forest for the trees. We do not see the major thing; we only see each individual so we miss things.

For instance, we all have various skills by which we make a living. Some of us are good at carpentry, some are better at welding, some people are good at selling things and other people tend to be very technically minded. They can engineer or design something and these are wonderful traits to have but if we just look at those individual traits we lose the fact that Americans, as a whole, tend to have a knack for making money, for making things that people want, for putting things on the market that people desire and will use.

This knack for making money probably goes all the way back to Joseph; who made a whole gob of money for Pharaoh. We can do the same thing! Look how big our economy is even though we are struggling right now. China, the second largest country in terms of gross domestic product is really a little bit more than one third of our gross domestic product.

We have a knack as a whole, as a corporate body, as a nation for making money. Our individualism, our concentration on what we do best, or what other people do best rather than seeing these bigger patterns, makes us think in certain patterns. We think more individualistically than we do collectively. That is probably why we fought so hard against the USSR; because we are individualists for freedom rather than collectivists who put themselves under certain collective or corporate restrictions.

As Americans, as individualists, we tend to consider and analyze people and events not in terms of larger movements, but as individual actors, individual happenings. We can see what happened in Japan and say there was an earthquake of 9.0 on the northeast side of Japan that caused a very large tsunami. The tsunami caused all kinds of problems on the Japanese mainland and there was a problem with four nuclear reactors at one place. This happened, but Japan will recover.

Just a few minutes ago in the commentary we heard that there are increasing numbers of these very large earthquakes happening around the world. Two of the largest earthquakes that have ever been recorded happened within the last two years in Chile and Indonesia. By looking at an individual happening, we lose the bigger picture of the trend and we have to have someone point it out to us; someone who looks at these things in larger groupings rather than our own singular patterns of looking at things in our own, individual ways.

Think of your neighborhood. You might live in a subdivision where every lot has been bought and the neighborhood is full. You notice neighbor B puts up a sign in his yard and within a few weeks or a month, he is gone. You also notice that neighbor F has done the same thing and a short while later he is gone. Then, you notice the neighbor H a street over is also gone and neighbor X, a little further down in the subdivision, is has moved too. We see these signs popping up all through the subdivision. We may just think of neighbors B, F, H, and X as individuals but if we were to step back and look at it as an urban planner might look at it, he would say, "No. What's happening in this neighborhood is that there's an overall movement out of the city or out of the suburbs or even out of this particular area because of some external influences making this area less desirable."

If we look at it just as individual neighbors, we do not see that trend but if we look at them all together and start thinking about how things work, then we see that, yes, these people have acted as a body. They have joined this movement out of this particular neighborhood or town and they have gone someplace else. We tend not to look that way; we tend to see only one person at a time.

By having this American mindset of individualism, we sometimes miss the larger trends and developments that could be important to us. They could really affect our quality of life; like in this example of people moving out, and in a bigger way with the earthquake trend. Of course, we should never forget that failing to see some of these trends has an even greater impact when it gets spiritual. We may see individual A going down the tubes and we may say, "How can he do that?" But we may miss that there are a lot of people following in a certain trend where they are following a crowd. That is more reflective of what I am going to be speaking about in this sermon.

In this sermon and the next, we are going to be looking at corporate actions. Today's is going to be negative but the positive side will be delivered on the next holy day. These corporate actions are important to us as Christians struggling against the three S's: sin, society, and Satan. In this sermon, we are going to focus on corporate sin. I hope, by looking at it from this perspective, we can see our own sins with greater clarity against the background of the world of sinners around us. I hope that we are not just seeing our own, individual sins, but that we are looking at our sins in terms of how they fit in with everyone else's sins.

Before we go into that, I want to touch base with the day. This is the first day of Unleavened Bread; it is the reason we are all here on a Tuesday rather than on a seventh day Sabbath. As most of us know, the Days of Unleavened Bread deal with the Israelites exodus from Egypt. It is a type of God redeeming us from our sin and leading us out of this world toward the Kingdom of God. Or, in their sense, He led them out of Egypt and He took them across the wilderness toward the Promised Land.

This is a very close parallel and God uses it in His Word to show how a Christian is taken from Satan's grasp, redeemed from the bondage that he is in due to sin and Satan's influence, and is sent on a path toward God's Kingdom. The things that we go through as we move along that path help us, test us, prove our mettle, and build us up so that we will be prepared to cross over Jordan and become sons and daughters in the fullest sense in His Kingdom. We have this analogy to provide us with instruction as we go through our lives.

Just as it was no simple matter for God to tear the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and lead them into the wilderness, it is in the same way no easy matter for Him to take us away from our simple habits and to instill godly character in us through the various experiences of our lives. Not only that, it is not that we have only a few sins to overcome, we have a whole boatload of sins that have accumulated over a lifetime of living contrary to God.

Though God has been gracious to grant us repentance and to forgive us of our past sins, we still have a lot to overcome because those habits, the sins keep coming back because of human nature. Frankly, we are not immune to new sin because of the influence of this world, and the influence of Satan. We spend our entire lives fighting against the pulls back into the world, back into sin, and back into bondage with Satan. Fortunately for us, God gives us the strength to do that, to resist, to overcome, to grow, and to produce fruit; but, without His help we would not succeed in the least.

Please start with me in I Corinthians 5. This is one of the clearest New Testament examples of the church of God keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread and Paul gives us not only this clear example but also instruction. He had just been speaking about the great sin that had happened in the Corinthian church where he said in verse 1 that a man has his father's wife and also the congregations' reaction to it. They were glorying in this sin rather than putting the man out because he was causing a great deal of harm to the church.

I Corinthians 5:6-8 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The apostle Paul, very succinctly, shows us how this holy day and the teaching encapsulated within it applies to those under the New Covenant. Now that Christ's sacrifice has been applied to us, it is our spiritual obligation to purge or clean out the old leaven. By that, he means all those old practices and habits of mind and body that always threaten to lead us back into sin. Two descriptors he uses to describe these things are: malice and wickedness. Notice the differences between the two words.

Malice stands for the evils of the mind and attitude. Malice is something you have between the ears. It is a negative character trait of hatred. On the other hand, wickedness is a little bit more all encompassing. Obviously, wickedness is evil. Wickedness is sin. Wickedness is doing bad things. It represents the simple things that we say and do.

By using these two words in tandem, he is saying that we have to purge out those sinful habits both inside in the mind, and those that come out in our words and our deeds. It is not good enough to only clean up our deeds and hide the malice between our ears from

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the world. That is hypocrisy; which is itself a sin. We have to conquer both; inside and outside. Not only do we have to conquer the sin, but we also have to replace these things with something good. He calls the things that we replace them with sincerity and truth.

We can say the same things about sincerity and truth that we say about malice and wickedness. He is talking about two different forms of the same thing. Sincerity tends to be those inner things. It is describing an inner purity; we might call it holiness. When we have totally cleaned ourselves up, we are clean on the inside. Truth represents godliness—our exterior actions, our outward manifestations of the holiness and righteousness that is inside.

We see here that the Days of Unleavened Bread are a yearly reminder not only of coming out of Egypt but also of this process of ridding ourselves of the evil that is in us, sin, and replacing it with good. We replace the evil by putting on what is righteous and coming before God holy and incorrupt.

When I look at this passage and I see verse 8, it really makes me wonder how professing Christians of this world miss the command right at the beginning of the verse. Paul is very clear, “Let us keep this Feast”. Yet, here he is 20 years or so after the death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection and he is telling these Gentile Corinthians, “We need to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread”. Every year, it is so necessary for the church of God to be grounded in this teaching once again. It sets us up; Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. That is the starting point. He has started the ball rolling by giving of Himself, taking us out of this world, redeeming us from sin and from the penalty that we have come under because of our sins, and now we can say that we are a new creation.

What do we do now that this has happened? What we do is found in the Days of Unleavened Bread and it is in these two ideas: The first is that we are out of Egypt and marching toward the Kingdom of God. The second idea is that while we are on the way, we get rid of sin, and we put on righteousness. We have both of these ideas. Yes, they marched out of Egypt but they left the leaven behind, and only took the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

It is not just here. I Corinthians 5 is not the only place that it is shown that the New Testament church kept these days. They are all through the book of Acts, from all of the ones that the New Testament recognizes or at least the ones that the New Testament mentions specifically, (I am talking about the first century, apostolic church) they were keeping *all* of the holy days in Leviticus 23.

The book of Acts itself recognizes the Sabbath, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Atonement just within its 28 chapters. There are very many clear references in the gospels of Jesus Himself keeping these times. You can add the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day to that as well. From one end to the other, Jesus, the apostles, and the first century church were keeping these days.

Let us go back to Exodus 12. I want to see the original instruction on the Days of Unleavened Bread. This is the section from which Paul takes his teaching about purging leaven, sin, from our lives. It comes directly from this command of God.

Exodus 12:15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

Is that not interesting? Put that into the larger sense of the New Testament understanding of this. If we are imbibing sin as a habit within our trek toward the Kingdom of God, we are not going to make it.

Exodus 12:16-17 On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. [We are given the ability to prepare a meal.] So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

It is very clear from the first command of God that we are to keep this holy day, or this set of holy days, in particular, forever. It is an everlasting ordinance. It lasts as long as the children of Israel last. As we know, the church of God in Galatians 6:16 is the Israel of God. The church of God is in existence. We need to be keeping this Feast.

It has eternal significance, helping us to remember not only God's works to redeem us and free us, but also to remind us of the part we play in the process. Yes, He redeemed us. Yes, He brought us out of Egypt but we also have to come out. We need to look not only at our personal, individualistic sins (here I am tying it back into my idea of corporate-ness) but also our corporate sins; the sins we commit by going along with a larger group.

Let us go to I Peter 4. We will see Peter thinking similarly. I Peter 4 fits in very nicely with the theme of the Days of Unleavened Bread.

I Peter 4:1-4 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

Here is another New Testament exhortation to fill our obligation since Christ has suffered for us: to live lives of righteousness. We do this in response to the sacrifice of Christ and to the grace God has given us. Peter sets things up in terms of our daily walk; how we live our lives. He says we used to walk according to the will of the Gentiles. Before we were called, before we knew the truth, we heedlessly went along with the crowd. We fell in step with the ways of this world and we had no compunction about doing these things that he says in verse 3; the licentiousness, the lusts, the drunkenness, the revelries, the drinking parties, and all these abominable idolatries that he mentions. We just went along. It seemed to be okay; everyone else was doing it.

Now, God has made a change in us. He said, “I want *you*” and He said, “I’m going to make it possible for the blood of My Son to cover you, to bring you out of this world, to make you Mine”. Because the price was so high, it puts us under obligation to change. In response, we say, “Okay. No more licentiousness, no more lusts, no more drunkenness, no more revelries, no more drinking parties, no more abominable idolatries”.

So, we do not run with them, as he says here, doing all these things that we used to do and they think it is strange. They poke fun at us and they can even get to the point where they are persecuting us because we are not acting like we used to. Now, we are *not* conforming to the group. Now, we are going along another path; a path that they do not even really know exists, so caught up are they in their very simple extravagances.

God has redeemed us from the mindless devotion to the course of this world. He has set us on the path toward the Kingdom of God. To do this, to do it right, we have to set our will just as we used to set our will to follow the will of the Gentiles. Now we have to

make up our mind to not follow the crowd. We cannot just engage in the corporate sins of this world. Paul makes a similar statement to this in Ephesians 2. Here, he puts it a little bit differently and you will notice I use the phrase “course of this world” and that comes out in this particular passage.

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive. . .

Remember, I said He made us a new creation. It is the same idea of “born again” that Jesus talked about in John 3.

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive who were dead. . .

We were spiritually dead! Remember, Christ said let the dead bury their own dead. He was saying, “They’re dead to me. They can’t really understand. They don’t have the mind. They’re not spiritually quickened yet”. They do not have the lively mind that is empowered by the Spirit of God.

That is not the case with us. *You* He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins because that is what trespasses and sins do to us. They kill us. Remember in the second chapter of Genesis? God says if you take of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall surely *die*. The day that you take of the tree, you are as good as dead. That is what happened. When Adam and Eve sinned, ultimately, they were dead. God had to say, “Out of the garden with you! You can’t be around Me. You can’t have fellowship with Me because your sins have separated you from Me”.

They became spiritually dead and the whole world has followed in their footsteps in the same way. At some point, a choice was made to sin. It does not matter what the sin was. At some point, Satan put something before us where we had to make a choice: Will we do what God says? Or will we follow the easy road and do whatever we feel like we want to do?

Invariably, except for Jesus Christ, we chose to sin. This is the course of the world. This is the way the world walks. This is how they ran, as Peter put it. And we ran with them; along with the whole pack.

Ephesians 2:2 In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. . .

Now we see who influences this. Satan is the one behind it.

Ephesians 2:2 . . . the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. . .

He is still out there doing what he has always done to influence us to choose our own way or his way, he does not care, over God's way.

Ephesians 2:3 . . . among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

At one time in the past, maybe it was a longer time for some or a shorter time for others, this was the way we ran. We ran with everyone else; we were in corporate agreement with the whole body of men because all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We were happy to follow along in our ignorance. But, we have been freed from this blind, mindless conformity to Satan's nature and to the course of the world.

Now that we have set that up, let us see some examples of the forms of corporate sin. What I am going to do is take this from macro to micro. We are going to look at the biggest corporate bodies that we can fit into and we will narrow it down to the smallest ones. Hopefully, we can begin to see, in a small way, how we tend to conform to, and also perform, the sins that these bodies do. Therefore, once we understand how we fit into this, we can recognize it and repent.

The very first time I was thinking about this was Genesis 6:5. Of course, the biggest corporate group in the world *is* the whole world. This one comes early in the Bible and the message is very clear. The illustration hits you right in the gut; where it should. This is just before the Flood.

Genesis 6:5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Here we have the entire, pre-Flood world; all of mankind except for Noah. As we see in verse 8, it says that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He still was sinful but there was something about Noah that made God choose him to be the one to build the ark and save mankind through the Flood. All of mankind, before the Flood, was caught

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up not just in sin. Yes, everyone sins but there was something special about these sins. There was such widespread and malevolent wickedness that *every person's* impulse, not just initial impulse but *every* impulse was to do some kind of evil. They hardly ever had a good thought at all. They just wanted to do evil things.

Mankind was a body of intense iniquity and God says this has got to stop. The thing He had made very good at the beginning, had turned into only evil continually. He had to do something very drastic and that was to send the Flood. Every person born into that world became caught up in his neighbors' sins and the sins of the whole world. And he added a few of his own to the mix.

This becomes important to us because, in Matthew 24:37 Jesus said that the end is going to be like the days of Noah. We can see sin mounting up where people in this world do not think twice about things that just a few years ago we would have been ashamed about. I will not go into them, but you know what I am talking about. Paul says we should not even speak about such things.

We do not have a great deal of difficulty seeing corporate sin on this worldwide level because we have been taught for years that Satan has deceived the whole world. (Revelation 12:9) The whole world has been caught up in this sin and it has been since the very beginning, since the time of Adam and Eve. We tend to not just go along with the whole world. As a matter of fact, the sins of the world are easier to see because they are so blatant and maybe we can resist those a little bit easier but we tend to go along with other groups that we belong to; that we think of ourselves as members of. Maybe we say, "Well, I've come out of the world, but I still belong to this thing, this club, this group".

Let us start narrowing down to smaller bodies of people that we follow; that we tend to follow without even thinking because we are a part of this group. Let us go to II Kings 17 and we will start in verse 5. If you remember we are going from macro to micro. The next level is probably pretty obvious. This is the encapsulated history of the nation of Israel up to the time of their captivity to Assyria in the late 8th century B.C.

II Kings 17:5-6 Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Why?

II Kings 17:7 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt

There is a nice connection to the Days of Unleavened Bread.

II Kings 17:7 From under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods.

Well, that is bad; it gets worse!

II Kings 17:8 And had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel. . .

This is starting to get really bad because the people that He had cast out before the children of Israel had been very iniquitous. It was the iniquity of the Amorites that had come to its fullness; meaning they were pretty evil people and the land had to vomit them out. Now, the children of Israel, who had replaced them in that land, had come to the very same point. They were walking in the statutes of these nations who the Lord had shown that He was altogether against.

II Kings 17:8 . . . and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

It was not just the people, it was the kings.

II Kings 17:9-13 Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law

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which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.”

God had given them a great witness. The law was there for them to see, He had sent prophets warning them that they were going off the track, and telling them what they should be doing to praise the Lord, but they would not hear.

II Kings 17:14 Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God.

Now we add stubborn resistance and rebellion to this list of evils. It just keeps mounting up.

II Kings 17:15-18 And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

Judah got her comeuppance about 150 years later. Now, we have taken it from the worldwide level to the national level. Most of us here consider ourselves Americans. Most of us have pride, we have patriotism, we think of this as a good country, and because of that, we tend to go along. We think, “Oh, it’s not so bad. Most people in this country are still Christian aren’t they? They’ll come back. They always do. There’s always a reformation. There’s going to be a revival. You can see it. It’s a pattern down through history. America will revive and go back to Christ”.

Are you sure? Is it your prejudice talking because you are an American and you always want the best for America? I am not saying that you should not want the best for America but it does color our judgment. We give the rest of the Americans a bit of a rest

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because we are one. If we are not careful, we can find ourselves supporting American things, American initiatives, American this, that, and the other thing just because it is American and not because it is right. We can be swept along in the patriotism of the thing. I will let you think about some of those things that, perhaps, America does that she should not be doing. But, we give our support because we are Americans.

In ancient Israel, this same kind of idea got to the point where they were sacrificing their children to Moloch. There was a time in Israel when that sort of thing was being done against them in war. The person was sacrificed on the wall of the city that was being besieged just totally destroyed them; it was horrid to them. But, only a couple of hundred years later they were doing the same thing. I am sure that, after a while, they felt safe doing it amongst their compatriots in the nation but it was still wrong. They got swept along in national fervor. They thought, "The leaders are doing it, why not us too? They are leading the way!" They were really leading them into destruction.

We have to think more individually; more individualistic in this sense. We cannot allow ourselves to be swept up in national movements. Sometimes national movements are okay but we have to be thinking about them and asking ourselves if *this* national movement is something *God* would say is alright.

Let us go to the next level. We are going to go to the New Testament in John 4. You may say, "What's in John 4? Isn't that the woman and the well? How can you find something like this there?" Well, we find it within the story, as told by John.

John 4:1-3 Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria.

He is going from south to north but He needed to go through Samaria. Samaria was a region that sat between Judea and Galilee. If you were going to go directly from Judea to Galilee, you had to go through Samaria. You could take the long way around, but that would take many more days; so, it was prudent for Jesus to go through Samaria.

John 4:5-6 So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

So, noon; the sun was coming down, and it was a hot day.

John 4:7-9 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

We are talking about going along with our ethnic group. The Jewish prejudice against Samaritans is an example of corporate sin on an ethnic level; very similar to the various racial and ethnic prejudices that are around here in the United States or around the world and many of them are deepening. Here in the United States, there are a great deal of ethnic problems in the various cities where these various ethnicities are crammed together. Los Angeles, Chicago, New York; think about the movie West Side Story. You saw the Puerto Ricans against the Whites; those were the two gangs going at each other. You have the Whites, Blacks, Koreans, and various Latino groups; what do you think these gangs are? They are not just there for drugs. They are bands of ethnic groups; young kids in various ethnic groups and very infrequently do you see any crossover in these gangs of various ethnicities.

In these New Testament times, John is writing about the rivalry between the Samaritans and the Pharisees. To the most self-righteous Pharisee, the prejudice against the Samaritans is representative of their disdain for all Gentiles but they had a special disdain for the Samaritans because the Samaritans presumed Israelite origins and they had presumed to take up the Israelite religion with a few Babylonian things thrown in so the Pharisees looked down their noses at the Samaritans as though they were defiled. That is why the woman at the well said, "How can you, a Jew, ask me for a drink? Aren't you afraid that I'm going to defile you by giving you water, by touching your food, something that you're going to put in your mouth?"

This is something the individual Jew was reared to do. To despise Samaritans was something that was taught at a young age. This is why the Parable of the Good Samaritan would make such an impact to these people. Here it was, the defiled, wretched Samaritan that had done the good thing, the righteous thing, and the Pharisee and the Levite had passed by on the other side and would not even stop to find out what was going on.

This is another corporate sin we have to think about: Are we proud of our race? Are we proud of our ethnicity? Are we willing to give people a break or do something that would

cause us to sin because of who we are and how we were raised? That does not matter anymore because now we are sons of God. We have to leave that sort of thing behind.

Here is another one; we are narrowing down again. Back in Genesis 37, this is where 10 of Jacob's sons sold Joseph into slavery. Joseph had been a little proud and was showing off his nice coat and saying that his brothers would eventually bow down to him. It all turned out to be true but his brothers did not like it so they formed a conspiracy together. They decided to kill this little boy who was getting on their nerves. Then, Reuben interjected and said not to kill Joseph because that would destroy their father. Judah suggested selling him to make a little profit. So, they put him in a pit, Midianites came by, and Joseph went into Egypt. Here is an example of one going along with one's *family* in conspiracy to do something evil. This is a problem that we could have if we are not careful.

Let us go to Proverbs 1 where we see a bit of a warning.

Proverbs 1:10-19 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all kinds of precious possessions, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse"— My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird; but they lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners.

Here we have not necessarily a family but a group that has conspired to do evil. In the case of Jacob's sons, they had an even more powerful enticement. That was the pull of family. It was not just enticing words; these were their brothers. These were the ones that they had grown up with; the ones they trusted. Blood *is* thicker than water. In most cases, it can be a wonderful source of strength and unity, but if it is misused, it can be a terrible curse. It is this sort of thing that is the fuel of blood feuds and interminable retaliations. As it says here in Proverbs, it only ends in destruction.

To counterbalance this, recall that Jesus says that if we are to follow Him fully, we have to be willing to hate [love less] our family; father, mother, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, cousin if we do not want to put a stumbling block to the relationship. He must come first. That is in Luke 14:26.

Let us go to another one; Acts chapter 5 is the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. We have narrowed it down once more from the world, to the nation, to the ethnic group, to the family or a small group of conspirators, and now we have come to husband and wife.

Acts 5:1-2 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

If we were to go any further we would find that once Peter caught him and he admitted to his sin, he fell down and died. Sapphira came in a little bit later not knowing what happened. Paul asked her a similar question and she fell down and died also because God was making a very, very pointed example of them at this early time of the church.

This is another corporate sin and, as we go closer and closer to our empirical self, the drive, the persuasion gets harder to resist. It gets especially hard to resist when it is our families and most especially hard to resist when it is our beloved spouse asking us to do something that God does not want us to do.

When we marry, the spouses become one flesh. They become a unit; so, we have a corporation as it were. They are one flesh but even this union can be used for evil purposes. Sometimes it happens out of misplaced love, misplaced loyalty. Sometimes it is more aggressive; sometimes it is actual, emotional pressure or it can even be physical force applied to cause one spouse to bring the other into the body of sin. But, if we comply with or conform to the sins of our spouse, we are just as guilty before God. That is what we see in the example of Ananias and Sapphira. God showed that they, in their collusion, were worthy of death because of their sins. I want to bring out a very important point in Romans 2.

Romans 2:5-6 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds."

Even though we would sin with others, God does not look at it as a corporate sin. In judgment, He ends up looking at it as our individual sins. We all bear the sin ourselves. Even if we went along and did it in "all innocence", it is still a sin that is pinned on us as individuals. We will all be judged individually. In the next few verses, Paul goes on to say that God will look at our personal record and decide whether we deserve wrath and

condemnation or whether we will receive eternal life and reward. So, even though we may sin along with others, the penalty comes on us as individuals.

This means that we *always* have a choice. We can follow along with the group and commit this corporate sin, which will go on our record as an individual sin, or we can decide to buck the trend. We can *decide* to defy the course of this world. We can *decide* to march to the beat of a different drummer and, as he says here in chapter 2, verse 7, “do good and seek glory, honor, and immortality.” We have that choice. We do not *have* to go along. We do not *have* to submit to the war of corporate sin. We can make our own way. Instead of conforming to those sinful ways, we can conform to God’s way.

I want you to think of this also in terms of the 700 pound gorilla in the room. We have to think of this in terms of our church group too. We have seven examples in the book of Revelation of groups that Jesus Christ Himself has shown to be separate within the greater church of God. Most of them He shows having sin and these groups have the same sorts of sins; they kind of go along with each other.

I was going to go to Pergamos because, according to the New King James, it is the *compromising* church. It shows there that you have among you ones that go after the doctrine of Balaam and who are guilty of Nicolaitanism and you just let them be. So, we have to be careful. I am not saying that we need to be independent to be righteous; what I am saying is that we cannot allow ourselves to follow a pied piper as so many did in the 80s in the Worldwide Church of God. They followed him right out of the true church and into the false Christianity that we see around us.

We have to think things through; I am sure we all do. It is something we have learned to do because of all the false teachers that have been a part of the church over the last 25-30 years; it has become a bit of a habit. I am mentioning this because we need to study hard, we need to meditate, we need to practice what is right, and reject what is wrong.

As Paul writes in I Thessalonians 5:21, test all things. Hold fast to what is good. Do not be taken out by just going along with the flow, even in the church. When we get to the next sermon, we will see a more positive aspect of this but I also want you to review Revelation 13:11-17 because we find there that the Beast with his false prophet will be given the power to cause the whole world to follow after him. There is a *huge* corporate sin on the horizon and people are going to be swept up in it thinking that this is a wonderful thing. They will accept his mark and, as it says there, that this is just going to lead to more destruction and calamity and people will not know what hit them because they have been swept along.

Let us conclude in Matthew 7. Jesus puts it so succinctly in the Sermon on the Mount and He uses imagery that we can all understand.

Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The majority is often *wrong*, so do not follow the crowd. The majority is usually just conforming because it is human nature following the piping of Satan. Make sure you do not follow the majority “just because.” Do not take the easy or the convenient path. The smooth way, the way of thoughtlessness and carelessness, often leads to destruction.

Though it may be fun getting there, we have to go the narrow way, the straight way, the difficult way. The margin reads, “the confined way”. That means one is hedged in, the boundaries are tight. It may seem constricting because the people out there are so loose and free and it seems like fun but that tight, confining, hedged in way is *the* way that gets us where we want to go.

If we want to follow the way of Christ, we must shun what others think and do and, as we saw, we must set our wills and follow the trail blazed by our Savior come what may.