

# Individuals are Covenantally Connected

## Joshua 7:1

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, February 5th 2023

### I. Introduction - why this doesn't seem fair to socialists or individualists

I was going to preach on a much larger section of Joshua 7 today, but I realized that most Americans would get royally hung up on verse 1 and would not be able to concentrate on anything else that I had to say about this chapter because *this* verse would be bugging them. So I am going to park on one verse today. Often, problem verses that stump us are wonderful keys to understanding life. And I think that is definitely the case with this one. And since socialistic pastors have misused this verse so much in recent years to promote BLM (and yes, I have seen pastors supporting Black Lives Matter radicals with this verse, and commie redistribution of wealth, and other centralist ideas), it really does need to be addressed. But thankfully, this verse also addresses another extreme. There are two extremes in our culture.

#### A. What troubles the individualists

The first extreme is radical individualism. What troubles the hyper-individualists about this passage is that God's wrath was looming over more than just Achan and his family. They could easily explain why the whole *family* got punished by God and still be able to maintain a system of radical individualism. For example, one explanation might possibly be that every individual in the family could have potentially known that Achan had brought the loot into their tent and had hidden it under his bed. And since God had made this a capital crime during *that* particular war, the complicity of silence would be treated far more seriously by the Lord. And I think there is a certain element of truth to that explanation. If your parent commits a capital crime, you can't keep quiet about it. So that might be an explanation that the individualists would give.

What I believe the hyper-individualists *cannot* explain is the corporate *guilt* and the corporate *consequences* meted out by God on the *whole* nation. It seems to me that it would have been impossible for the millions of people in this nation to have all known what Achan had done. How could they be held guilty on this trespass regarding the accursed things? On an anarchist or totally libertarian philosophy, that seems like a tough one to explain.

Look again at verse 1: Verse 1 and the rest of the chapter documents only *one* man's sin. Yet verse 1 starts by saying, "the children [plural] of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things" and it ends by saying that "the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel." Certainly the other millions of individuals had their *own* sins. We will even look at some of those next week. And in that sense, nothing that happens to them is unjust in the final analysis. *But that's not what this verse is talking about.* This verse is holding them accountable for the *specific* sin of taking the accursed things - *something that*

*only Achan did.* In verse 5 we discover that, while Achan didn't die in the battle against Ai, thirty-six *other* soldiers *did*. It just doesn't seem fair to Western individualists that so many people should suffer for one man's sin - and verse 1 only gives one man's sin as the reason for God's anger. I am trying to tease apart why two unbiblical extremes are contradicted by this passage. So the first extreme is hyper-individualism.

## B. What troubles the collectivists

But what troubles the collectivists on the opposite side of the spectrum (at least if they pay much attention to the text) is the amount of *individual* accountability found in this chapter. On their system, the individual is lost in the collectivist crowd. They don't mind corporate guilt, so long as the individual is not held liable. They would rather distribute the liability through everyone's taxes. So even though people like Tim Keller use this passage to justify their socialistic views, it actually doesn't completely fit their paradigm. And it will take a bit to tease apart why they aren't totally handling this passage correctly, even though they do get the corporate guilt part right.

Notice first that this verse speaks of children (plural), not Israel as some nebulous unit. Yes, verse 10 will mention corporate guilt of Israel as a whole. The covenantal view takes that into account. But even *that* verse immediately uses the plural "they" to describe Israel, and makes it clear that this corporate unit doesn't have a will to sin - only individuals do. Nor was it *society* that paid restitution (as the collectivists desire). No, no, no. The *individual*, Achan, paid for the crime at the end of the chapter. In verses 6-15, Joshua as an *individual* is held accountable and told to readjust *his* actions. And there are other similar hints of individual responsibility throughout this chapter that indicate that the collectivists have *also* missed something.

And let me dive into that a little bit because that is probably the primary problem in our nation, which is drifting more and more into collectivism. It's only the overreaction of some that goes into hyperindividualism. But hey, if we are going to err in one direction, let's not err in the collectivist direction.

Socialists love to demonize what they perceive to be *societal* sins. Or since they prefer the word "systemic," they demonize systemic unfairness (whatever that is), systemic racism, and other so-called systemic societal sins. Rarely are they willing to have solutions for the *individual's* guilt. Instead of individual responsibility, restitution, and guilt, they want to pawn those things off on some nebulous entity they call society. But this chapter will show that there is no such thing as a corporate will that can sin; it is always individuals who sin. Even imputed sins are treated by God as sins that He holds *individuals* accountable for. And that means that individuals can always do something to avert these issues, whereas it is hard to know what an individual can do about the guilt imposed by the collectivists. The way people speak of America's guilt of the slavery of the past and the racism of the past, you can never get past the guilt, even if your ancestors didn't arrive in America till 50 years ago. Just being white makes you guilty in their eyes. And since you can't get rid of your whiteness, you can't get rid of your guilt. In contrast, individuals can always get past *any* guilt that God imputes to them. They don't need to be paralyzed by some nebulous guilt that can never be dealt with because we are supposedly part of the systemic cultural sins.

That ends up freezing people into inactivity and being manipulated more easily by the experts. That's what they want. They don't really care about guilt. It's a tool to gain power - just like global warming is a tool to gain power as they add pollution with their private jets.

But let's get back to us. You might say, "How on earth can an individual do anything about the anger of God hovering over a nation when that anger is due to *other* people's abortions, theft, tyranny, etc?" Well, when there is guilt that we share with a leader of a nation, we can throw off that guilt by disagreeing with the leader (like the prophets did), or confessing the sins of the leader, and taking a stand for righteousness. There is no need to be paralyzed into socialistic acquiescence by some nebulous guilt that the collectivists try to put on society as a whole.

But having said all of that, it *is* hard to navigate the balance *unless you understand covenant theology*. That's the missing ingredient. So I probably should have titled the sermon "Covenantalism versus Individualism or Collectivism." But let's look at each word of the text, and then I want to give the covenantal background that helps to explain it. Hopefully this verse will serve as a good introduction to the rest of the chapter.

## II. Exegesis of verse 1 to show how the individual fits into the covenant

### A. "But" (can be "and" or "also") - highlights the covenant in both chapters

One interpreter made a big deal over the word "but" at the beginning of verse 1 and emphasized the contrast between chapter 6 and chapter 7. And yes, obviously there is contrast that can be seen. The problem is, the first word in the Hebrew is not a contrastive. It can be rendered as "and" or "also." This chapter is building off of the covenantal curses and blessings of the last chapter. The idea is that God's covenant, which guaranteed the victory in chapter 6 is also a covenant that guarantees the defeat we will be studying in chapter 7. We like the fact that one man's faithfulness to God in chapter 6 brings huge covenantal blessing to everyone. Yay! We love that! But we tend to neglect the idea that one man's unfaithfulness in chapter 7 can bring God's covenantal displeasure and can result in our corporate defeat. The same covenantal principles are operative in both chapters. We can't rejoice at the corporate victory in chapter 6 and reject the corporate defeat in chapter 7. It is the *covenant* that makes both operative, not some other secular idea. So the first word actually connects us to the covenant curses and blessings of chapter 6 by showing the flip side of the coin. And so in *that* sense the word "But" is an OK interpretation. But it's still the same covenant.

### B. "...the children of Israel"

The next phrase in verse 1 makes an accusation against more than just Achan. It says, "But the children of Israel..." Some versions leave out the words "children of" or "sons of" and just have the word "Israel." But literally it says the "sons of Israel," and it mentions sons

because the males had the primary responsibility to resist the unwise decision of Joshua and the other leaders in this chapter, and implies that they *could* resist. When we get to verses 2-5 we will see that the soldiers should *not* have accepted a task that God had not authorized. Oh boy. I probably need to give some background on Biblical civics. The most fundamental principle of Biblical civics is the Regulative Principle of Government. That principle means that the civil government cannot do anything that God has not *explicitly* authorized. It gives civil government a very limited authority. And here's the point: whereas defensive warfare was authorized in the law, *offensive warfare was outlawed by the Bible unless God gave an exception by direct revelation* (in what we looked at in the unusual herem warfare where God by revelation used Israel as an instrument of vengeance). Without God's direction, they could not engage in offensive warfare. It was unlawful. Well, we will see next week that there is no evidence that Joshua or anyone else prayed or sought God's guidance. In fact, God rebukes them on that account. But since the Regulative Principle of Government means that the state cannot do anything not directly authorized by God, the militias had the right to bow out. They were authorized by Scripture to decide to join or to not join a cause depending on the justness of that cause. And other leaders could have spoken up as well. So that's a Biblical presupposition that makes a huge difference on how you interpret this chapter. We've got to understand Biblical civics or we can easily be swept into modern so-called solutions for civics that are not Biblical.

But let me illustrate how this issue of resistance to an ungodly mandate can work. When a Senator Massie votes against an ungodly bill, he as an individual (and by association, his state of Kentucky) are no longer held accountable by God for the guilt God imputes to that wretched bill. Why? Because he resisted - and he resisted on behalf of Kentucky.<sup>1</sup> There is always a way for an individual to deal with guilt in God's economy.

But conversely, think of Nebraska senators who feel that it is hopeless to do away with abortion, so they don't try; in fact, they approve of abortion up to a certain week (and that is what the heartbeat bill is doing). When they do that, they have endorsed abortion up to a certain week. By failing to take a strong stand against it, they are covenantally guilty for all of those abortions that will now happen up through week seven or eight. And that is true even though they are personally opposed to abortion. It's exactly parallel to what most of these Israelites were failing to do. To avoid covenantal guilt, a magistrate needs to *oppose* a practice that God commands him to oppose. It doesn't matter whether you think it is achievable or not; you need to personally take a stand against it in order to avoid that covenantal guilt.

Let's return to an issue we talked about earlier. The way many Christians interpret corporate guilt, every white citizen in America is told that he or she is guilty for the evils done against blacks in early America until restitution is made. And actually corporate guilt doesn't work that way. It doesn't separate people into whites, Asians, Hispanics, and Blacks. If there is corporate guilt, the whole nation (including the blacks) are corporately guilty

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Thomas Massie is actually a congressman, not a senator. But the same principle applies.

unless individuals or counties or states or churches have stood against the sin. But the result of collectivist guilt is that *everyone* suffers because *everyone* has to pay taxes for this supposed restitution. And no one is told how much restitution needs to be made to the blacks alive today, or if those blacks even descended from those slaves. Thus, it is an excuse for endless redistribution of wealth - something God calls theft. It is theft on a grand scale. And how many pastors support it because of a misunderstanding of this verse.

I think you get the drift. In the battle mentioned in verses 2 and following God only held the sons of Israel accountable - at least the ones that went to battle. The ones that didn't go to battle didn't die. So let's take seriously the plural in this phrase, "the sons of Israel." *Israel was made up of a bunch of individuals. America is made up of a bunch of individuals and a bunch of States.* And as we go through a long list of corporate and individual guilt passages later in this sermon, I will illustrate how this is consistent throughout the Bible. I don't think there are any exceptions. I'm spending more time on this because of how irritated I have been with pastors who have misused this verse. It is Scripture twisting. Though this verse does speak of corporate guilt (and verse 10 is even more clear on that), there is always something that individuals can do about it and it is individuals who suffer.

### C. Committed a trespass

But next comes the puzzling phrase that helps us to have covenantal balance. It says, "But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things." There is no getting around the fact that God attributes the sin to more than Achan. Certainly, God will be describing Achan's sin in the next clause, but here he says that the children (plural) of Israel committed *that* trespass. Otherwise the word "for" in the next clause makes no sense. Our theology needs to be able to accommodate this idea of corporate guilt without entering into false guilt - and I believe covenant theology enables us to do so. Anarcho-capitalism does not.

Second, the disobedience is called an act of adultery - the Hebrew is *maal* (מעל). It may not seem like a big deal to us that one man in a nation coveted, stole, and hid the accursed things, but when God pronounces a curse on anything, we want to avoid that curse like the plague. This is not an ordinary sin - like Achan tried to make it out to be in verses 20-21. He admits to coveting and stealing, but he does not admit to having engaged in covenant breaking, embracing what God cursed, and having engaged in a capital offense. No, he minimized his sin, and confessed to what was now obvious. This was a deliberate taking of something God had cursed. And I highly recommend that you read Ray Simmons' book, *The Confessional County* to see how this relates to the blood shed in our land through abortion and other forms of murder.

I think David Firth's commentary summarizes the meaning of this phrase rather well. He says this:

The verb used here can refer to marital unfaithfulness, and though it is more commonly used to describe unfaithfulness to God, this background points to the pain that Yahweh experiences in his people's sin. This corporate approach to sin stands in marked contrast to the individualism that typifies much of Western

society, and which tends to assume that something is acceptable if it does not overtly hurt anyone else. This, however, is to fail to recognize that no sin, whether of commission or omission, stands in isolation. We are embedded within communities, and no sin is ever purely personal; rather, all sin is interpersonal. Although in some cases it is easier to see how it affects others, we should not imagine that our sin has no wider impacts.<sup>2</sup>

Well said. I will be demonstrating this covenantal connection that we all have with each other with a few more examples in a bit, but let me give you one example of how Paul makes exactly the same covenantal application in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. In that passage Paul gets on the case of the church for not having excommunicated a man who had engaged in an incestuous marriage to his step-mom - his father's wife. That is something that the law says defiles the land. And yet the church tolerated it. He said that the whole congregation was in spiritual danger as a result of that one man's curse-bringing-sin. In verse 6 he said, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" He goes on to say that the Christians didn't have to avoid similar immoral people of the world - after all, we need to reach them with the Gospel. That's not the point. He was not forbidding them from talking to unbelievers who do these kinds of things. But he insisted that those *in* the covenant impact each other in a special way for good or for bad, and that is why this individual needed to be under church discipline. The church leaders were to excommunicate him, and the members were to have nothing whatsoever to do with him. The point is that if a little leaven leavens the whole lump, it means that the whole church is impacted by that one man's sin.

#### D. Of one man's sin (v. 1b)

In the next clause Joshua clarifies that the sin that the others were guilty of was a sin committed by one man. He says, "for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things." He came from a very distinguished line, but by embracing what God cursed, he put everyone in danger. Again, this was not just an ordinary sin. This was a curse-bringing sin. The "for" explains the reason why God was attributing guilt to the sons of Israel - *Achan* had violated the direct orders of God. And this is where we need to understand the nature of covenant connections. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." Notice it says "members" (plural). We are covenantally connected as individuals.

#### E. And all suffer God's anger (v. 1c)

The next phrase shows how all suffered because of this man's sin - they suffered God's anger: "so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel." And as the next verses outline, that anger resulted in defeat on an easy battle and the loss of life. Ai looked

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<sup>2</sup> David G. Firth, *The Message of Joshua*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 87.

like such an easy target that everyone was blindsided. But we need to realize that if God is *not* for us, *anything* can successfully be against us - even a small thing like Ai. On the other hand, if God *is* for us, nothing can be against us. And that is the reason why it is so important to get rid of serious sin from our midst.

**F. A misapplication that socialism makes is to say that we must make the “system” atone/pay. Instead, God’s focuses throughout the chapter is on the individual’s responses.**

But one misapplication that Tim Keller and many other people make from this passage is to say that because there is corporate involvement in sin, that society must pay restitution. Now Tim is not as bad as some pastors that I have read, that is still a very wrong conclusion. Sure everyone in a nation has the potential of *suffering* from the sins of others in the nation, but citizens should call the *individuals* to account. And if that is not possible, the leaders can confess the sins of the past and put them under the blood of Christ. That ends it. There is no need for generation after generation to endlessly pay restitution to classes of people for the sins of the past. That leads to socialism *and* racism. And because this is such a misunderstood concept, I want to illustrate it by giving sample verses of how this corporate principle works on every level of society and show how it is still individuals who make the difference. That’s *true* covenantalism.

### III. Background on the corporate effects of sin and righteousness

#### A. Illustrated negatively

##### 1. All humanity (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22)

The most obvious example of us being held guilty of one person’s sin is the imputation of Adam’s sin to not only Eve (whom he was covenantally related to), but to every human that descended covenantally from Adam - even though Paul says that they didn’t sin in exactly the same way that Adam did. Still, covenantally they are guilty of Adam’s sin. In your outlines I have a picture of one of the best books on this doctrine of the Imputation of Adam’s Sin. It’s by John Murray. I highly recommend it. Or you can read the same thing in his commentary on Romans. But I just want to introduce you to the concept. Let me read Romans 5:12-19.

Rom. 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned [and in a moment he will say when they sinned - they sinned when Adam sinned] — 13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from

one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. 17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Rom. 5:18 Therefore,\* as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,\* even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

By reading all of it, I've already jumped ahead to the positive example of Christ. There is a parallel between Adam and Christ. Just as Adam's sin was imputed to all who are covenantally connected to him, Christ's righteousness is imputed to all who are in covenant with Him. Just as Adam's sin caused God's wrath to be poured out on every human, Christ's righteousness caused God's blessing and grace to be poured out on all who were in Him. If you deny that we were guilty of Adam's sin in that passage, then you logically have to deny that Jesus' righteousness earned our justification. There is a covenantal corporate nature that makes all of us guilty of Adam's sin. You cannot ignore the corporate nature of blessings and curses.

How does the individual play into this? As each individual rejects his identity in Adam and by faith receives his identity in Jesus, He avoids condemnation and receives blessing. This is what the Revoice Movement has gotten so disastrously wrong. They don't reject their past identity with one or another facet of the LGBTQ+ movement. They call themselves gay Christians, or trans Christians. No. If they are true Christians, they have a new identity in Christ that drives their whole future. It doesn't mean they can't fall into sin. But they reject their old identity and begin to progressively be conformed to their new identity in Christ.

The point is that our whole salvation is dependent on this idea of corporate guilt and corporate worthiness in Christ; but it's also dependent on our individual response. It's a mediating position between the two extremes. Paul's interpretation does not make the individual passive or hopeless as the socialistic interpretation does. So that is an illustration related to all humanity - an illustration that should not be controversial.

## 2. Nation (1 Chron. 21:1-14; Daniel 9)

But let's move on to 1 Chronicles 21:1-14. I won't read the whole passage, but it is clear that David sinned by making an intrusive census of the people. Keep in mind that God hates America's intrusive census which was way worse than David's. Anyway, Joab objected by saying,

“Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?”

Notice that Joab recognized *that this one sin could bring guilt to Israel corporately*. By resisting he had the potential of nullifying the guilt, but he didn't follow through on his resistance. It was too half-hearted. The text says that David prevailed and insisted on doing the census. And Joab kind of grudgingly did it. So there is one man's sin, yet verse 7 says,



“And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel.” And individualists say, “How is that fair?” The text goes on to say that 70,000 individual Israelites died of a plague as a result of David’s census. Why? Two reasons: First, because of their covenantal connection. But they are not trapped in that covenantal connection, so the second reason is that they didn’t resist the census. Anyway, David sacrifices to the Lord, and the sacrifice stems the plague. But the point is, because of the covenantal way the people in the nation are connected, there is corporate guilt and corporate consequences.

When I preached on that passage in the life of David series, I pointed out that those who *did* resist (and I believe many refused to cooperate with the census people - those resisters) were spared God’s judgment and wrath, while those who did not resist *experienced* God’s wrath. That’s why we can never ignore the sins of our nation. We must open our mouth (as Jarrod Ridge preached last week) and resist them.

So it is no surprise to find down through history that clergy and political leaders would come together to confess the sins of their nation or their city. They did it because they didn’t want to be a part of God’s wrath. Daniel 9 is one such example. Though Daniel did not *personally* commit the sins he confesses, he confesses the sins of his fathers *on behalf* of his nation. That’s legitimate. I’ll just read a few sample verses, but notice the “we” all the way through. I’m going to start with verse 4:

4 And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, 5 we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. 6 Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. 7 O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

Dan. 9:8 “O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. 10 We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. 11 Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. 12 And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

And he continues on in the same vein. It is clear that there is corporate guilt. Yet he as an *individual* could still make a huge difference for the nation. And he could certainly make a difference for himself. This is why we believe it is so important for us to oppose the evils in

our society and to confess the sins of our nation. Resistance to evil and confessing those evils shields us, but also helps to turn around the nation. Why? Because there is a covenantal connection. We will see in a bit that God blesses and honors our individual actions - again, because of that covenantal connection. If all the county leaders (both civil and church) could get together to do what Daniel did, I believe God's favor would rest on that county in a powerful way. And Ray's book documents that rather well. But in this case, Daniel starts the process of the restoration of the nation as a whole by confessing the sins of the nation as if they were his own. And we will give you an opportunity to do that when we sing our final hymn. That will be a first step in applying this sermon.

### 3. Land (Numb. 35:33; Deut. 19:10; 21:1-9; Ps. 106:38)

Well, we need to hurry on. What about the land? The law of God says that blood defiles the land and brings God's curse. It's an inescapable aspect of God's covenant. Again, Ray Simmons' book, *The Confessional County*<sup>3</sup> documents that. Numbers 35:33 says,

So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.

The Old Testament ends with the threat of this same curse. Malachi chapter 3 starts by listing some of the capital crimes that would be happening in the time of Christ and ends by saying that John the Baptist would be sent to lead the nation in repentance "Lest I come and strike the earth with curse." That's the last verse of the Old Testament. John the Baptist was successful in averting that curse for 40 years.

Today abortion defiles the land. We can't take a who-cares attitude toward abortion, thinking that it is impossible for individuals to make a difference. No; individual resistance at least protects those individuals from the corporate guilt. That's the way covenantalism works. That's not the way socialistic collectivism works. Collectivism leaves it up to "George" to do something about it and hopes that there is a "George" to do something about it. No, that's irresponsibility. It's not covenantalism.

### 4. A town (Mark 6:5-6)

In Mark 6:5 we see that the unbelief in a town made it difficult for Jesus to do miracles there. That was a case of corporate unbelief. It had an impact upon the whole community.

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Simmons, *The Confessional County: Realizing the Kingdom through Local Christendom* (Red Oak, IA: New Dunedin Press, 2021), [https://smile.amazon.com/Confessional-County-Realizing-Kingdom-Christendom/dp/1513684752/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=B0VJJ4NITF6J&keywords=The+confession+al+county&qid=1675285468&srefix=the+confessional+county%2Caps%2C122&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Confessional-County-Realizing-Kingdom-Christendom/dp/1513684752/ref=sr_1_1?crid=B0VJJ4NITF6J&keywords=The+confession+al+county&qid=1675285468&srefix=the+confessional+county%2Caps%2C122&sr=8-1)

### 5. A true church (1 Cor. 5:6-13; 12:26; Rev. 2:14-15,20)

I've already dealt with the 1 Corinthians 5 passage, where a little leaven of sin tolerated within the church defiles the church. Revelation 2 has several verses where God holds things against an entire church because they tolerated gross evil in their midst. The leaders didn't commit the sin, yet they are held accountable by God for that sin and the others suffered. Like it or not, that's the way God's covenant works. And I've been going from the whole of humanity all the way down to localism to show that there are no exceptions. Christ indicates that His curse could have been removed from those churches if they would have disciplined the offending member.

### 6. An apostate church (Revelation 18:4)

Revelation 18 tells people to leave an apostate church of that time (the Jewish synagogue system) because if they didn't, they would be held guilty of that denomination's sins. It says,

“Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

I was glad to see that 1,831 Methodist churches left the Methodist denomination recently because that denomination advocates for sins that the Bible considers to be capital crimes. They didn't want the covenantal curse. They resisted and they finally left. Sadly, they stayed so long that they have unwittingly embraced a lot of other corruption.

### 7. A household (Deuteronomy 22:8)

What about a household? Deuteronomy 22:8 says,

“When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.

Yes, such a fall would be an accidental fall, but because of the dad's failure to take precautions to prevent such an accident from happening when it was easy to prevent it, if a person fell from the roof it wasn't just the dad who had guilt. It says, “that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your *household* if anyone falls from it.” There is a covenantal guilt that the whole household shares.

### 8. A spouse & children (Josh 7:25-26)

And of course, we will later see that Joshua 7:25-26 has the whole family being stoned because of Achan's sin. It may not seem fair to Western minds, but it is God's covenantal way of doing things. And again, on each of those examples, an individual can protect himself or herself from guilt by personally resisting. Passivity is not enough. To avoid corporate guilt, we must individually *do* something - pray curses against evil, confess evil, or resist it in some way.

## B. Illustrated positively

### 1. The new humanity in Christ (Rom. 5:14-21; 1 Cor. 15:22)

But of course, the second group of passages shows that this covenantal connection brings blessings as well. And I think it is good to end with these blessings. Romans 5 shows that we benefit from Christ's active and passive obedience. 1 Corinthians 15:22 shows that the blessings even go into eternity: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

### 2. A nation (Gen. 18:23-33; Numb. 6:24,27)

But look at the positive impact that a righteous person can have upon a nation. In Genesis 18 Abraham is told that God is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham has a nephew there. He doesn't want his nephew destroyed, and so he intercedes with God. He hopes this nephew has been having a good impact upon the city through evangelism. But that is not the case. There are no righteous people there other than Lot, and he is messed up and compromised. Beginning to read at Genesis 18:23.

Gen. 18:23 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Gen. 18:26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

Well, worrying that there weren't 50 righteous people there, Abraham bargains God down to 45, 40, 30, 20, and then 10. It shows the power that one man (Abraham) can potentially have in prayer. But it also shows the power that righteous people could have had within a nation to avert judgment. Sadly, there weren't even ten righteous people there who were willing to resist or speak up in a prophetic way. 2 Peter 2:8 says that Lot was vexed in his *spirit* every day. But that's about it. He kept his mouth shut and therefore had no godly impact. It's not enough to be bothered; there must be active resistance.

### 3. A land (Deut. 21:1-9)

I've already read Scripture that shows that murder brings defilement to a land and God's curse. But what if you can't find the murderer and he can't be executed? Or what if he is already dead and can't be executed? Or what if it is murder your fathers engaged in 150 years ago? Well, Deuteronomy 21:1-9 has the leaders (both civic and church) confess the guilt that the land has of the murder, to offer a sacrifice (which in modern times would be to plead the blood of Christ), and to ask God to cleanse the land. So individuals can take actions to deal with the corporate sin.

#### 4. A town (Prov. 11:11)

What about a town? Proverbs 11:11 says, “By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.” The upright can positively make a huge difference in a town.

#### 5. A true church (Rev. 3:7a,10)

What about a church? Each of the letters of Revelation 2 and 3 were written to the lead pastor of that church. Some of those pastors received God’s judgment for tolerating evil. But in verse 10 of chapter 3 Christ tells *that* pastor,

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

The whole church is blessed because of a single pastor’s willingness to uncompromisingly preach God’s Word and keep God’s Word. His blessings spill over into the lives of all the members.

#### 6. A business or estate (Gen. 39:5)

Can a righteous man bring blessing to a business or to the estate of a pagan? Interestingly, yes he can. Genesis 39:5 speaks of Joseph, saying,

So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

The same thing happened in the prison and later in Pharaoh’s household. Christians can have a powerful impact on blessing a business if they will honor the Lord in all that they do. And then when they leave, that business will lose that blessing.

#### 7. A spouse & children (1 Corinthians 7:14)

I’ll read one more verse. 1 Corinthians 7:14 says,

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

One believer in a home can set apart that entire home to God’s blessing if they will be faithful to the Lord.

### IV. This should affect how we view covenantal relationships

All of these verses should affect how we view covenantal relationships. It should make us avoid joining majorly compromised churches. Every church has sin. I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about serious sins that bring God’s curse or a refusal to speak out against

serious sins in a nation. Both issues can result in problems for the members of those churches. I would not be a member of a church that refused to ever preach against abortion, or homosexuality, or the occult, or other sins that bring God's curse.

But this covenantalism should also make us careful on who we covenant with in marriage. You might be attracted to a person physically and socially, but you need to evaluate whether that person is willing to wholeheartedly follow God's covenant. It is the covenant that should dictate who we marry - not attraction.

There is covenantal guilt and blessing that we all need to take into account. But praise the Lord, it is not a collectivist guilt that individuals can do nothing about. And sadly, it is not a collectivist blessing that individuals cannot reverse. God calls us to human responsibilities. And in the next section we will get into some of those.

But for now, I just want to leave you with one more application. Joshua was on a spiritual high in chapter 6. He had led an entire nation to miraculously conquer Jericho by faith. In this chapter he lets down his guard. He doesn't pray; he doesn't ask God's guidance. He allows self-confidence to replace God-confidence. He succumbs to peer pressure on who to send to Ai. So there is a crash immediately after a spiritual high. This is one of Satan's strategies because he knows we are less on guard after a spiritual high. Scripture calls us to *always* be on guard. Paul said, "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). May God give us the faithful actions to keep ourselves insulated from the corporate guilt we find in churches, businesses, cities, counties, and national governments. May He help us to keep our guard up always. And may He help us to be a blessing to others. Amen. Let's pray.