

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 61 – *Fleshly Lust, Achan’s Downfall*

By Sharon K. Griffie

When people think about or hear the word “lust” mentioned in conversation, they usually think that means sexual lust. However, there is far more to it than that. According to the Dictionary definition, the word “lust” is descriptive of an intense longing or craving for anything that we want. Moreover, in the Bible the Apostle Peter describes “fleshly lusts” as a war against the soul.

1 Peter 2:11 (KJV) - “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;”

It is these evil desires, urgently and intensely played out in the mind, which gives way to the lower nature of man. Though the spiritual man can endure and avoid the temptation altogether, receiving blessings from God in return, James explains the systematic thinking process of someone drawn into full-blown sin.

James 1:12-15 (KJV) - “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 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.”

James leaves no question about it. “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust.” God certainly does not bring the temptation. Nor does sin just happen to fall on someone. On the contrary, the person drawn away with lust had been *thinking* about something they wanted for a long time. The lustful thoughts played in their mind until they acted on it. As James put it, lust conceived brings forth sin. When sin is finished, it brings forth death.

Such was the case with a man named Achan, who lived at the time of Joshua, whose life was lived in stark contrast to that of Joshua’s life. On the one hand, we have Joshua, a mighty warrior and man of great faith, chosen by God to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land after the death of Moses. Regardless of the giants of Canaan who

occupied their great high-walled cities, Joshua’s calmness, coupled with his fearless military strategy against the Canaanites came directly from the strength of God Almighty. Isaiah conveyed the ultimate depth of God’s promise to the obedient in the following verse.

Isaiah 41:10 (KJV) - “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: Be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Because Joshua was a humble man with great wisdom, he acknowledged God’s hand in the victories he enjoyed against his enemies. His famous victory at Jericho, when the walls of that city tumbled down, exhibits his faithfulness.

Hebrews 11:30 (KJV) - *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

At this stage in Israel’s history, with the walls of Jericho flattened and the whole city burning, it seemed that the nation was invincible. Yet, even with the enjoyment of victory, trouble was brewing in the camp.

God had given a specific command to Israel that the spoils of war from Jericho belonged not to the men of war, but to God. The honor, the credit, the reward of victory rightfully belonged to God. They were told to put the silver, the gold, the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord’s house (**Joshua 6:19**). Joshua decreed to Israel that this specific command be carried out, as God desired.

Nevertheless, while his fellow comrades joyfully gathered up the gold, silver, bronze and iron implements to be freely dedicated to God, Achan’s thoughts went in a different direction. He saw some things he intensely wanted, and he selfishly took some of the booty for himself and hid it under his tent. Although Achan did not express sorrow for disobeying God’s command, he later confessed to Joshua’s questioning,

Joshua 7:21 (NIV) - “When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylon, two hundred shekels

of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”
(Underlined emphasis mine)

Make no mistake, coveting often leads to a sinful action. Observe that these three verbs, “I saw”, “I coveted”, “I took”, are akin to words found in the story of the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:6 (NIV) - *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and desirable [covetous] for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.* (Underlined emphasis mine)

Blinded by his own self-deception, Achan convinced himself he was justified in laying claim to the forbidden contraband. Thinking that his future was totally secure with this sudden store of wealth, he felt morally justified in his deliberate disobedience. However, selfishly taking what belongs to God shows lack of trust and outright failure to obey God. It is sin.

In the next battle against the small City of Ai, Joshua’s warriors met sudden defeat. Feeling overconfident, they had failed to seek the guidance of God. With this unexpected, ferocious counter attack, they turned and fled for their lives. Thirty-six men lay dead upon the ground. The hearts of the people melted in fear. In utter dismay, Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down into the dust. He lay prostrate before the ark of the Lord until sundown (**Joshua 7:6**). In a moment of weakness and deep remorse, Joshua actually questioned God, blaming Him for bringing Israel to this tragic end. God knew that this line of accusations against Him was totally out of character for Joshua. Rather than let him continue his haranguing, God abruptly chided Joshua,

Joshua 7:10-11 (NIV) - *The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.”*

God then gave Joshua a very clear directive,

Joshua 7:12b (NIV) - *“I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.”*

God’s tough lesson through Joshua is a reminder to all of us. Sin is not simply an individual matter. Individual sin affects the whole community. Those who depart from God’s plans to pursue their own poor choices cannot expect God’s presence in their lives. Achan’s individual responsibility to the whole community had been broken.

The next morning Joshua had Israel come forward, tribe by tribe, to identify the offender. The stolen objects, hidden in the earth under Achan’s tent, were brought to Joshua and the Israelites to be spread out before the Lord. Achan, along with his family, suffered the consequences of disobedience to God.

Joshua 7:24, 25b (NIV) - *Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor... Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.*

Because Israel dealt with the sin problem in their midst, as God commanded, the community was led to repentance and obedience. God was ready to lead Joshua and his warriors once again to victory.

Questions for Personal or Group Study

(Please do not mail to CA for grading):

1. When people hear the word “lust” mentioned in conversation, what do people usually think that word means?
2. How does the Apostle Peter describe “fleshly lusts”? **I Peter 2:11 (KJV)**
3. What is the systematic thinking process of someone drawn into full-blown sin, as described by the Apostle James? **James 1:12-15 (KJV)**
4. What blessing from the Lord is waiting for the person who endures temptation?
5. What specific command did God give to Israel regarding what to do with the spoils of war from the battle of Jericho? **Joshua 6:19**
6. Achan deliberately disobeyed God, laying claim to the forbidden contraband. To what extent did his coveting, which led to sin, affect the entire community?
7. Why was it necessary to deal with the sin problem in their midst, before God would again lead Israel to victory? **Joshua 7:13**