

Subject: *The Sin That Can Ruin a Church*

Scripture: *Numbers 32:23*

This is a message that needs to be preached. It is a message for the church. It is a message that speaks about the influence we have on others either positive or negative. It is a message that warns us about sin and inspires us to faithfulness and action.

Look at that warning in verse 23, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” What sin is that talking about, the sin of lying or stealing? Is it the sin of adultery, blasphemy, or gossip? It is none of these. What is the sin that can ruin a church?

1. A SELFISH REQUEST (vs. 1-5)

Until now, all twelve tribes had traveled together, eaten together, fought battles together, and murmured together. Because of their unbelief they wandered 40 long years in the wilderness, and a whole generation had died. This was a whole new generation and they faced the same decision to cross over the Jordan River and claim their Promised Land. Two of Israel’s twelve tribes (Reuben and Gad) wanted to settle down on the east side of Jordan because it was good grazing land for their cattle. They were thinking more about cattle than Canaan (vs. 1, 4).

The root of their problem was selfishness, complacency, unconcern for others, and focusing on the present only. Some people are like the tribes of Reuben and Gad. They have gone as far as they want to go in their spiritual life and they are content to just settle down where they are. The problem is that we have other people to think about and not just ourselves.

2. A SERIOUS REMINDER (vs. 6-15)

Moses was speaking to a new generation too young to remember what happened 40 years earlier, so he reminded them of a little history. Moses said (vs. 6), “No man has a right to be at ease when his brothers are at war.” On Veterans Day we honored the military men and women who serve our country. We didn’t honor draft dodgers or deserters. Moses warned them that their actions would discourage others. What we do affects other people. We will either encourage others or discourage others. Every person has influence.

What was at stake? The unity of the people. Their actions could divide the people. United we stand, but divided we fall. Something else was at stake: the attitude of the people. We should always be concerned about others, not just ourselves. We must be concerned for the new believer and the young people.

3. A STRONG RESPONSE (vs. 16-19)

Verse 17, “ready” means “hurrying.” These tribes volunteered to “go before” the rest of the Israelites. They were willing and eager to be the first to go into battle and pay the price for everyone else.

4. A SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY (vs. 20-24)

If they failed to live up to their promise, God would judge them for it. It would be a sin for them to fail to do what they promised. This is called “a sin of omission.” The Bible describes different kinds of sins:

- Sins of ignorance and sins of presumption (willful sins)
- Sins of action and sins of attitude
- Sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit
- Sins of commission and sins of omission

A little boy tried to explain the difference between sins of commission and sins of omission: “A sin of commission is something we do that we don’t mean to do. A sin of omission is something we want to do, but never get around to it.” The sin of omission is no laughing matter. It is a sin to do what we ought not to do. But it is also a sin to fail to do what we ought to do. And the sin of omission has serious consequences. In verse 23, “your sins will find you out,” is usually interpreted to mean “you won’t get by with it because someone will find out.” But that’s not what it means. People can sin and other people never find out. This means that sin would have consequences. It’s the same thing as *Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Whenever we fail to do what we ought to do...

- It is a definite sin

Failure to do what we ought to do is a sin. When Moses challenged the tribes of Israel to go to war with their brothers, he said, *But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23)*. Failure to do their part in battle would be a terrible sin. When the people of God asked Samuel to pray for the nation, he replied, *God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you (1 Sam. 12:23)*. It would be a sin of not praying. When Jesus came to a barren fig tree (a symbol of the Jewish nation), He put a curse on it because it bore no fruit. It was a sin of not bearing fruit. Jesus told the story about the talents and the man who buried his one talent. It was a sin of doing nothing with his talent. Jesus told the story of a priest and a Levite who saw a badly wounded man along the road, but didn’t stop to help him. It was a sin of not helping. Jesus spoke of five foolish virgins who were unprepared for the bridegroom because they had no oil for their lamps. It was a sin of not being prepared. When Jesus healed ten lepers and only one came back to thank him, He asked, “Where are the nine?” It was a sin of not being grateful. Jesus rebuked the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where most of his mighty works were done. It was a sin of not repenting. The sin of omission is a terrible sin.

- It is a deceptive sin

The sin of omission is a “respectable” sin compared to other sins. For example, the Bible says *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)*. We all know that getting drunk is a sin, but it is also a sin not to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit. Not being filled with the Spirit is more respectable. James 4:13-16 describes businessmen who make their plans and leave God. It is a sin. Jesus told the story of a rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21. The problem was not what he did, but what he failed to do. He left God out of his plans and out of his life. Hell is going to be full of people who simply left God out of their thinking and their plans. The sin of omission can be deceptive in another way. Sins of commission are easily seen, especially sins of the flesh. When someone is drinking, people usually know it. When a person is lying, stealing, cursing, gambling, cheating on their spouse, others eventually find out. Abraham Lincoln said it best: “You can fool some of the people all the time and all the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all the people all the time.” But the sin of omission is different. It is deceptive and can often be hidden from others. God has a specific plan and purpose for every one of us. Other people don’t know what God has told each of us to do. For example, God may have called someone to be a pastor or missionary, but only God and that person know about it. A person may live a lifetime of disobedience to God’s call and no one may ever know. Someone observed, “The greatest tragedy of life is not what people suffer, but what they miss.” Think of the blessings that have been missed because

someone failed to do what God told him to do. Think of the lives that could have been touched if someone had just obeyed the Lord.

- It is a destructive sin

All sin has consequences, but the sin of failing to do what we ought to do is very costly. It will cost us to obey the Lord, but it will cost us more if we don't obey. Our nation has been hurt by the sin of omission. Edmund Burke warned, "The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." Someone asked this poll question: "What do you think is the greatest sin in America today, ignorance or apathy? One man's answer: "I don't know and I don't care."

Churches are declining and dying because of selfishness and indifference. Failure to pray, failure to witness, failure to give, failure to attend, and failure to serve are sure ways to ruin a church. If it were up to some of our members we wouldn't have a Sunday night or Wednesday night service. The doors would be shut. If the finances of the church depended on some of our members we couldn't pay all the bills because they don't tithe.

Families are being damaged and destroyed by this sin. Most bad marriages are not blown apart; they just fall apart out of neglect. Kids are suffering because of dead beat dads and drop-out dads.

- It is a deadly sin

The sin of omission is actually the worst sin of all. Why? If we did what we ought to do, we couldn't be doing what we're not supposed to do. That's why the Bible says, *Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21)*. The Bible also says, *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16)*.

Why are lost people ultimately going to Hell? Is it because of what they've done, or is it because of what they've failed to do? Many are going to Hell because they don't think about their eternal soul. They're going to Hell because they have heard the Gospel and ignored it. They're going to Hell because they know they need salvation but keep putting it off. Someone developed a gospel tract with the simple question: "What must I do to be saved?" On the next panel was **Acts 16:31** *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.* Then there was another question: "What must I do to be lost?" The next panel was blank. To be lost and without Christ, you must do nothing. Jesus pointed to this deadly sin of omission in **John 3:18** *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

All of us are guilty of the sin of omission in one form or another. We might be surprised if we stopped to consider how many ways and how many times we have sinned by failing to do what we ought to do. What then should we do? The same thing we must do with all sin—confess it and forsake it. **Proverbs 28:13** *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.* **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* It's not too late. Now is the time to stop sinning and start obeying.

This is a message to warn us and a message to inspire us and challenge us. If you are in the battle and pulling your share of the load, keep on doing what you ought to do. Don't even think about quitting or slowing down or being comfortable. Think about the ones who are looking to you as an example. Think about your responsibility to new believers, the children, teenagers, and young adults.

If you're not doing what you ought to do, let this be a call to action and a change of heart. Remember that no man has a right to be at ease when his brothers are at war. We are in a battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need to rally the troops and do what we ought to do while we can.