

SINFUL SILENCE
When Christians Neglect Their Civil Duty
Lessons for Bible Study Groups

Title: Sinful Silence -- Shared Accountability

Study Passages: **Chapter 1:** Isaiah, 1:1-23; Deuteronomy 16:18-20, 17:14-15;

Chapter 2: Psalm 66:18

Introduction:

- Pass out index cards and ask adults to write on their cards a scenario in which they were unfairly accused of doing something because of association with another.

- Ask adults to share scenarios written on their index cards.

- Ask them to describe the feelings associated with their experiences and if they shared any responsibility in any of the scenarios.

- Ask adults as a group to listen to the following scenario:

Alex walks up to a group of high school students during break at school and overhears them planning to vandalize the school over the weekend. He does not want to be a part of the discussion, and therefore, moves onto another group of friends to finish break. The next Monday, Alex, along with the other students in the first group are called into the principal's office. All are subsequently given notice that they are being suspended for participating in vandalism over the weekend. Alex begins to protest, but the principal will not hear his words about not being involved in the activity. He is sent home for a week to think about the consequences of his actions.

- Ask adults to answer the following questions:

- o Did Alex have any involvement in the actions of the group?
- o Should he have experienced consequences? Why or why not?

*Help students understand that even though Alex did not participate in the actual activity, he knew what was happening, and did not say anything to appropriate authorities. Explain that sometimes, we are guilty simply because we are silent which is exactly what **Sinful Silence** discusses.*

1. God's Word outlines biblical standards by which believers should live.

BIBLICAL TRUTH: *God outlines in His Word specific standards for His people and breaking those standards can result in serious consequences.*

LIFE APPLICATION: *Observing the biblical example of Judah can help believers identify standards that God has outlined for Christians living in today's societies.*

LIFE CHANGE OUTCOME: *As you go about your lives this next week seek ways to uphold at least one applicable standard identified in today's Bible study.*



Teaching Activities:

- Instruct students to read aloud Isaiah 1:1-23
- After reading the passage, *explain the following contextual information.*
 - o *Isaiah's prophecies are specific to Judah and Jerusalem commonly called the Southern Kingdom.*
 - o *At the time of Isaiah's writings, the Southern Kingdom became the only kingdom left of God's covenant nation, once called Israel. Israel had been one nation up until King Solomon's death, when it split into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and when Isaiah prophesies, the Southern Kingdom is a little over 100 years away from also being conquered. They would eventually be overtaken by the Babylonians in 586 BC as a direct result of their disobedience.*
 - o *The first chapter of Isaiah is written as a "lawsuit" against the nation of Judah. The Lord indicts his covenant nation with their breach of the Mosaic covenant, and explains the consequences of continued disobedience as well as the forgiveness that would be given for those who repented.*
 - o *God is called "The Holy One of Israel" which is a direct contrast to the sin of the people.*
- Divide the group into small groups of three to four.
- Ask adults to go through the passage verse by verse and make a list of sins that the nation of Judah had committed against God on one side of the page (*hint: they are identified in 15-17 and 21-23*). On the other side, have them list the consequences of their sins.
- Discuss answers.
- **As a large group, ask:** Does God still have standards for us today? Ask adults to list different standards that God has for us as Christians today according to scripture. *Explain that Christians are still responsible for the standards God sets- to follow them. And Christians are held responsible not only when they break those standards but also when their silence shows that they might support others breaking God's standards.*
- **Ask:** What happens when those standards are broken?
- Discuss answers.
- **Ask:** What specific instructions does God give his people in verses 16 and 17?

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.
Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the ruthless,
Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow. (NASB)



- **Ask:** What are ways that we as Christians can “learn to do good?”

What are ways that we can seek justice?

What are ways that we can help the oppressed?

What are ways that we defend the orphans?

What are ways that we plead for widows?

Note: in Isaiah’s day, the culture did not recognize the civil rights of widows and orphans, so they could be abused, and even murdered, with no legal protection or consequence. What class of individual in our society has no legal protection? (hint: orphans and widows are protected, BUT babies inside the womb are not!)

- **Ask:** Are we to do all of these individually? How does the church play a role in such actions? How does the government play a role in such actions?

Discuss how the church is to help with the needs of individuals within their sphere of influence as well as social needs as a body of believers. The government should uphold Godly standards, although this is not always the case.

- Ask adults to write down one way in which they could individually carry out one standard discussed in the upcoming week.

2. Believers are responsible to select leaders by God’s standards and share accountability with their selected leaders.

BIBLICAL TRUTH: *The people of God were responsible for selecting qualified individuals who would then be approved and installed by the religious leaders. If the people failed to select leaders according to God’s standards, the people shared in the guilt and consequences of their failed leaders.*

LIFE APPLICATION: *Christians today are biblically responsible to select leadership according to God’s standards and they share in the guilt and consequences of their failed leadership.*

LIFE CHANGE OUTCOME: *Identify one responsibility that you are not living up to and determine one specific action of change to begin carrying out that responsibility.*

Teaching Activities:

- Ask adults to turn to Deuteronomy 16:18-20

- Explain the following contextual information.

- *The book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons Moses gave to the people of Israel in the 40th year of the exodus from Egypt.*
- *Moses had addressed issues of God’s faithfulness and had begun a long dialogue explaining to the people the laws they were to follow.*
- *Beginning in Chapter 16, verse 18, Moses begins to teach about the responsibilities of officials to uphold pure worship in the land that God had promised them, and to judge righteously and impartially.*
- *In Chapter 17, Moses begins to teach the people what kind of king they will need to appoint to follow God’s standards.*



- Divide adults into small groups and ask them to read Deuteronomy 16:18-20, 17:14-15
- Ask adults to answer the following questions in their groups:
 - o What responsibility did the people of Israel have to choose civic leaders?
*(The people were to choose leaders who would judge with righteousness)
(The people were to choose a king whom God chose, who would not store up earthly treasures, but who would rule according to the law of God.)*
 - o What truths were to guide the leadership of the nation?
(The leaders were to lead righteously and according to the statutes of God- the first five books of Moses- Genesis through Deuteronomy)
 - o How are the people responsible for the actions of their leaders?
When the citizens have a voice in the selection and direction of their civil leaders, God holds both the leaders and the citizens accountable for the civil sins of the government (Conner & Revell, 24)
- Discuss Answers.
- **Ask:** What responsibility do Christians today have in selecting leadership?
(In America, they have the democratic freedom to choose leadership and have the responsibility to seek leadership that aligns itself with God's standards; Christians have the responsibility to participate in voting and voicing disapproval of leadership decisions that do not align themselves with God's standards. If they do not, it is as if they are supporting the decisions that are not in line with God)
- **Ask:** What truths are to guide the leadership of our nation?
(God's standards- the rules have not changed; You may want to get into some specifics here, and tie in the standards discussed through the first Objective!)
- Ask adults to consider how they take part in choosing leaders and in knowing what decisions that their leadership is making. Ask them to list ways to take an active role in supporting God's standards in government. Ask them to consider one way in which they are not actively supporting God's standards in government that they could share with a partner. Have them partner up and discuss at least one tangible way they can actively support God's standards for choosing and supporting leadership.

3. Cherished sin hinders prayer and worship.

BIBLICAL TRUTH: *Because of their sin, God rejected the offerings and sacrifices of Judah, ignored their assemblies, and refused to hear their prayers.*

LIFE APPLICATION: *Cherished sin in the life of a believer can hinder prayer and worship.*

LIFE CHANGE OUTCOME: *State one method of accountability to keep oneself from cherishing sin and state at least one specific way that method can be implemented within the coming week.*



Teaching Activities:

- Ask one adult to read Ps. 66:18. What happens to those who cherish sin in their hearts?
(God doesn't listen to our prayers when we "cherish" sin in our hearts)
- Direct adults back to Isaiah 1:11-17.
- **Ask:** What three things did God do to show that he rejected Judah's worship?
(God rejected Judah's offerings and sacrifices, ignored their worship assemblies and celebrations, and would not hear their prayers. These practices were the major focuses of Judah's religious life, and God would not accept them.)
- **Ask:** How did God respond to Judah's sin? Look specifically at verses 13, 15, & 17.
God not only rejected these, He despised these "empty exercises"
V.13 He called their offerings meaningless and detestable.
V.13-14 He "hated" their celebrations and gatherings.
V. 15 He hid his eyes from those who prayed and refused to listen.
- **Ask:** What does verse 17 show that Judah was guilty of doing against the Lord?
How did this hinder their prayer and worship?
(V. 17: The nation experienced civil failure by not maintaining justice, not relieving the oppressed, and not defending the helpless.)
- **Ask:** How are we hindered in prayer and worship when we sin? Look at the following verses for New Testament examples of sin interfering with worship.
 - o *Matthew 5: 23-24 (reconcile with angry brother before worship)*
 - o *I Peter 3:7 (Prayers hindered if not treat wives correctly)*
 - o *I John 1:6-9, 3:21-22 (individuals fellowship with God is hindered)*
- Discuss as a group how to have accountability to not cherish sin.

Summary Points:

1. God has basic requirements of all civil leaders; and when leaders fail to meet these standards, they sin and face God's judgment.
2. When God's people know His basic moral code standards for civil government, and when they have the legal opportunity to influence their civil leaders accordingly, and when they fail to do so (resulting in rampant civil sin), they themselves sin.
 - a. James 4:17 (Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins)
3. When people realize their sin and repeatedly refuse to turn from that sin, God rejects their worship.

(Connor and Revell, 39-42)

