

# Covering Sin, Part 1

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Proverbs 28 and verse 13: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy." In the opening up of the text thus far we have observed the universal scope of the text. It refers to "he" and "whosoever" in the broadest sense in which those words are used in the Word of God--as broad as the "whosoever" of John 5:24 and John 3:16. We have noted the unchanging force of the text. These are the "shall nots" and the "shalls" of the living God who cannot lie. And then we have noted the specific concern of the text.

Everything focuses upon the issue of sin in the form of transgression, sin when it come to light in the area of rebellion against the norms of God as conscious acts of rebellion. And then further in the opening up of the text, we have sought to ascertain what it means to cover sin sinfully. And we've looked into the Scriptures at many examples of the various coverings which the human heart weaves in an effort to cover its sins. We looked at the covering of shifted responsibility. We looked at the covering of lies, religious activity, rationalization, framing misconceptions of God, finding faults with the instruments of exposure, refusing the means of exposure. And for those of you who were not with us, these were not fanciful descriptions. Each of them was simply an effort to describe coverings for sin, which are given to us in the Word of God itself.

Wherever, whoever, under whatever circumstance sin is covered, God says, "There you will find non-prosperity." We have it from the lips of Him who cannot lie: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper." And if anyone can cover his transgressions and prosper, then God has lied; Jesus Christ was in ignorance when He said concerning the Word of God, "Thy Word is truth", for here would be a three word statement of non-truth. If it is at all possible to cover sin under any circumstances in any place and still to prosper, God has lied. The Scriptures tell us, "God who cannot lie"; therefore, this truth, the results of covered sin, is as changeless as the character of the living God who gave it. "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper."

Now what is the meaning of the word "prosper", simply the meaning of the word itself? Well, it's the general word used in the Old Testament for prosperity, and it means pretty much the same as its usage in the English language. To prosper means to flourish, to succeed, to thrive in a vigorous way, to make good. If we say of a certain man, his business was flourishing, we mean that it was succeeding in a rather marked and vigorous way. If we say, "My garden is really flourishing this summer", we mean all the plants that we planted are growing and growing well and bearing fruit. So the meaning of the word "flourish" is very obvious to even the children amongst us who perhaps could not give a technical definition. But if they went out and saw a scrubby garden with half the plants drooped over half dead, instead of big luscious vegetables, little scrawny ones, and we say to the child, "Is the

garden flourishing?", the kid would say, "No way!" The child would indicate that he understood the word "flourish", even though he couldn't give a technical definition.

But now the matter for our concern this morning (and this is crucial to everything): what is the significance of the use of that word in this text? When the text says, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper [that is, he shall not flourish, he shall not succeed, he shall not thrive in a vigorous way, he shall not make good]", to what is the text referring? Well, let me state the answer first of all negatively. It does not refer necessarily to anything physical, economic, or any other temporal observable prosperity. And I can't underscore that enough. The wicked who cover their sins often do prosper. Well then, what does the word "prosper" mean in this text? The clue is found in the text itself. The structure of Hebrew poetry is such that sometimes the second part of a passage is parallel. Sometimes it's just saying the same thing in different words. But then you have an antithetical statement. In other words, you have a contrast. And the contrast helps us to understand its opposite. You have a statement given here; then an opposite over here, and both opposites help you to understand their counterparts. Now notice, what is the opposite in our text of not prospering? Notice: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain [riches? popularity? long life? good health?]." No, no! What is the opposite of not prospering? Obtaining mercy. Now what is mercy? A physical or spiritual commodity? It's a spiritual commodity. Mercy immediately brings us into the orbit of a man's unseen relationship to the unseen God, His unseen law, the unseen commodity of peace with God, a conscience at rest before God, likeness before God, preparation to meet God, the basis of walking with God. So you see, the antithetical statement in the text itself points us in the direction of the true significance of the word "prosperity". "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper [that is, the prosperity that comes in the only realm that really matters]."

The only realm that ultimately matters is the realm of being right with God, having communion with God, knowing the blessing of God's presence in life and death and the world to come. Therefore, when our text says, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper", it is asserting that the covering of transgressions utterly precludes the conferral or the increase of those distinctively spiritual blessings which are the essence of that life which is life indeed. And if you read into this text economics, if you read into it physical well-being, you are reading something into the text that simply is not there. Now, as we shall see in our subsequent studies, the covering of sin that results in the non-prosperity of the soul will often have physical attendants just as the mercy that comes to the soul will also bring external, physical, economic attendants. But they are incidental and disposed according to the sovereignty of God. We shall not prosper now; we shall not prosper in the future. Two basic time slots: you shall not prosper now; you shall not prosper in the world to come.

As we considered last Lord's Day, each one of us by virtue of being created in the image of God has two inescapable realities stamped upon his inner consciousness: "My deeds are known to God, and God shall bring my deeds into judgment." You can no more escape that conviction than you can escape your humanity. Like it or not, that's as much a part of your humanity as the nose on your face. Ah, when we transgress and conscience is active with respect to that transgression, and then we cover that sin, you know what we do the moment we do that? We bring into our companionship the worst companion in all the world, an accusing conscience. The

worst companion in all the world is an accusing conscience. It is the companion that will be the hell of hells in hell, for Jesus said, "...where the worm dieth not, and the fire is never quenched." It will be the accusing worm of a condemning conscience the damned in hell will know, and know for eternity: "I'm here because I chose my sin for which I'm accountable to the Lord." I say the worst companion in life is an accusing conscience.

But the moment you and I sin and conscience brings accusation, you've got to do one of two things: you've got to try to stifle his mouth; you've got to get him to change his language (you try to do that by putting coverings over the voice of conscience), or in the language of Hebrews 10:22, we flee to a fountain open to sin and uncleanness. And here the Apostle says in that beautiful language, "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience...." The blood of Jesus Christ alone can rid the human heart of that foul companion called an evil conscience because when we come owning our guilt, and we say, "Conscience is telling the truth when conscience speaks according to the objective law of God and says, 'You're guilty, you're culpable, you're liable to judgment.'" And conscience is speaking according to the eternal law, and we say, "Where shall I flee?" We find in the death of Christ that God did punish sin. And conscience can strike in with forgiveness that is grounded in the justice of God, venting itself upon the substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. And when the conscience comes, and in faith we embrace the Lord Jesus, in the language of Hebrews, conscience is sprinkled, and we no longer have an evil conscience.

But until you've come to the blood of cleansing, my friend, the Scripture says covering your sins, you shall not prosper. You have not that peace of conscience that alone can be given in the blood of Christ. And because you know it creates that aversion to God, the accusing, uncleansed conscience is a radical influence both with reference to our dealings with God and with our fellow men. You remember in the garden of Eden, the moment Adam had an accusing conscience, instead of running to God, he ran from God. He tried to hide. Why? Conscience was accusing. And because conscience was accusing him, what happened in the relationship with Eve? In the place of harmony and concord, there was disharmony and enmity and resentment and accusation. Why? He had an accusing conscience. "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper." What happens? There's no pacified conscience through the blood of Christ. That affects us not only Godward but manward. It affected Adam's relationship to Eve, Cain's relationship to Able.

You know why some of you young people are so shifty-eyed; you can't even look your mom and dad straight in the eyeball back to the retina? You know why some of you are so shifty-eyed with your elders at the door? I'll tell you why. You've got an accusing conscience. And because man is made in the image of God, when you're around any man or woman who reflects that image as a believer, it reminds you of your uncleansed conscience before God when you look upon one of His image bearers. And that's why you feel uncomfortable. That's why you're shifty-eyed. That's why there's small talk. There's no looking back to the retinas, no gripping a hand and feeling, as it were, the communion of soul to soul in even a social handshake. Why? I'll tell you why. You've got a companion who not only ruins vertical relationships but horizontal.

Not only will you not have the peace of conscience through the blood of Christ, but you will have none of the peculiar privileges of the children of God. That's the now.

These are the areas in which you'll not prosper now. You will have none of the peculiar privileges of the children of God in covering your sin, in refusing a full and honest confession and forsaking. You've cut yourselves off from the family of God and all of the privileges of that family. Let me just enumerate a few of them.

You have no communion with God. And you see, the tragedy is, as a human being, you were made so that in a real sense, you're not a full human being until you're in communion with God. Woven into the fabric of man's manness was his capacity for and his enjoyment of fellowship with God. That's as much a part of true humanity as nose, ears, and mouth. And if you cover your sins, you shall not prosper. You will have none of that fellowship and communion with the living God. You will have no valid access to God in prayer. How can a man or woman live this life who cannot come to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need? I do not marvel that people have to belt down three or four cocktails at lunch and another three or four at night to keep themselves half numb to the real world. Why? If there's no access to the throne of grace where we can unburden the deepest concerns of our hearts and know that we have a loving Father who hears and answers, it's no wonder. I just marvel that more people don't put a gun to their head and end it all. You can't have that certainty. You see, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear, the Scripture says.

You can have, in the third place, no settled confidence amidst the mysteries and trials of life. You see, the one who's dealt with his sin and found mercy, he can stand upon the statement of Romans 8:28: "All things are working together for my good." What do you have to pull together the seeming inequities, the mysteries of life, the imbalances, the injustices? You have nothing, my friend. That's what God means when He says you shall not prosper. This is no peculiar notion of a cranky preacher. It's God who says you shall not prosper, man, woman, boy, and girl, and all because you've covered sin. But God is so willing to cleanse and purge, but which He will not purge as long as you will to cover.

But tragic as the effects of covered sin are now, for those of you who are out of Christ, the greater tragedy is to be seen in the future. As long as you cover sin, the Scripture says you shall not prosper. And I want very briefly to say just three things under this heading. And may God help you to listen as ones who with me are quickly making their way to that day when we stand before God. If you cover your sins, man, woman, boy, or girl, you shall not prosper in the future. How? You'll die without the comforts of Christ. You'll be summoned to judgment without the protection of Christ. And you'll be sent to the everlasting state without the presence of Christ. That's the price you'll pay for covering your sins.

You'll die without the comforts of Christ. One of the great consolations of the believer, the one who has confessed his sin and forsaken it and found refuge in the blood of Christ, is to know that when that inevitable experience comes and I must die, and there will be the wrenching of soul from body, and that soul goes out into that world it's never entered before, what a consolation to have the words of Jesus ringing in one's ear, distilling into the depths of the heart, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am, there ye may be also." Or the words of John 11: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live;

and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." What a wonderful truth to have the comfort of Christ in death.

Secondly, you'll be summoned to judgment without the protection of Christ. Men are big and bold and brave about their sin in judgment. Well, the day comes when we read in Revelation 6:16, when that day comes and conscience can no longer be stifled and its voice no longer ignored when they see the coming Judge. The language of Revelation 6:16 is graphic. I quote it: "And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." My friend, when you go out yelling for mountains to fall on you, you're in a bad state. Because the judgment was coming, and they knew that the Judge was against them.

Well, as the child of God, the one who has forsaken and confessed his sin, he knows that there's going to be a day in court the likes of which no earthly court ever saw. The Judge who knows all shall actually plead the case of his trial. "He that confesseth Me before men will I confess before My Father." What a wonderful thing to have the Judge say,

"Eternal God, My Father, that man--all the evidence is accurate; all the sins were committed, but, My Father, he fled for refuge to Me and to My righteousness. Father, I plead My death on his behalf. I plead the sum total of that righteousness which is Mine by virtue of My obedience, even unto death."

And the Father will be well-pleased with the plea of the Son. And the Father will not be able to find one iota of just claims of unfulfilled pardon. I tell you, what a wonderful thing to face judgment in the knowledge that we shall have the protection of Christ. But my friend, you go to judgment without that protection, and you'll plead your own cause. And the evidence will be such as will make you cry. You'll die without the comforts of Christ. You'll come into judgment without the protection of Christ.

And finally, you'll be sent into the everlasting state without the presence of Christ. When your covered sin is openly displayed and placarded before the entire moral universe (for Jesus said there is nothing covered but that shall not be made manifest--Luke 12), then my friend, the words I pray God none of you will hear: "Then shall the King say to them that are on His left hand"--and I quote from the Scriptures now--"Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire."

O, I plead with you this morning in the name of Christ, believe what God has said: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy." May you find mercy in the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin.

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