

Covering Sin, Part 2

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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." Having sought to open up from this text and then relating other portions of the Word of God to the text, we have sought to understand what it means to cover sin in a sinful way, the various ways in which the human heart devises coverings for its sin. And we are now occupied with seeking to understand the results of covered sin as described in this text in the few words "shall not prosper." And our application, then, of the text in its truth was primarily to those who are not in a state of grace. As we sought this morning to understand what it means when God says to the unconverted who cover their sins that they shall not prosper, we saw from the Scriptures that this meant at least a number of very frightening things. It means that they shall not prosper now, nor shall they prosper in the future. They will know nothing of a pacified conscience through the blood of Christ, nothing of the peculiar joys of the people of God. And then in the future, they shall die without the comforts of Christ, go to judgment without the protection of Christ, and pass into the everlasting state without the presence of Christ to become what I called in the exposition this morning an eternal exposition of the meaning of the text, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper."

Well, having demonstrated how it is that the unconverted who cover their sins do not and cannot prosper, it is only right that we should see some of the application of this text to the people of God. For it is a tragic reality that the people of God are also involved in this dastardly work of making coverings for their sins. But as we introduce the subject, it is important that you understand what I mean when I say "the application of the text to the people of God."

The first thing I want to do is very briefly describe what I mean by "the people of God." When I say that our concern is to understand what this text says by way of application to a specific group of individuals called the people of God, what do I mean? Well, I mean nothing less than those who are born of God, those who, in the language of the Apostle Paul, have been made new creatures through union with Christ Jesus. I am not speaking of those who have merely made a profession of faith in Christ, who have merely conformed to a religious heritage that has brought them into proximity to the ways and laws and people of Christ. Nor am I referring to those who simply engage in certain number of religious duties that are connected with the church of Christ. When I use the term "the people of God", I mean nothing more or less than those men and women, boys and girls who by the work of the Spirit through the Word have been brought to a conscious awareness of what they are by nature: lost, rebel, guilty, undone sinners who by the same Spirit and the same Word have been brought to that glorious discovery of God's way of pardoning sinners through the work of Jesus Christ. And by the same Word and Spirit, not only have they made that discovery of their need, that discovery of God's remedy for their need in Christ, but they have been brought, in the language of Acts 20:21, to deep, inward

repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. They have, in the words quoted earlier, been constituted new creatures in Christ Jesus. Now that's what I mean by the people of God because that's what the Scripture means when it speaks of the people of God.

Now it is to such people, those who have had the implantation of a principle that commits them to righteousness and holiness, those who have the beginnings of God's mighty work in conforming them to the moral likeness of Jesus Christ. It is such people who are the recipients of such mercies, who have such a glorious destiny, but shame of shames, are yet guilty of covering their sins. And whenever they do, the people of God will find this text coming down upon them with inescapable authority: "He that covereth his transgressions [even though he be a child of God] shall not prosper."

But I want you to see some of the ways in which the child of God does not prosper when he covers his sins under the concept of forfeiture. I've fished for sometime for a word that would most powerfully and clearly set forth the teaching of the Word of God, and the word that I was fixed upon is the word "forfeiture". Now when you forfeit something, you give up or relinquish something because of a crime, a fault, or a neglect. And so when the child of God covers his sins, his non-prospering is seen primarily in terms of that which he forfeits. First of all, he does not profit when he covers his sins because he comes to the forfeiture of access to God in prayer. When the child of God sins, particularly in the area of transgression, and conscious of his area of transgression against the law of God, he does not immediately flee for cleansing to the blood of Christ and renewing and quickening by the Spirit of Christ, one of the first ways in which he no longer prospers is precisely here. There is the forfeiture of access to God in prayer.

No privilege of the child of God is of greater worth to him than the liberty of access to His God in prayer in the spirit of sonship. The Apostle says in Galatians 4: "And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And one of the surest marks that you're a true Christian is that when I say there is no privilege of greater worth to the Christian than the privilege of access to God in prayer, your heart leaps out and says a spontaneous "Amen! It is so." What is wealth; what is health if there is a brassy heaven? But if there is an open heaven so that when we pray, we are conscious of having access to God, entering into that most intimate form of communion possible to the sons of men here upon this earth, we are conscious of the unspeakable privilege of that access.

But (and here we must be careful to understand the teaching of the Word of God) though the ground of this access is outside of us in Jesus Christ, the condition of that access is a good conscience within us. Turn, please, to 1 John 3:21: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because [here's a cause-effect relationship] we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." You see what John is saying? John is not saying that we have built up a certain amount of merit by our obedience that now makes our obedience the ground of access to God in prayer. No, remember, it is John who recorded the words of Jesus "I am the way, the truth, the life; no man cometh unto Father but by Me." It is John who said, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins." No, John has not forgotten his theology of the objective provision for sinners, being found in Christ and in the work of Christ. But John is saying there is an

inward personal condition if that access is to be enjoyed, and here it is: "If our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we [are keeping] His commandments." What's the opposite of keeping His commandments? Well, surely it is covering our sins, for whenever sin or transgression is detected in a believer, the commandment of God comes home to his conscience that he is to confess that sin. He is to turn from it; he is to acknowledge it before his God and seek cleansing in the blood of Christ. Therefore, when our text says, ""He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper", in its application to the child of God, it is saying this:

"Child of God, when you transgress and rather than go through whatever kind of spiritual agony is necessary to come to true confession before God and where necessary before man, anything short of that, you're covering your sin, and covering your sin, you will not prosper. There will be the forfeiture of access to God in prayer."

The psalmist stated those well-known words in Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." If I regard, that is, if I countenance iniquity, I'm conscious of its presence, but I throw the blanket of rationalization over it, I throw the covering of shifted responsibility, I throw the covering of a lie, I throw the covering of refusing to drag it out into the blazing light of the law and the Gospel. If I regard iniquity, if I countenance iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

Now I did not say that God will paralyze a Christian so that he cannot say a prayer. Many of us have gone to our closet many times to say our prayers, but there's been no access. There's been no experimental communion with God. Why? Because God is going to be true to His Word: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper." And because we have covered sin and regarded iniquity, God has refused to us the blessing of access. There is no Christian who has walked with God for any length of time at all who does not know to his bitterness how real this is. He attempts to draw near to God and do something more than say his prayers. He wants to engage God in prayer. He wants access. And every time he gets down to serious business, that sin that he's been covering looms before him.

Are some of you living monuments of the text? You're covering sin. O yes, there's been some clever rationalization. There's been some very fancy footwork as you've woven your lies, as you've spun out that very clever shifting of responsibility. But you're covering your sin, and you're a living monument to this text: "shall not prosper." Why? For some of you, it's been weeks and months since you've access to God in prayer that you once knew in the past. And now you say your prayers, but you have no access. Why? Because God's Word is true: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper." Child of God, this text is for our warning. Is anything worth the forfeiture of God in prayer? Is anything worth that? Not if you've tasted it.

In the second place, there will not only be the forfeiture of access to God in prayer; there will be as fulfillment of this text the forfeiture of joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. Next to love, these are the great fruits of the Spirit. One of the great truths (Galatians 5:22): "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...." See how they're put at the top of the list. You find a similar centrality of emphasis in a passage such as Romans 14:17. As the Apostle is treating the whole subject of things indifferent and what a Christian ought to do with things that are not clearly condemned by the law of God. And in this setting, the things were external matters, and the Apostle wants to inject a principle

that ought to govern all such discussion. So he says, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking [it does not consist in these external things], but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." You see, the predominant characteristic of those who have been introduced to the kingdom of God is that they stand upon the ground of an imputed righteousness in the favor of God. And they have the inward delight of joy and peace imparted by the Holy Spirit. Now when the child of the kingdom transgresses and does not flee to Christ for cleansing and have his conscience sprinkled anew, what happens? There is the forfeiture of that joy and peace of the Holy Spirit.

A classic example is given to us in the history of King David, the David whose Psalms are full of joy and peace, which are the hallmark of those in the kingdom of righteousness. What happens to those commodities that are found again and again in Psalm after Psalm? When David sinned, we find in the language of Psalm 32 that there is the forfeiture of this joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. Notice the language of Psalm 32, one of David's great penitential Psalms. In the first two verses, he speaks of the blessedness of those whose sins have been covered by God. But then he reflects upon the misery of those who cover their own sins and will not confess and forsake them. And notice how vigorous is the language. Verse 3: "When I kept silence...." There was not that agreeing with God about the heinous nature of his sin. There was not confession. There was casting over the cloak of silence and rationalization. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

Do you see what he said? In place of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, there was misery and disturbance and inward disruption of the soul. He describes his condition in the language of groaning all the day long. All you need to do is hear a person groan once in a day and that's enough to help you to never forget it: the groan of pain or disappointment or the news of tragedy. He said he groaned the entire day. It was so opposite of his state of joy that he said his moisture was changed into the drought of summer. When a man cries himself until there are no more tears, he has nothing but the dry sobs of a broken spirit. What happened? He sinned. And instead of confessing and forsaking his sin, he covered it. And in covering it, God said, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper." And so he forfeited joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

Mark it well, no true joy and peace will ever be found but in righteousness and the true penitence that leads to righteousness. Now there is a false peace and a false joy that bypasses an honest dealing with sin. This is one of my major complaints against modern movements that claim to have a corner on the work of the Holy Spirit and get people all happy and joyous. They do not deal with sin. "Seek an experience." And as one of their writers said, "It will be like having gin in your orange juice." And they talk about the tingles down the spine as someone laid hands upon them, the feeling of liquid love flowing over them. My friend, where is the dealing with sin?

If you've forfeited joy and peace because of sin, there's no way to its restoration but to go to the place where the Spirit of joy and peace was grieved and renew the communication of those blessed commodities. And having dealt with those points of controversy, plea that the Spirit will impart those graces again. Isn't that Psalm 51. Look at the language of it. Having owned his sin, and not until then--mark it, not until then--the first 7 verses are preoccupied with the reality and the ugliness and the guilt

of sin. "My sin," he says, "my guilt, my wickedness, my uncleanness." Now he dares to say in verse 8, "Make me to hear joy and gladness...[O Lord, it was my sin that brought the forfeiture of joy in the Holy Spirit.]" "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." Then and only then would he pray for the restoration of joy. David knew that to seek the restoration of joy without dealing with the occasions of its forfeiture was to try to make mockery of God. And my friend, you can try to chuck yourself under the chin with a hundred verses from a promise box that is suppose to make you happy, but if you're covering sin, you shall not prosper in having true joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

Now a false peace can be conjured up by the flesh as well as promoted by false prophets. You just read the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's great complaint was every time he tried to tell the people, "You've got peace, but it's not peace that is kissing righteousness." The false prophets came along, and in the language of Jeremiah, said, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace." You better fear peace and joy that are divorced from righteousness as much as you fear hell itself. "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper."

Child of God, what sin is worth the broken bones of forfeited peace? If the joy of the Lord is our strength, in the language of Nehemiah, then the absence of that joy is our weakness. What sin is worth being so weak, so crippled. O, I plead with you, young people, adults, save the loss. Hear the word of God from the pen of Solomon: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy [mercy with its taproots in God's eternal love, mercy that flows through the wounds of Christ, mercy that is now available in the promise of Christ, in the living, exalted Christ]." Seek Him; seek the mercy that is to be found in Him.

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