

# “Love Will Cover a Multitude of Sins”

*by Bryan Gibson*

“Hatred stirs up strife, but **love covers all sins**” (Proverbs 10:12). This Old Testament passage may very well be the one cited in two New Testament passages, although one appears in a more abbreviated form: “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for **‘love will cover a multitude of sins’**” (1 Peter 4:8). “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and **cover a multitude of sins**” (James 5:19-20).

If there’s anything in the world we should want to cover, it would be sin. And that’s exactly what love seeks to do—cover it, or put a lid on it. But not just any love will do. What some call love will excuse sin, or perhaps even glorify it. The love that covers sin is the love accompanied by “knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9), the love that “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6), the love that hates sin and loves righteousness (Hebrews 1:9).

In trying to understand what it means to cover sin, let’s think, first, in terms of the covering God provides—the forgiveness of sin one receives from God, through Jesus Christ. Some folks try various tactics (hide them, deny them, blame someone else) to cover their own sins, but it just won’t work: “He who **covers** his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). We’ve got to “come clean” and come to God on His terms if we expect to be forgiven. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose **sin is covered**” (Psalms 32:1). “You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have **covered all their sin**” (Psalms 85:2). Going back to the James 5 passage cited earlier, if one among us goes astray from the truth, it’s this covering we want him to receive—that’s why we make every effort to turn him “from the error of his way.” What we know, and what we hope to get him to understand, is that as long as his sins are “uncovered” (Ezekiel 21:24), he’s in a whole lot of trouble.

We should also think in terms of the forgiveness we extend to others, especially in cases where others may have done us some personal wrong. Too often, we do the very opposite of covering—we broadcast it to others, when what we should do is seek reconciliation. “He who **covers a transgression** seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends” (Proverbs 17:9). Telling everyone what so and so did to me, giving the cold shoulder, retaliation—that’s how hatred behaves. Love wants to put a lid on it as soon as possible.

We’ve focused on the forgiveness aspect of this covering, but perhaps there is another way to apply the expression, “love covers a multitude of sins.” If we truly hate sin, shouldn’t we also try to put a lid on the practice of it? There’s nothing uglier than sin, nothing more destructive, so whatever godly means we can use to put the brakes on it, we need to do it. No, we won’t eliminate it completely, but we can sure try, and here are just some of the means we can use toward that end.

- 1) We can give liberally (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), so that men can be supported to take the gospel “into all the world” (Mark 16:15-16). Remember, the very design of the gospel is to change “slaves of sin” into “slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).
- 2) We can put the word of God into as many hearts as possible, with sound, balanced teaching—congregationally, at home, and wherever else we can find someone willing to listen. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalms 119:11).
- 3) We can administer firm, consistent discipline of our children (Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-24; 29:15; 29:15, 17), discipline designed to drive the “foolishness” out of them (Proverbs 22:15), and then replace it with “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).
- 4) We can offer encouraging words to our brethren, so that they “do not grow weary while doing good” (Galatians 6:9). Stay busy doing good and we hardly even have time to sin.
- 5) When needed, we can also issue words of warning and rebuke, words designed to turn one away from sin (Revelation 3:19).
- 6) When a fellow-Christian refuses to turn from sin, we can “withdraw” ourselves, or refuse to “keep company” with that person. The design of this collective action is to make them as uncomfortable as possible in their sin, to bring them to shame, to get them to repent and come back to the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).
- 7) We can pray for deliverance from temptation and sin—both for ourselves and for others. “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13). “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18; see also 4:14-16).
- 8) We can set a good example of faithful obedience to the Lord. What a fearful thought, that we may have led others into sin by our poor example (Matthew 18:6-7). On the positive side, who knows how many people we may save from a life of sin by the power of example? Joshua’s example seemed to have a great impact on his generation, and on generations to come (Joshua 24:31), and ours has the potential to do the very same.
- 9) We can quit squandering the abilities and opportunities given to us by God. Just imagine the number of people we could help spiritually, the number of sins we could “cover,” if we better utilized both (see Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).