

Thursday Evening Bible Class.

18th November 2021

Covering Transgressions

Proverbs 17:9

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Proverbs 17:9: *9 He that covers a transgression seeks love; but he that repeats a matter separates very friends.*

This useful and helpful passage does present questions when thinking about it.

1) Does this mean that all misdemeanours should be covered up, and ignored?

2) Is this a contradiction of Matthew 18:16? *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.* – in other words, you may deduce from this passage that if you seek help of others to resolve a matter, you are repeating a transgression and therefore cannot be seeking love.

To answer Question 1.

What does it mean to cover sins? Who is qualified to cover sins?

Ultimately all sin is a transgression against God. He has defined what sin is, which is a cutting across His commandments, and knowing to do good and refusing to do it. Therefore the way of the covering for sin – through forgiveness - belongs to God, as He is the one who has been offended. This can be seen in the prayer of David in Psalm 51:4. Even though David sinned against Uriah the Hittite, he realised in truth, he had sinned against God - *4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou might be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.* Therefore, forgiveness of sins belongs to God, and Him only – Psalm 32:1,2: *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. He has provided a way of sins and transgressions to be covered through the forgiveness of sins, through the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, who has provided the covering – not of fig leaves but of his own sinless life, given as the price paid, the ransom required. See 1 John 1: 7 -9: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God hates sin - Psalms 5:4-5: *For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.* Habakkuk 1:13: *...Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity:* It can be safely deduced then, that sins must be dealt with in a proper way, owned up to, admitted, and acknowledged. Through understanding, there should be repentance shown, and a new direction taken, only then can sins be forgiven by God.

How can we cover sins? How then can anyone else take it upon themselves to cover transgressions as this Proverb advises? What can it mean? In light of the above clear Biblical teachings, the Proverb **MUST** be taken in context. It is a couplet. The first part of the Proverb is joined to the second part. The first part is given as a contrast to the second.

The Proverb is speaking of transgression, or a matter between two people. The Proverb explains it can be dealt with in two ways.

1. Covering the transgression
2. Repeating the matter

As God hates sin, will He be pleased to see sin repeated? A transgression doubled? Of course not. Does God expect those who trust in Him, and have faith in Him to behave like the exemplar of Truth – Jesus Christ? Of course He does. Thus if we seek to be forgiven by God, we should be as ready to forgive those who trespass against us (Matthew 6:14-15) *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Process of Covering

The Proverb is then dealing with a situation when we are sinned against, or when we have been offended. How we react, will determine an outcome which can make the original sin diminish, and help the other person, or we can expand and make the matter worse. The covering of the sin, is not necessarily the end of the matter, for the offence may also be against God, and that needs to be explained to the sinner. But as we have been forgiven so it should be our first reaction to forgive that person, and the sin is, as if it had not happened – against us. To completely cover the sin, that person must confess it before God, and seek His forgiveness, and that needs to be emphasised.

Seeking Love

This reaction shows the presence of love. Proverbs 10:12: *Hatred stirs up strifes: but love covers all sins.* 1 Peter 4:8: *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

Love not just to a brother, but to even an unbeliever, for anyone can offend us, some of us are easily offended, especially when we don't get much sleep, or are ratty and irritable. But the willingness to overlook a transgression must be our reaction, just as Christ said to those who crucified him: *Lord, Forgive them, they know not what*

they do: This passage in James is also useful: James 5:20: *Let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

Repeating a Matter

The Proverb warns that repeating a matter – leaving the transgression uncovered, and making it even worse, has the effect of separating friends. Even VERY friends. It could be the cause whereby that person could become estranged from God – *the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother*. Yes our intransigence and stubbornness in holding a grudge and going around and telling all and sundry may cause great harm. Yes, it may help us, by getting rid of a burden, but how has it helped that other person. So we read Proverbs 25:9: *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:*

A couple of examples

Genesis 9:22: *And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.* His reaction was not the best. Did he show love? – which covers a multitude of sins, even someone being drunk. No. He could have quickly popped some clothes over his Dad, made him comfortable, and put a jug of water by his head. But no. He was concerned only with his own feelings. Oh, my Father, who has saved the world, cannot even look after himself – true, Ham was shocked, let down even, but to rush out and go and tell his brothers – what did that really achieve. Now Noah's weakness was known by three other people, not just one. He had broken the trust between him and his friend – his own dear Dad. Yes, repeating a matter, had separated friends.

1 Samuel 22:9: *Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub.* This man showed he had no love in his heart. All he had was ambition. Thus in repeating a matter, he

committed treachery against the nation, and against God. He separated friends because he caused the Priest of God to be murdered, and the Lord's Anointed to be a fugitive for even longer. What a wicked man. He could have kept quiet, and maintained peace there, and the matter would have died down, instead he added fuel to the fire.

Is there ever a time to repeat a matter?

We return to the beginning of our comments, and answer question #2. We must always be ready to forgive trespasses against us personally as quickly as we can and resolve the matter. On occasion it is not always as simple as that. The individual may continually offend in the same way repeatedly. No matter; Jesus said: Matthew 18:21-22: *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*

Jesus also explains – you need to make sure that the person knows that they have offended you. Matthew 18:15 *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.* Again, this is not easy, as the person may well not be approachable, or the issue is complex. It may be that you need advice in handling the problem. But the point of the proverb is to show love, to protect friendships, to protect the reputation of the offender, if the matter can be dealt with and covered. All is well. However, if there is no change, or repentance. If the situation shows that the other person actually really does have a problem, do we just sweep it under the carpet, and pretend it isn't happening? The point of the Proverb is to show love and protect friendships. Jesus makes the same point here in Matthew 18. The point of the right approach detailed by Jesus is to gain your brother. ... *thou hast gained thy brother.* The time may come where to gain your brother, help is

needed. Jesus then explains: 16 *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.* Does this involve repeating a matter? Undoubtedly. Although there is the necessity in showing love, to spare details where possible. But in continuing in the offence, the other person is already repeating the matter! In seeking help, you are trying to stop this repetition. Obviously, this is no time to broadcast the situation, but seeking wise minds, one or two more, to bring their admonition also to bear, so that a joint approach underlines the severity of the matter – always with the aim to gain the brother, show love, and protect the friendship – with God. Ham, may have tried the quiet and discreet approach, but it may not have done the trick, instead Noah may have started to misbehave and come out of the tent. Then it would have been the time to get his brothers.

It is time to look at ourselves. How would we like to be treated? With love? What are our motives? Do we repeat a matter to make ourselves look better? As we repeatedly sin, and repeatedly ask for forgiveness, so we should repeatedly forgive, and forgive again. In gaining our brother, we hope to gain a friend, but we will certainly BE a friend, - and that is acceptable to God, and to His Glory.

Brother Terry