

What to do about sin

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[0:00] Proverbs chapter 28 and verse 13. Proverbs chapter 28 and verse 13. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Now this morning we're looking at the basic matter concerning our religion, which is faith. And tonight we look at the basic matter concerning our human condition, which is sin. All of the problems that we have in life, as people and as a society, can all be traced back to sin and particularly can be traced back to the fall.

Man didn't last long in paradise. Sin rears its ugly head very early on. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's simple and straightforward command in the Garden of Eden.

They were not to eat of the fruit of one particular tree in the Garden. A very simple, straightforward command. And they disobeyed.

[1:24] And since then, the problem has been a constant one. Because we all are descended from Adam and Eve and we all are guilty of sin along with them.

The whole reason why Jesus Christ came into the world was to counter the effects of sin. He came to represent man as a man without sin.

Giving to God the obedience that was due to his name and due to himself. And he came to bear the penalty for sin.

The penalty for the sins of others to make it possible. Indeed, it goes further than that. To achieve for his people the fact that they are able to have eternal life instead of eternal punishment in heaven.

And so, the Bible, on one level, is basically about sin. It's about sin's consequences. The way in which it is treated by God and the way in which it is dealt with by God and removed.

[2:35] If we were to remove Genesis chapter 3 or reading. If that wasn't the case, then the rest of the Bible would probably have to remove it as well.

Because the rest of the Bible follows on from Genesis chapter 3. And so, we come to a verse this evening which tells us about sin. Which encapsulates in a few words what God has done with regard to sin and how we are to react to that.

And although this verse is in the Old Testament, we can say that it still applies today. And we can put a richer content to it because we know how God dealt with sin.

We can bring into this verse the teaching of the New Testament. And so, who is this verse for? Well, this verse is for everybody.

There's not a single person here tonight for whom this verse is irrelevant. If we are still in our sins, if we're still unconverted people, then we need this verse very badly.

[3:55] We need to know the content of this verse. If we do not trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, then it's vital that we attend to this verse.

And that we carry out what is required of us. And even if we are converted, even if we are true Christians in the biblical sense of the word, well, we'll know that we are constantly troubled by sin. The Christian life is a constant battle against sin. What happens as we go on in our Christian lives is that the layers of sin are stripped off us.

And the layers of our inner life are stripped away. And what do we find? We find depths of sin that we didn't really realize existed. We find sometimes frightening depths of sin in our own hearts.

And so this verse is for us because what it speaks of, repentance, is something that we must constantly practice. It's not something we do once for all.

[5:04] It's something we must constantly practice. And so this verse is for every single one of us tonight. And God speaks to us through this verse and he challenges us about our sinfulness.

So let's look first of all at what we are to avoid. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper. Now everybody wants to prosper.

And so this is understood by the writer of Proverbs. And so we can be sure that he means that we are to avoid covering our sin.

Now what does that mean? Well it means to refuse to acknowledge our sins. To realize our sins. To realize that they are there. Our sins must be covered.

Now that's what we're singing about in Psalm 32. Blessed is he whose sin is covered. But it has to be covered in the right way. That's what the psalmist says later on.

[6:07] At least in the metrical versions. That he says that his sin is not covered. He has opened it up before God.

The sin has to be covered in the right way. The only way to cover sin is not to, as it were, shoot it under the carpet. The only way to cover sin is to cover it with the blood of Jesus Christ.

We have to bring our sins before him. And so we are not to cover sin in the sense that the writer here means.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper. He's not meaning there covering them with the blood of Christ. He is meaning more what we call a cover-up. A cover-up.

We all know what a cover-up is. It's when there's some scandal and those involved in it try to hash it up. And they try to avoid this news coming out. And that's what the writer is speaking about here.

[7:10] If we cover up our sins. Now how do we do that? What sort of ways do human beings cover up their sins? Human beings are very ingenious.

And some of the greatest ingenuity is in avoiding the responsibility for sin. Let's think of some of the ways in which people make excuses for their sins.

And try to cover up their sins. One way is by refusing to acknowledge them as sin. Yes, people will say there are such things as sins.

But sin is something really nasty and serious. If you steal from someone, that's sin. If you are to murder someone or to beat them up, that's sin.

But sin is only something that's for the evil members of society. They're not part of the life of a good, upright citizen of our land.

[8:12] And people will say, well, yes, of course, I'm imperfect. But I don't commit these gross sins. And so, I'm not a sinner. But the standard is not what we think is serious.

But what God says is serious. The standard for what is sin is not what we think. But what is revealed to us in the word of God.

We have the Ten Commandments. And as we know, I'm sure, the Ten Commandments go much, much deeper than simply outward obedience to these commands.

They go to the heart. They go to our thoughts and our attitudes. These commandments deal with our inner life.

We are to love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength. And in many, many ways, we fall short with regard to that.

[9:18] And one of the reasons, as we're saying, is that we simply refuse to recognize what God calls sin. We allow for many things that we do in our lives, saying they're quite acceptable.

But in actual fact, God would call them sin. So we have to be very careful that we don't make a cover-up in this way. That we ignore what God's word says.

Instead, we are to study God's word, absorb its truth, and see what it says about our lives. And when it condemns something as sin, we must acknowledge that.

But then there are some people who will acknowledge that. They will acknowledge that much of their imperfection is actually sin. But then they'll say, well, it doesn't really matter.

They're not that serious. Yes, there are serious sins. It's a serious sin to murder someone. It's a serious sin to be involved in an armed robbery.

[10:29] It's a serious sin to rape someone. These are all very serious sins. But surely, the other sins are not that serious. People will say, surely it's not sinful.

It's not serious. It might be sinful by definition, but it's not that serious to have lustful thoughts. Or to have thoughts of hatred, or of envy, or of jealousy.

After all, everybody does that. I wonder if that's the way we think. We might say it's harmless to have the desire to be wealthy and rich.

But the Bible calls it covetousness. We might say it's harmless to spend the Sabbath day doing recreational activities.

But God's word says it's to be for the worship of God. And the reason why we fail to do this, fail to recognise how serious our sins are, is once again because we're using human judgement.

[11:40] We are judging by ourselves. We are judging by ourselves. And we think, well, something that doesn't outwardly harm somebody else, can't be very serious.

That's the way people argue these days. They argue about things that are right and wrong in these terms. If something doesn't harm somebody else, then it's alright.

But that's not the way the Bible estimates the seriousness of sin. And this is something that all of us need to realise anew. Perhaps realise for the first time.

The seriousness of sin doesn't arise from our estimate of it. The seriousness of sin arises out of the fact that it is a sin against a holy God.

It arises out of the dignity and honour of the one who is sinned against. Now that puts a completely different complexion on sin.

[12:45] God is an infinitely holy God. He is awesomely holy. And so any sin, any deviation from his word, from what he has said in his word, any deviation from that is a gross insult to this infinitely holy God.

And so the small things that don't seem to be that serious to us are serious in the eyes of God. And that is a rather frightening thought to us.

But let's try and keep it in mind. Let's not be tricked by Satan into thinking that the little sins that we commit are not serious.

They are very serious indeed. Each one of them desires eternal punishment. It is because of the honour and the glory of the one who is sinned against.

So when we are tempted to sin, remember what we must do. We must remember who we are sinning against. We are sinning against God. Another way of covering up sin is people who don't admit that they are sinners.

[14:11] People who admit they're sinners, but they say that some sins are not really that important. But another way of covering it up is by making excuses for our sin.

And that is the tendency that we have to blame other people. That's what we saw in our reading. Adam, he was the one who was tackled first in the matter by God.

What did he say? The woman that you gave me. She gave me the fruit. And I ate. He's blaming others. He's blaming Eve, but subtly and indirectly, he's blaming God.

The woman that you gave me. And then God goes to Eve and she says, well the serpent was the one to blame. Don't blame me. The serpent's the one you're looking for. He was the one who tempted me.

Now we can accuse others of being guilty of our sins quite easily. It's something that the human mind always seeks to do.

[15:16] We can blame Adam for our sins. In a sense that's true. Because when Adam fell into sin, so did we as his descendants. But we can't just say, this is the way I'm made.

I'm a sinner by nature, so I can't help it. That's the way we sometimes argue. Like Eve, we blame Satan. We say, the temptation was too strong.

Satan came at me and he tempted me with this and I sinned. Not my fault. It's Satan's fault. And then we can blame God as well.

We can say, he made me this way. If you're such a great God who has control over my circumstances, well, it can't be my fault that my circumstances are such that I fell into sin.

I can't help it. It's in my nature. If we're bad tempered, for example, we may say, well, that's the way I am. That's my nature.

[16:23] But that's no excuse. Maybe we are more hot tempered than our neighbour in some ways. But it's still no excuse. This is what James says in his letter.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.

Drawn away of his own lust. There's something in ourselves that allows us to be drawn away into sin. We're not to make excuses for our sin.

Any of these excuses I mentioned or any others you can think of. Our attitude should be the attitude that Job had. When he was faced with his sin, eventually, what did he say?

Behold, I am vile. What shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my man. In other words, Job is saying, there's nothing I can say.

[17:32] I can say absolutely nothing in my own defence. I am vile. And we have to realise that. We have to realise that that is the way we are by nature.

And, even if we are believers, sin still has a grip on us to a certain degree. If we try to cover up our sins, well, what does the verse tell us?

We will not prosper. We will not prosper means we will have poverty, spiritual poverty. We will remain, if we are unbelievers, we will remain in that condition.

And it will lead us to the ultimate spiritual poverty of hell. That is what will happen to those who remain in their sin.

And even if we are believers and we allow sin to take a hold of us, what happens? Well, we become weak specimens of Christianity.

[18:37] And we will not achieve very much for the Saviour. And so let us make sure that we do not make any excuse whatsoever for our sins.

Let's make sure that we don't ignore the small things in our view that we do that are wrong. But let's bring everything, our actions, our words, our thoughts, under the microscope of Scripture.

And there we'll see things as they really are. Scripture speaks about all the evil thoughts, the envy, the jealousy, the hatred, the lust. These things are sin and they are serious because they are against a holy God.

But then we see, having seen what to avoid, we see the proper way to deal with our sins. It's not to cover them up, but we find, whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

There are two aspects of it spoken here, but together they present to us what we call the idea of repentance. There are two aspects to that, confessing our sins and forsaking our sins.

[20:05] Let's look at these in turn. We are to confess our sins. What does that mean? We are to admit our sins. We are not to cover them up. We are to open them out before God.

We are to admit them. We are to allow God's light to shine into the depths of our heart and to show up all the darkness that's in that heart. We have got to realise that we ourselves are responsible for our sins.

that we have no excuse that we are responsible for them. We are to confess our sins. Confess them before God, not to some priest.

Although there is a place for confessing our sins to one another, it says that in James chapter 5, confess your faults one to another and especially that's true if we've wronged someone.

We should confess our faults to them. But that's only the first step. Perhaps tonight after thinking about all these different types of sins and the ways in which the human nature tries to cover them up, maybe we do realise that we are sinners and maybe we do confess that we have sinned.

[21:24] But let me assure you that confession by itself is not enough. there are two parts to it. It's really quite frightening to look in the scriptures and see how many people there were who confessed their sins but did not find forgiveness.

I want to just mention some of them. Think of Pharaoh in the time of Moses and Aaron and the plagues. When the plagues hit, what does Pharaoh say?

He says the same sort of thing on many occasions. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin. He said the right things. He confessed his sin. But there was no repentance at heart. There was no change at heart. And that's the other part of it you see. It's those who confess and forsake their sins.

[22:34] They're the ones who find mercy. There was no change of heart in Pharaoh. His heart was hardened. Think of Balaam.

Balaam's spiritual condition was such that his ass had more spiritual insight than he had. They asked saw the angel of the Lord.

But what do we find? Balaam said. And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned. But if you read about Balaam, even though he made some great prophecies, some wonderful prophecies about the Messiah and about how God's people would grow and prosper.

Yet he met a bad end. Why? Because although he confessed his sins, there was no change of heart. No change of heart at all.

Think of King Saul. On one occasion, he was told to destroy the Amalekites. He didn't do so.

[23:50] He was told to destroy them, everything about them. Because they were evil in God's eyes. And the people of Israel were to be God's messengers of judgment against the Amalekites.

But Saul failed to do so. He spared Agag, the king. He spared the best of the flocks. Now he said he was doing this for the best of reasons, the best of motives.

He was going to keep these flocks to sacrifice to God. Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to say?

He was keeping the best of the flocks so that he could make a big sacrifice to God.

But that wasn't the way that God saw it. When Samuel came, he said this, Hath the Lord with great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. And later on we read, And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words.

[25:06] But there was no change in Saul's heart. And Saul meets a bad end as well. perhaps the most frightening example of all is that of Judas Iscariot, one of the Lord's disciples, one who is with them over three years of ministry, one who no doubt was engaged in preaching the gospel of the kingdom and casting out demons and healing the sick.

And yet what happens? He betrays his Lord. And we find later on that when Judas which had betrayed him when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself.

And that means there he changed his mind about the thirty pieces of silver. It doesn't mean repentance in the proper sense of the word. And brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.

he had deep sorrow over his sin. Very solemn this. But it wasn't a godly sorrow that Paul speaks about that leads to repentance.

And so these four examples should make us think most of us, if not all of us, will be sufficiently well versed in the Bible to know that we are sinners.

[26:40] sinners. We might even have some idea of how serious our sin is before God, just as Pharaoh did. I have sinned against your God, he says to Moses.

But there must be more than just admitting that. There must be more than mere confession of sin. And what is that something more? Well we're told, whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins.

We are to forsake them, we are to renounce them, we are to turn our back on them. Now this idea of repentance that we have in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the various words that are used for this convey to us the idea of turning.

Turning away from something, turning to something else. Now we can only be pointing in one direction at a time. We're like the needle of a compass, we can only point in one direction at a time. And we are to turn from sin. Sin is the direction in which we point by nature. But we're not simply to turn away from sin, we are to turn to something else.

[27:56] At this point we have to bring in the richer teaching of the New Testament here. Because included in this idea of forsaking, is that we

turn away from sin, but the New Testament makes it clear that we turn to God.

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, reminds them of how he turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. That's repentance.

They turn from their idols to God in order to serve him. There must be a forsaking of sins. repentance. Now it doesn't mean that we turn from some sins to other sins.

That's one way that people might look on repentance, but it's not that. It's not turning from some sins into other sins. It's not turning from more sin to less sin.

It's not turning from frequent sin to occasional sin. It is turning from sin to Christ and to no sin. We turn with, as the Catechism says, with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience.

[29:14] This forsaking of sin is accompanied by a genuine desire in our hearts and a real effort made to obey God in the proper way.

So we turn from sin to God in Christ. We seek to follow his way. We trust in Jesus Christ when we take it from the New Testament perspective.

We forsake our sin and turn to Jesus Christ for our sins to be forgiven. And we go on serving him and we submit to his lordship and we seek to live a holy life.

That's what it means to forsake our sins. And so instead of going on in our sin, we seek to be holy as God is holy and as he commands us to be.

We are to be holy because he is holy. We are to be increasingly conformed to the example of Jesus Christ. Now you might be saying, well you can't do that.

[30:23] It's impossible. Yes it is impossible for us. We turn from sin to Christ and then gradually we turn away again because of our weakness. But we turn to Christ again in repentance and we turn away.

And hopefully every time we turn away, we are turning away a little bit less and turning back to Christ and following his way a little bit more. the realities are that we need to repent of our sins and confess our sins and forsake them every day of our lives.

Because in our weakness we continue to sin. We don't become sinless when we've come to faith in Christ. But although we turn away we should never be back at where we were before.

And if we do that, what will happen? Well, what do we see here in our text? Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

We will find that we will be forgiven for our sins. No matter how serious they were in our own eyes, never mind the eyes of God, no matter how serious our sins are, we will be forgiven, we will find mercy.

[31:38] We will not receive what we deserve. Now, the writer doesn't say how that's going to happen. The writer doesn't tell us how we will be forgiven and how we will find mercy.

We find that more in the New Testament. But let me emphasise this, it's not because of our repentance. It's not in the sense that by repenting, by confessing our sins and forsaking them, that somehow we deserve to be forgiven.

No, the word here is mercy. It's not to do with things we deserve, it's to do with not receiving things that we deserve, the punishment and wrath of God against sin.

So let's never think that because we have repented of our sins, that God is obliged to forgive us. No, he forgives us out of his mercy.

This is what someone has said about it. even our tears of repentance need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Isn't that striking?

[32:45] Even our tears of repentance, and true repentance brings tears from time to time, brings real sorrow, godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Even our tears of repentance need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb because even that repentance is itself tainted by sin.

We are utterly dependent on the mercy of God. And if we turn from our sins, we will find that mercy. That word mercy is derived from the word for a womb.

It's the mercy shown by a mother for a child. That's the sort of compassion that is shown here. And we are in a sense, as God's creatures, the children of God.

And he has great compassion in these poor creatures of his who have wasted things, who have turned away from him and rebelled and missed out on all that blessing they could have had

because of their sin.

And yet God has compassion upon them. Compassion upon these helpless little creatures. So that's what the text says.

[34:01] He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Well, let's ask ourselves, tonight have we complied with these requirements?

What if we are not converted? What if we are not a Christian? Christian? Well, we need to follow this text and we need to follow it immediately.

It is a matter of the most, the greatest urgency. We need the mercy of God. What we deserve is eternal punishment. And if we are still in that condition, we need to comply with this.

We need to cry out to God to give us the strength to comply with it. we need to make sure that we don't cover up our sins anymore, that we do away with all the excuses and we cry out to God and say, I'm a sinner, I deserve nothing but your wrath and curse forevermore.

Please will you save me? Please will you forgive me? Please will you give me the strength to confess my sins openly and to turn away from them? And the way in which we do that is by faith in Jesus Christ.

[35:22] We trust in him, we turn from our sins to Christ, trusting that he has taken away the penalty for our sins and that in him we have the righteousness that we need to be accepted with God.

What about those of us who are converted people? Those of us, for example, who will be preparing to go to the Lord's table next Lord's day? We also need to comply with this text.

Every day of our lives we need to comply with it. We need to receive mercy from God. It's amazing isn't it that God doesn't treat us in exactly the way our sins deserve.

Because if we are his people we are his children and he doesn't condemn us any longer. There is no condemnation. He will show his fatherly displeasure. He will discipline us.

Just as human parents will discipline their children when they go astray. God will discipline us. He will use our circumstances and so on to bring us to our senses again.

[36:33] And when we come to our senses let's not make excuses for our sins but let us confess them and forsake them. And we too will find mercy once again.

God is ready to forgive his people. He's ready to forgive anyone who comes to him. He's ready to forgive the worst sinner in the world who comes to him. So how much more is he ready to forgive his own people?

So if we are his people tonight let's seek to be active to root out sin out of our lives and to make progress. And let's remember that when we fail which we will on countless occasions let's remember that we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous who pleads the benefit of his sacrifice and we will receive that forgiveness.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper. May we take that to heart. Never again making any kind of excuse for our sinfulness.

and realising that if we attempt this cover up we will be lost. But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

[37:55] Let us pray. O Lord we ask for thy blessing upon our consideration of these words. We give thanks that that verse and the truth that is contained in it is found in thy word.

Thy word is not a word of condemnation that although it gives warnings of condemnation it also gives the promise and the invitation and the command so that we will confess our sins and forsake them and turn to thee through Jesus Christ.

And so we pray that we may all every one of us tonight gathered here every one of us who has been faced with this verse from thy word this verse which is so clear so unambiguous that each of us would respond to it that any of us who are as yet unsaved may realise the great urgency of dealing with the matters concerning our soul and that we will seek thy forgiveness that we will seek to confess our sins and forsake them.

And those of us who are thy people O Lord may we be able to anew understand the doctrine of repentance that we would not continue in any course of backsliding but that rather we would be drawn back to thyself once again.

May we be able to see the pervasiveness of sin in our lives may we be active against it and we pray that we would confess our sins openly before thee and forsake them.

[39:55] O Lord we know that even our repentance is itself tainted by sin and needs thy forgiveness. We are dependent utterly upon thy mercy enable us then O Lord to consciously put ourselves at thy mercy realizing we have nothing to commend ourselves.

So we ask for thy forgiveness now that thou deal mercifully with each one of us. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.