

The Covering of Sins

Scripture has several interesting and provocative verses regarding this subject which are worthy of examination in order that they maybe be understood, rather than simply “covered over.” Proverbs 10:12 observes that “hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth sins.” Psalm 32:1 tells us that “blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” In Psalm 85:2 we are told “...thou (God) hast covered all their sin.” Also, in the New Testament we find sins covered, as in Peter 4:8 where we read “...and above all things have fervent love among yourselves; for love shall cover a multitude of sins.” Also James tells us in Chapter 5:20, “brethren if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

The three Old Testament references are fairly easy to understand, because they pre-date Jesus and the redemption He provided. Prior to this, all sins were merely “covered” because our Lord had not yet shed His blood through which they could be washed away. All of the animal sacrifices and other God-ordained rituals administered for the purpose of dealing with sin did not cause forgiveness of sins, but merely “covered” them over and provided in effect a salvation “credit slip” which was to be redeemed when the Redeemer came.

However, the New Testament references require a deeper insight to explain them because the Redeemer has come, and all sins have been washed from the souls of genuine believers. Both Peter and James are speaking to “brethren” and therefore to saved souls. So the question to be answered is what sins are being covered, and why should they be “covered” or “hidden”? In the case of James 5:19, 20 we have a powerful example of what is called the “sin unto death.” A brethren who has backslidden into chronic sin is very likely engaging in a sin unto death as referred to in 1John 5:16. This, of course, is not spiritual death, but simply premature physical death. James is telling us that if

another brother can convert the backslider, that is prevail on him to end his sinful way, he can save him from that premature death. If this effort is successful, it “shall hide a multitude of sins.” At this point it seems appropriate to ask, whose sins, what does it mean to “hide” them, and what is the purpose and benefit of hiding them?

Whose sins? While there are some who believe otherwise, it is my contention that it is the converters sins, which may be “hidden”, and not the one who has been converted. Should the one whose sins were so vile, and protracted, but was saved from God’s just intervention which would have resulted in a premature death, be rewarded by having them also “hidden?” The sinner was amply blessed. I believe that it was the “converter” the brethren who saved him from the sin unto death punishment, who receives the benefits of this “hiding of sin, whatever that means.

What does it mean to “hide” sins, and what is the purpose and benefit, are questions, which it seems necessary to answer together, in conjunction with related questions, such as: from whom or from what are these sins being hidden or covered over, and how is this achieved? Surely nothing is hidden from God. Therefore, because He is of necessity involved in this process, the term “hidden and covered over” is probably more allegorized than literal. Furthermore, we are here dealing with “brethren,” those whose sins have already been spiritually forgiven. Therefore, whatever is going on has nothing to do with eternal security, but is instead strictly of an earthly physical nature. Once we recognize this, and the fact that there are earthly, that is physical, emotional consequences of sin, the pieces to the puzzle come together quite rapidly.

The central message here, I believe, is that if one intercedes and rescues a brother from a sin unto death, he may be rewarded by having a “multitude” of his sins hidden, that is covered over in such a way that some of their earthly consequences may be diminished, softened, or removed. I believe that 1Peter 4:8 is telling us that same thing regarding similar benefits which “fervent love” can achieve in the lives of brethren. What is fervent love? It would seem in this context that it is a love, which sacrifices, which goes well beyond normal limits to help a brother or sister to stay the course, to live the God-

ordained life, which will preclude the condition, which could result in sin unto death. What a wonderful gift this is, that through God's love in us, and our sincere unselfish application thereof, God may choose to "cover," that is soften or to eliminate the deserving earthly consequences of our sins. Can you see the thrilling beauty of this? He is offering us a way to obtain the very opposite of the consequence of a sin unto death!!!

If you haven't thought much about the consequence of sin in our daily lives, reading my essay titled "The Consequences of Sins" should be quite helpful as might also be "Sin unto Death," which I wrote earlier. These might be useful in evaluating the merits of what is stated here. It should be an axiom in every believer's life to accept no alleged truths unless they are clearly validated by careful study of the Scriptures. Although there is much Scriptural evidence of the earthly consequences of forgiven sins, and several references to sin unto death, as well as the concept of "covering or hiding sin" I have found no concrete Scripture basis for combining these in the manner described above, although I believe that there is ample evidence from which to conclude so by the many Scripture inferences. If you disagree, great! But don't just leave it at that. Search out the truth for yourself. The consequence of these scripturally offered clues is far too great to be dismissed and to simply trust it to luck. Surely some serious prayer for wisdom and discernment in these matters might provide much for your benefit in terms of how you might improve the quality of your remaining earthly existence. Please let me know if the Holy Spirit provides you with clearer answers than I have been offered and have here shared.