

Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 28:13

Perhaps you have heard **verse 13** quoted during either a gospel message or a message on Christian-living. It is a verse which sheds light on a great many sermons, and so it has become a noted supporting actor. It is so clear and obvious – transparent and simple – that it doesn't become the preacher's primary text. That is a shame, because there are things about this verse which, I think, will surprise you. The general meaning won't surprise, but some of the details may actually shock you.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Once again, let's break the verse into its component parts, and compare them with a few other scriptures. Then we'll bring them back together, closing for maximum effect by reversing the verse.

Let's start with the word “SIN.”

Most of us are mature enough to understand this word, so you're already waiting for me to move on to the more surprising stuff. But wait just a minute first. Don't get too far ahead of me. *“He that covereth his SINS shall not prosper.”*

One of the common Hebrew words translated “sin” is “chata.” Many experts, including Robert Young in his Concordance, defines the word as “missing the mark.” The Lord has a standard of holiness to which He commands us, but we often fail – **usually** fail. In that failure, we “miss the target” – we “sin.” But if I might extend the metaphor, at least that sinner is trying to hit that target.

But **this** “sin” is **not** “miss the mark” it is rather “to transgress.” The Hebrew word is translated “sin” – 3 times; “trespass” – 5 times; and “transgress” – 84 times. If I might put it this way, the Lord has posted “No trespassing” signs all over these sins. But this kind of sinner, reads the signs and crawls under the fence, becoming a deliberate transgressor. We could read this verse this way – *“He that covereth his DELIBERATE sins shall not prosper.”* I am not minimizing our native wickedness and natural, total failure when it comes to holiness. But this verse is talking about deliberate rebellion and trespass. God, the Holy Spirit says, such a person will not prosper.

“He that COVERETH his sins shall not prosper.”

Once again, there is **nothing shocking** in the word “covereth” – there isn't even anything **surprising**. It means exactly what we'd expect it to mean. And obviously, Solomon means, *“He that covereth his own sins shall not prosper.”* We might follow that March Hare or the White Rabbit down the trail leading toward covering or ignoring the sins of others, but that isn't Solomon's intention.

Another possible rabbit trail might be our attempt to apply the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again that isn't Solomon's lesson, and yet it could be an interesting and beneficial study. In that study we'd notice that the blood atonement of Christ is not ours to apply; it is sovereignly given. We, as sinners, can only humble ourselves and beg for the Lord's application of blood to cover our sins. Furthermore, *“He that covereth his sins with Biblical doctrine, religious good works, and prayers for forgiveness shall not prosper any more than the man who tries to cover his murder with lies and further murders.”* No sir, *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.”*

And the Bible is filled with notable examples. Adam and Eve deliberately transgressed God's law, and at that point, knowing themselves to be naked before the Lord they covered themselves with fig leaves. Have you ever noticed that the leaves of some trees become transparent as they lose their protoplasm? Adam's fig leaves were transparent to the omniscient eyes of God.

“He that covereth his sins shall not PROSPER.”

There is nothing surprising about the word “prosper” – it means what it says – and we know what it means. But still there is something in the fallen nature of man, which denies or ignores this statement. Many people are absolutely sure that they can prosper if they sufficiently cover their sins.

But consider Achan in the **Book of Joshua** at the battle of Jericho. Achan, the son of Carmi, of the tribe of Judah, looted the Lord's property from out of the fallen city. The entire community was God's, including all the people in it – whether for judgment or redemption. But Achan lusted after a wedge of gold, 200 shekels of silver and some fashionable clothing. He transgressed God's crystal-clear commandment and walked home with his robes stuffed with contraband. Then he dug a hole in the floor of his tent, covering the effects of his sins with dirt, luggage and grandma's antique dresser. But, of course, God knew all about it.

Sinners are often convinced that they will be able to prosper in their sin, but it does not happen – except once in a while in the short term. God has said, *“Be sure your sin will find you out,”* and it always happens. It is like Abel's blood, calling out to God from the soil which swallowed it up.

Better – MUCH better – it is to “CONFESS and FORSAKE those sins.”

Here is where we find something really surprising – if not shocking. It is good that the Lord tied these two words, “confess” and “forsake” together. The word “confess” is “yadah” and it is translated “confess” twice. But that same word is rendered “praise” – 53 times and “give thanks” about 40 times. Insert those words into this verse and what do you get? Heresy? *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso praises, giving thanks for them, while forsaking them shall have mercy.”* Does that make any sense? Maybe it does.

How many times, as parents, have we forced one of our children to apologize to another? So Junior says through pouty lips, “I’m sorry,” but everyone in the universe knows he really isn’t sorry. And how many times have people confessed to God they were sinners, but those were nothing but words filled with vapor, appearing for a little time before vanishing away? I believe that God wants to hear words of **sincere repentance** and expressions of **genuine sorrow**. In fact, I believe that it is only as God changes the sinful heart that we can properly confess our sin and our sins.

I put a poem in the bulletin three weeks ago, expecting to hear some comments – but none came. *“What comfort can a Saviour bring; to those who never felt their woe? A sinner is a sacred thing; the Holy Ghost hath made him so.”*

How can a sinner be a sacred thing? It is only as a sinner that we can be saved. Can we, or should we, praise God for sin? Never. And yet, it is only as we are finally brought to understand our sinfulness that we can be saved. Praise God, the Holy Spirit has taught me about my wretched sinfulness. *“Lord now, I honestly, and even boldly, confess my lost condition and need of the Saviour.”*

But then on the heels of that confession is the unmistakable word “forsake.” All the confession in the world is useless if there is no desire to abandon, relinquish; cease and desist from sin. We all know people who are proud of their sinfulness, and will even boast of it toward Heaven. But that is not about what this verse is speaking. Following our honest confession there must be an equally honest forsaking of sin.

Only then will there be mercy.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have MERCY.” The Hebrew word “mercy” reveals its source and heart; it is also translated “compassion” and “love.” It is not our open transparency about our sins which earns God’s mercy. It is not our confession; there is no efficacy with the confessional. And mercy can’t be based on our willingness to forsake our sins, because despite our desire there will never be full success. It is through the love and compassion of the Lord Himself that God in mercy forgives and cleanses us from sin.

I John 1:9 – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* If we properly confess – which includes a penitential desire to forsake our sins – God will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And we remind ourselves that this was written to Christians, people already born again. Then there is **Jeremiah 3:12-14** – *“Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD...”*

In closing please turn to **Psalms 32** – *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is COVERED. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence”* (when I tried to ignore and cover my sins), *“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. Selah. But then “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.”*

What might be the lesson if we reversed this verse or turned it toward a mirror?

“He whose sins are covered by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ shall prosper for eternity. Whoso humbly himself before God, confessing his sin and lost condition shall enjoy the Lord’s mercy for ever.”