

## Delusions Of Perfection

Covering Sin in Love

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I would like for you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 26. We are going to be reading this passage from verse 57-68. It comprises one large paragraph during the trial of Jesus Christ. Jesus had been arrested just before this in the garden of Gethsemane, and He was taken to the house of Annas. Now Annas had been high priest before this, but this particular year he had handed it off to his son-in-law Caiaphas. We should know that Annas was the real power behind things at the time; he was an older man; he was like the puppet master behind all that was going on. Jesus was sent to Annas first, and after a time Annas then sent Him on to Caiaphas' house where the Sanhedrin had gathered to take care of this matter with Jesus of Nazareth.

**Matthew 26:57-68** And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end. Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days." And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it that these men testify against You?" But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy, What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy. What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death." Then they spat in His face and beat Him, and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophecy to us Christ, who is the one who struck you?"

Let us think about this situation. We have the group of leading men in Judea, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the elders of the people, the cream of Jewish society at the time. And they were standing in judgment of Jesus of Nazareth, the perfect, sinless Son

of God, their Creator and giver of the law they so revered, the one who had preached the gospel to them.

This is an amazing thing to consider; and what is worse, they accuse Him, not just of sin, not of stealing bread, or even murdering, or any physical sin. They accuse the Son of God of blasphemy. I can hardly find words to describe how awful what they were doing was. The high priest, in setting this up, asked Him a direct question, “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” And Jesus of Nazareth, who never told a lie, never said anything untrue, never said anything that was sketchy, answered him directly and plainly and truthfully, “Yes it as you say;” and then He adds (which was also the truth) that He would be exalted to God's throne, and He would return in power.

He basically, in just a few words, preaches the gospel to them, if they have not already heard it. He got in His witness, and as Peter later testified in I Peter 2:22, “He committed no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.” In His reply to them He was perfectly honest and straightforward. He did not even try to bend the truth a little bit, in order to get Himself out of this mess. He said, “Yes I am, and I'm going to go to heaven and I'm going to be the one who comes back and smashes this earth for its sin.” By speaking the truth, He was judged not just a sinner, but He was condemned to death as a blasphemer—for speaking the truth.

From elsewhere in the gospels, we know that the Sanhedrin did this. All these scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and elders did this, and not because they were ignorant of who Jesus was. They knew very well who He was. Nicodemus came to them and said, “We know You are sent from God.” It is stated very plainly in John 3. They did this to secure their own positions with the people and with the Romans; they did it for purely selfish and political reasons.

Do we realize what a truly heinous condemnation this was? For those scum of the earth sinners—those who were total hypocrites—to condemn the perfect Jesus Christ! It is appalling, it is unthinkable, but it happened. Let us read Luke 11:42. This is Luke's version of Jesus' castigation of the Pharisees that we normally read in Matthew 23, but I want to go to Luke 11 because it is a little shorter, more concise, and it has some interesting wording that I thought I should bring out.

**Luke 11:42-46** But woe to you Pharisees, for you tithe of mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice, [Did they ever! As we saw in Matthew 26] and the love of God, [They ground the people under their feet and condemned them as sinners] these you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. [Tithing is great, and you should do it, but there

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are things that are more important, like justice and showing the love of God to your neighbor.] Woe to you Pharisees for you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. [They love to be thought of as just wonderful.] Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them. [You clothe yourselves in these nice clothes; you appear righteous and pious in all your outward doings, but inside, Jesus says, I know the depths of your blackness of sin. It is like death in there; death comes as a result of sin.] Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, Teacher, by saying these things you reproach us also. And He said, Woe to you also lawyers, for you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch these burdens with one of your fingers.

You come up with all these wonderful answers from the Bible, about how you are suppose to live out there; and your answers are always too hard for anyone to do. You tell them, "Don't go out of your house on the Sabbath and walk more than 5/8ths of a mile. Don't go out of your house carrying more than three barley grains; don't go out of your house on the Sabbath with a needle because if you do you are working and breaking the Sabbath." And all those other laws that they came up with. That was the scribes, the lawyers, the ones who came up with all these picky little things, interpretations of the law of God, and He said, "You tell other people to do this, and you watch them like they're under a microscope, but you don't lift a finger to abide by those same rulings."

**Luke 11:47-48** Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.

You are complicit in all of the persecution of godly men and women down through the ages that have preached the good news, that have had God's blessing; these are the same people that condemned Jesus Christ.

**Luke 11:52** Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.

The way you have been working in interpreting the law, you have hidden the key of

knowledge, meaning the right way to understand what is in God's Word and how to apply it. They were certainly not headed toward the Kingdom of God with their rulings and things that they did. They kept other people from getting there, too. You have obscured the truth, He says, by the way you have interpreted these things. This is a pretty thorough denunciation of the Pharisees and the lawyers or the scribes. He could have said similar things about the Sadducees. One of the Sadducees big problems was they were mostly made up of priestly families, yet they were among the richest and the most politically connected people in the entire country.

The priest and the Levites were not supposed to be involved in that sort of thing. They were not supposed to be getting rich at the hands of the people or off the backs of the people. They were not supposed to be meddling in politics; that was not their position. God raised up Judah and the house of David for that. The Levites were supposed to be involved in His work. They were supposed to be living on the tithes of the people. But they were the fat cats of Judea. They were all hypocrites, just like Jesus said in verse 44 and other places; he goes into it again in chapter 12 when he tells them that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. They tried to appear well on the outside, but inside they were ravenous wolves.

Their teachings and examples influenced others, and instead of pointing them toward God, they made them (as He says in Matthew 23) into sons of hell, just as they were. Jesus did not pull any punches, here, nor in Mathew 23. As a matter of fact in John 8:44, He castigates not only these people, but all the Jews who were listening to them as sons of the Devil.

I bring this up because I want to contrast these people with the perfect Son of God, whom they condemned—the sinful condemning the perfect, the truly perfect. Let us go forward a few pages to Luke 18. We all know this; this is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. We will start in verse 11, just so we can pull out how Jesus depicts the Pharisee. We do not want to go at this time into the publican.

**Luke 18:11** [This is how Jesus describes him:] The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men. . ."

You can just see his nose up in the air as he is standing as far away from the publican as he possibly can because he might be contaminated by closeness to him. "God, I thank You. . ." He is praying to himself. He is not really praying to God because to himself he is God. This is a clear indication that his righteousness was in himself and not in God. "God, I thank You that I am not like other men."

**Luke 18:11-12** . . . extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. [Probably did not like the name rolling over his tongue.] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.

What a snooty attitude! How contemptible. How contemptuous of his fellow man—as if this tax collector was a bug. He needed to be squashed; he was so dirty and awful and sinful. Jesus always told the truth, and His depiction of the Pharisee here is spot on. There had to have been Pharisees who were actually like this. This is not a character, is what I am trying to say. Jesus is pulling from actual experience of how the Pharisees were. Obviously this is an extreme, but it was true. The Pharisee Jesus describes is self congratulatory, “I’m so righteous, God, you wouldn’t believe it. Pat me on the back. I’m so righteous.”

The Pharisee considered himself pretty much perfectly righteous; and how deluded he was! The Pharisee had a delusion of his own perfection. And as a delusion, it was perfectly untrue. Notice how this parable is introduced in verse 9.

**Luke 18:9** Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

Jesus purposely directed this at people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous; whose faith, you might say, was in their own righteousness; who compared themselves to other people and found themselves superior. The fruits of this attitude, of those who have faith in their own righteousness and trust in their own righteousness is that they despise others. They despise their brethren, they show contempt for their own who do not quite meet their standard. This is the exact same attitude that they showed toward Jesus in Matthew 26.

They trusted in their own righteousness and despised Him. Notice how He concludes in verse 14.

**Luke 18:14** I tell you this man[the publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other [meaning the other, the Pharisee, was not justified at all.]; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Those who consider themselves righteous and look down on others will not be justified

before God. They exalted themselves at the expense of their brothers, and Jesus sternly warns such people that a very rude awakening awaits them in the judgment. You thought you were high; Christ the Judge will bring them low. These low, who knew they were low and wished they were not, sought God's help to bring them out of it—they will be exalted. They are the ones that will be in the Kingdom of God.

Notice a stark contrast between what we have seen of the Pharisees and Jesus Christ Himself. We will turn to John 8. This is the well-known episode of the women caught in adultery. I could have gone to several other examples where Jesus is forced to deal with a sinner, whether that sinner is a harlot, a tax collector, or any others that He may have come across; but He always treats them the same way, or in very similar ways.

**John 8:2-3** Now early in the morning He came again into the temple and all the people came to Him and He sat down and taught them. [There was quite a crowd here, in the Temple area, so there was an audience watching what was about to take place.] Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery.

I am sure that they had been watching her and planning to use her for this because they were trying to bring Jesus down through this. So they probably knew that she was going to her tryst with this man. They barge in, take her out, and say they caught the women in adultery. They were totally factual and true about that.

**John 8:4-5** They said to Him, “Teacher, this women was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?”

That was leading question if I ever heard one. They were putting Him to the test; they should have known that they should not tempt the Lord your God. How many times did God say this in the Old Testament? They never learned the lesson.

**John 8:6** This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

Jesus pretty much ignored them, and it does not matter what He wrote on the ground, I know some people think He was writing down the sins of these Pharisees that had

accused Him. It does not matter, I do not think it was, who knows, He might have been writing down Psalms 23, could have been anything. It does not matter what He was writing, what matters is He essentially turned His back on them and in a way said this is not worth My notice, I am not going to jump in here at your bidding, I am not going to be teased into something.

**John 8:7-9** So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convinced by their conscience. . .

By the way that may not have been original. There are several manuscripts that omit this. The majority text is one of those that omit this. Let us assume that it is there; it does not make that much difference to the story because we can supply that as the reason why they left.

**John 8:9-11** . . . went out one by one beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone and the women standing in the midst [all these accusers melted away into the crowd]. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, [Meaning none of that crowd that had brought her in.] He said to her, "Woman where are those accusers of yours? [those high and mighty ones] Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." and Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more."

The Pharisees, in Matthew 26, gin up an accusation from some false witnesses and finally "get" Him, as it were, by making Him reply truthfully to a question that they know is going to entrap Him. And here they are, sinful men trying to do a political act by getting rid of Jesus—doing it for totally selfish reasons. Yet, here we have an obviously sinful woman who had been caught in adultery, who had however many sins—a wicked woman.

Breaking the seventh commandment was probably only *one* of her sins; and who knows how many times she had broken that one? She was known for having an adulterous affair with someone, and that is how the Jews or Pharisees knew where she was and when to catch her.

So we have a very opposite situation because Jesus Christ was perfect, but this woman

was not. They were trying to get Him to condemn somebody who was a sinner, which would have been an easy thing, but Jesus approached this situation entirely differently. Our attention, as we go through this passage, should be riveted on Jesus' reaction and His attitude throughout the whole thing, because it is totally different from the way the Pharisees were.

They bait Jesus by saying, "Look, we have witnesses; she was caught in the very act, and you know what the law says very clearly—that a person caught in the act of adultery must be stoned." That is unequivocal; that is true. You can go back to the Old Testament and see that is exactly what the punishment for adultery is—to be stoned; it was the death sentence.

What more proof did Jesus need? All they asked Him, as it says in John 8:5, was, "What do You say? How would You judge this matter?" To them this was an open and shut case: woman caught in adultery, two or three witnesses, law, get your rocks ready to throw. That is how they approached it, but Jesus did not. It was not cut and dry to Him. He understood, yes, this woman sinned. There were witnesses. The law says this, and the penalty is death. But, Jesus did not leap to immediate death; He approached it quite a bit differently.

Notice that He, for some time—and we do not know how long it was—does nothing. He stoops to the ground and writes, whatever it was. How long did this writing take? Did He write out the whole book of Deuteronomy? I do not know. Like I said, it does not matter what He wrote. The fact is that He kind of turned His back on them and did something else for awhile. He ignored them.

Think about this in terms of God, not as Jesus Christ the man, but as God, who works with us. God frequently waits a long time after a sin is committed to allow time for repentance; God does not rush to judgment. He takes His time. He lets things go. How would we like it if someone came before God and said, "This person has sinned! Off with his head!" I think God would say, "I'm not going to listen to you right now; I'm working with this person. Give him some time."

Finally after they badger Him for awhile Jesus says, "Whoever is sinless among you go ahead and be her executioner." Obviously they melt away. Let us realize what He was really telling them. What He was really telling them is, 1) None of you are qualified to judge this person, and 2) Only I am qualified to judge this person. Did we ever think about that second point? It is important. He is the Judge. He said, "You people don't know a thing about the situation; you know the bare facts here, but you are blinded by your own sins. I know the hearts of all men; I have no sins to blind Me; I can judge the

situation perfectly."

He was telling them cease and desist in His own inimitable way. That is why they leave because they realize He had them. Because we are so familiar with the character of Jesus, I do not think we appreciate how shocking His statement is. That statement is, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." That is first class, world class, shocking because we would expect a righteous God to say, "This is the law; this is your infraction; this is your punishment." We understand that God is love, that God is gracious, God is merciful, so He does not say, "You are condemned to be stoned." He says totally opposite: "I don't condemn you, just go and don't do this again."

Do you know how astounding that was for a first century Jew to hear? I do not think we do; they were probably the most judgmental people who have ever lived on the face of the earth. One little infraction of the law, and you are gone; you are a sinner. You had to do so many works to get back on God's good side at the best. How many people did they throw out of the synagogue for having some sort of idea or understanding that was just a little bit unorthodox? You are out of here, buddy. Go meet with the Gentiles, the pagans. That is how they were.

Jesus comes in with a hugely radical concept, and says, "Yes, I recognized that you've sinned, but I don't condemn you. Repent, live righteously." Jesus had every right—as God in the flesh, as Judge—every lawful reason to condemn her to death, but He forbore; He showed mercy. He did not react in anger. He did not spread the juicy story of her wickedness to others. He did not ruin her reputation forever, even though she had pretty much done that herself. He did not even preach at her. He did not tell her why she was wrong. He simply commands her to go and not sin like this anymore, and He lets her work it out.

**John 8:12** Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying. . .

Remember there was a big crowd around watching this going on, it was like an arena in there and this was center court. All this stuff was going on and they were hearing Him tell her to go, "I don't condemn you, and don't sin anymore." Then He turns to the crowd to teach them, and what He says is this:

**John 8:12** "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

What is He saying? Light illuminates what is dark. Light clarifies what is obscure; light reveals what is hidden. In the Old Testament there is a figure of a lamp being a light to your feet, meaning it is the knowledge of God. Light is what illuminates the paths so we can walk through life without tripping and make sure we reach the destination ahead of us. Jesus is saying that He is that light.

So we can understand that His teaching and His example instruct us in the right way to conduct ourselves, and He had just given them a symposium on how a righteous individual confronts a sinful person. He says, "If you walk in the light, [meaning, if you do the same thing, if you react to a sinful person in the way I have just reacted to this woman caught in adultery] then you will have the understanding that leads to eternal life." My question is, how often do we do this? We are less than two months away from Passover when we examine our faith and prove ourselves, as II Corinthians 13:5 says.

**II Corinthians 13:5** Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith, prove yourselves.

This past year in the churches of God has seen members of God's church throw appalling accusations of sin and unethical behavior at one another. An attitude and a conduct that God simply hates. It certainly does not produce unity. We have seen one major church split up over accusations of sin and unethical behavior that to my mind have not yet been proven. There may be things that were not quite right, but I do not know if they have really reached the level of splitting off. That is for others to judge.

There have been individual accusations one against another in every church, I am sure, even here in the Church of the Great God, too. Instead of being like the Pharisees, we who are trying to strive for the Kingdom of God need to have the mind of Christ on this matter. He dealt with sinful people with love, patience, with long suffering, with mercy, and with self control.

This has been a long introduction, and my SPS, but I felt I needed to start with a bang, because we needed to see it from Christ point of view first.

I have spoken about those who have a delusion of their own perfection; now I want to change gears a little bit and look at it from another angle, because there are people who have this attitude as well.

I want to introduce it by talking a little about what has happened in the past in this specific situation. When we lived in California on or near the Pasadena campus of

Ambassador College, I heard several stories of people, and I knew at least one of them. These people were fairly new in the church, though not always. But these people decided, out of zeal for God and His work, to move to headquarters. Now I am sure that they thought that if they moved to where God's apostle and His ministers and His people were congregated in a very small area, that life would simply be grand; it would be like the Kingdom of God on earth.

The concentration of church members and all those ministers and Mr. Armstrong coming in and giving sermons every once in awhile, they supposed it would make it the ideal environment, where God's people could work together and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the Kingdom would come and everything would be fine. They could shut out the sinful world and live in Christian bliss. Invariably their balloon would be burst, and usually it was pretty quickly.

They would find that the headquarters people were just as sinful and perhaps more so, than church members back in their old congregation out in the field. And this will shock you: ministers sinned! There were rumors of Mr. Armstrong's sins, and Mr. Tkach's sins when he was Pastor General, that would curl your hair. Some of these zealous but very naive people saw sin in God's people who should know better; they lost their faith and left the church.

This is another example—the opposite view of the delusion of perfection. This is not the view that I am perfect. This is the view that God's people should be perfect. I think we slip into this attitude more often than we realize. This delusion of perfection is the misconception among some that members of God's church will not sin; and when a brother's sins are exposed, as they always are, (Christ says He will bring these things to light, does He not?) and they become offended (“I can't believe he did that; he must not be converted; I think he's a tare!”).

We all know intellectually that our brethren sin; and they must overcome and grow to spiritual maturity, just as we do. But we often act viscerally, I mean out of the gut, not thinking with the head but just reacting to the news or sight of a fellow member sinning.

Why is it so surprising to learn of a brethren's sin? He is a human being; human beings sin, converted or not. Worse, why are we so quick to condemn them as if we are not sinners ourselves? This delusion of perfection occurs when we let the fact that we should not sin obscure the reality that despite being forgiven and under God's grace, church members are still sinful human beings. Some, granted, are more carnal than others. Some, granted, do not work as hard to overcome as others.

But when we do this when we set up this strange delusion of perfection for our brethren. We set up an impossible standard for our fellow members to live up to; and they are bound to disappoint us because they will never live up to it. By being disappointed we can become disaffected and choose to separate ourselves from the brethren that God has given us to help us make it into the Kingdom of God. So we break fellowship, and we further the splintering of the church. You know what? This simply does Satan's work for him.

**Galatians 5:15** But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.

In this case, he was talking about those who had come in insisting that church members needed to be circumcised (men of course). Paul was frustrated with all this nitpicking and arguing back and forth, and people being offended one after another.

**Galatians 5:12** I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off [he was not talking about their fingers].

Other translations read, "I wish they would mutilate themselves." To see how wrong they are.

This is what happens when we are constantly pointing the finger of accusation of sin against one another when we know that we are weak and sinful as well.

Why are we doing this to one another? Why are we fighting one another? We are on the same side; we are trying to get to the same goal. Not everybody on the track team can run a hundred yard dash in 10.2 or 9.8 seconds; some of us run it in 15.5 seconds.

I saw a ninety-five year old woman the other day on Headline News. She won this big award because she ran the hundred yard dash in under thirty seconds. Should we condemn her for not being Adrian Bolt from Jamaica, who can do it in 9.5 seconds? Is that ninety-five year old woman not worthy because she does not do a 10 second hundred yard dash? It is the same principle.

Why are we biting and devouring one another? Because we are going to end up consuming one another, and none of us will make it into the Kingdom of God. Now just as a little insertion, here. Please do not misunderstand me; I am not saying that it is okay to sin, not at all. We should strive personally. We should strive with everything in

us not to sin, but that is us; we cannot expect everyone else to be perfect and never sin.

Sin is an ever-present reality among us, and it will be so until we are changed in the Kingdom of God. So we should not be surprised when our brother sins, even a long-time member; somebody who has been in the church 30, 40, 50, 60 years. They will sin until the day they die. Rank within the church does not matter, either. Lay member, deacon, elder, minister, evangelist, apostle—they all sin, too.

We should not be surprised when we hear that someone has committed a sin, trespassed, or transgressed. We all have weaknesses; we all are foolish; we all make mistakes; we all sin. And we should certainly never condemn the sinner for it. Never. Never.

**John 8:11** Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.

In Matthew 18, Peter asked Jesus, “How often do we have to forgive a brother for sinning against us? Seven times?” No, He gives an impossibly large number of times. Seventy times seven—that does not just mean 490 times. It means you forgive your brother at every opportunity when he repents. And a lot of times we are supposed to forgive them before they repent.

God does that to us all the time; we are under a state of grace. God is very willing to forgive us. And we have to show that same love for our brothers that God and Jesus Christ do for us. They give us a pass all the time; and say, “Okay, we will work on this. I'll give you some time. I'll forebear. I'll withhold condemnation.” That is the same way we have to react to our brothers sins.

**I Peter 4:7-8** [ This was the inspiration for this sermon:] But the end of all things is at hand. [Notice the time element, here. If we are not at the end, I do not know when it has been closer.] Therefore be serious, be sober minded and watchful in your prayers, and above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.

Do you know that God has been covering a multitude of our sins, all of our lives?

God wants to teach us to do the same amongst the brethren. This is a vital principle that we need, especially as the end is approaching. So what does this mean? How do we cover a sin in love? First, let us understand, that this does not suggest in any way that

we are sweeping sin under the rug. It does not mean that we are ignoring sin or condoning it at all.

Probably the worst we can say at this point is that we are tolerating it for a time. But we are actually covering it. We are not ignoring it; we are not sweeping it under the rug; we certainly are not condoning it. God does this all the time, so it is not wrong. It is not a wrong principle to cover a sin, and you know that He does not ignore our sins. Nor does He condone our sins. But He has patience. He gives us grace, and we have to learn to extend that same forbearing love to our sinful brethren. Which means everyone.

To understand what covering sin is all about, let us use an illustration that might help us to remember this. Think of sin as a poisonous snake rising out of a basket ( a Hindu with his flute, trying to make this cobra rise out of the basket.) This snake is rising out of the basket on its own accord, and there are a lot of people around, and you know that if something is not done quickly, the snake will invariably bite someone or many someones. So, thinking quickly, witnessing what is going on, you snatch up the lid and you slam it down over the top of the basket containing the snake. You cover the problem. You keep that problem from spreading; the snake (sin) cannot get loose to cause more damage.

What does this mean? A loving person, observing another person's sin, will do the same sort of thing. He will not let knowledge of this sin go any further. It is between him, the observer, and the sinner, and that is it. He will inform no one else about it, except God. Informing someone else about it would be gossip. Even if it were true, it would be gossip.

He will give the sinner the benefit of the doubt, meaning that the man or woman who was sinning may have done this sin in weakness. It was a one-off type of thing, or that he or she would repent very quickly, or this is also in giving the benefit of doubt. He will consider that somehow he is mistaken and he did not see what he thought he saw.

Something might seem to be sinful, remember my dad's story of him stumbling out of the bar and hitting his head. Remember that story? It was not true, by the way. A casual observer might think he was in this bar drinking, when in fact he had been doing God's work by going in there and meeting the waitress for a counseling session; but the sunlight had hit him as he came out of the doorway; he had gotten disoriented and tripped.

So, if we see someone sinning and it is not really clear, we give them the benefit of the doubt—that we do not have the full story behind it all. That is another way to cover a sin.

Obviously a person covering a sin will take it to God and pray for help for the sinner to overcome.

He is the most powerful One. He is the One that can do whatever it is that needs to be done to help the sinner repent and overcome the sin, so that is the Person you take it to. He will forgive the sinner of his sin without even being asked; He will extend love and mercy toward that sinner and be patient. He will allow the sinner time to overcome it on his own.

Only if it continues, only if he sees further evidence that this sin is continuing, will he say something to the sinner, not to anyone else; and he will not confront the sinner, but will offer him his help. It is not supposed to be adversarial; remember this is a brother that is trying to get to the same place we are: the Kingdom of God. So he will not condemn the sinner, as a tare or an apostate or as unconverted, but he will work with him and encourage him as a brother, helping him up the hill. Let us turn to Ephesians.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** [This the attitude we need to have:] I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This applies to a lot of situations, but it applies in spades to the situation where you are trying to cover a brother's sin. These are the attitudes you need to have. Lowliness, meaning humility, gentleness, or meekness with longsuffering—that is patient endurance, and bearing with one another in love—putting up with one another out of love for them. And of course in verse three, we are trying as hard as we can to remain in unity. We do this by the Spirit of God, unity, and peace.

**Ephesians 4:32** [Getting near the end of this instructional section he says:] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, [and he tells us why] just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Remember what has been done for you and apply the same attitude toward the sinning brother.

How often do we do this? I would hope that we would have the godly love to do this all the time. But I know better. Unfortunately, this is not done frequently enough. We, and I

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include myself in this, seem far more likely to react carnally, pharisaically, and look on our brother, condemn him, and stand aloof from him as if we are devastated that he was not perfect.

We expect others to live up to the high standard of Christ, yet we give ourselves a pass. What devious human nature we have! Here is the proper attitude in Galatians:

**Galatians 6:1-5** Brethren, if a man is over taken in any trespass [meaning if he is caught in any kind of sin], you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

So here is the proper attitude: restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, realizing that we are just as susceptible to sin as he is. This instruction follows right on the heels of what Paul said in his listing of the fruit of the spirit and walking in the spirit. This is how we demonstrate some of these attitudes and this fruit. And this is how God obviously reacts, because He always walks in the Spirit. He, in a spirit of gentleness, patience, humility, forbearance, and grace works always to restore the sinner to righteousness and fellowship.

Remember sin separates us from God; sin also separates brethren, and so God is always working to restore that person not only to righteousness but back into the fellowship. He does not want these people excluded by sin. When they sin, He has to face that fact and work to bring them back again, into the fellowship, into a relationship with Him; and we have to do the same with the brethren.

This means that we are to set the sinner straight with kid gloves, not with force or harsh discipline. As it says in Galatians: gently. We help him to recover without resorting to harsh measures that are meant for the truly stubborn, hardhearted, and incorrigible.

Paul commands us to bear one another's burdens; and he says that this fulfills the law of Christ. The law of Christ that he is talking about is the commandment to love one another. If we bear one another's burdens, we are showing love one to another. We are not in competition, as I mentioned before, to see who is the most righteous, who is going to get to the finish line first. That is not our kind of race.

We are in this together; we are trying to attain the same goal, both as individuals and as the unified body of Christ. We have to look at this in a dual way. We are here to make it to the Kingdom of God. If I do my part in becoming righteous and doing what is right, I can also help you be righteous and do what is right; and we can all be there when Christ returns and rise together to see Him in the air.

We are allowed, we are encouraged to help each other up the hill and across the finish line because our race is a long and difficult course, like a marathon. It has all kinds of pitfalls, and we are more than likely going to make it the best if we work together. So this working together fulfills the law of Christ—to love one another.

Notice that Paul ends this section in Galatians 6:5, with a valid warning: "for each one shall bear his own load." This is not a contradiction of verse 2, where it says, "bear one another's burdens." It is an allusion to the fact that each of us will be judged according to our own works. Do bear other people's burdens, but we are going to be judged by our own load, how you bore your own load.

While we are here to help each other reach God's Kingdom, we will be judged separately, individually. We will read Romans 14. I want to touch this quickly.

**Romans 14:1, 4, 9** Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. . . . Who are you to judge another servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. . . . For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

I threw this verse in here because it went well with the end of verse 4. Christ died to this end: that we will be all made to stand and be in God's Kingdom.

**Romans 14:10-13** But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

He turns things around, right there at the end. Do not be judging one another; in fact, do

your best to take those impediments out of their way. Whether you yourself are a cause of one of those stumbling blocks or not, help one another. This comes as part of the passage concerning judging one another, over what the King James calls, doubtful things. These doubtful things are areas of Christian living that are, really, merely differences of opinions over secondary matters. They are personal decisions that each individual must determine for himself on how to approach something. There are things that the Bible may not have a clear, "Thus says the Lord," answer to.

Paul uses the example of doubtful things as vegetarianism, also choosing which days to fast. One, if he wants to, can become a vegetarian, even though Paul says, in his opinion that he thinks that it is a sign of spiritual weakness, but you can do it; it is a personal choice. God does not say it is wrong. If you want to do it, God says you can eat meat. As to which day or how often to fast, that is also a personal choice. God nowhere says in the Bible that you will fast on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He does not even say you have to fast once a week, once every two weeks, once a month; but He does say you have to fast once a year. But how often you must fast between days of Atonement is up to you. That is a personal choice.

We should not become judgmental with each other about matters that are not truly salvational issues. They are choice issues. We have to learn to have a discerning mind to discern between what is truly sin and what is really, when it comes down to it, a lifestyle choice that simply may be different from the way we might have chosen.

We should also notice as we go through here that Paul makes the distinction that though we are to help one another along the way, meaning in this case not putting hindrance before our brethren, we will also be judged according to our individual works. It seems to be a theme that keeps coming up; it is what you do, not what the other person does, that makes the difference for you. We should remember at this point what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1-5 about much of God's judgment of us being based on how we judge others. Remember He uses the example of the splinter in the other person's eye while you have the great big beam sticking out of yours. That is terrible judgment. What judgment you meet out to others, will be meted out to you. So we have to remember that.

I was going to go to the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. I just want to verbally go over it for a minute without turning to Matthew 25:31-40. As you go through it, you will see that this parable is a depiction of Christ's basis of judgment. The whole thing is about the sheep on the right hand and the goats on left hand being brought before Him in judgment; and He tells us very clearly what His criteria is for judgment. It is not on how scrupulously we kept the commandments that is important. It is not on how

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dedicated we were in doing God's work, although that also has its merits. But His criterion for judgment is shown in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. That is, how we serve our brethren in love. If you did it unto one of the least of these, you did it unto Me, He says.

If we show love toward the brethren, we are showing love toward God. They go together; you cannot separate the two great commandments. This, He implies, is true righteousness—how we treat our brethren shows our true righteousness, our right doing. How we conduct ourselves in love toward brethren and neighbor. This includes covering their sins. Is this not what Jesus says in John 13?

**John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.