

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD'S GLORY IN HIDING SIN.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."—Proverbs xxv. 2.

THE translation of our text, if it had been more literal, would have run thus, "It is the glory of God to cover a matter, but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." For the sake of variety in language, our translators sometimes gave two different interpretations to the same word; and though that makes the verbiage more smooth, it is generally a great mistake, and apt to mislead us. The word "conceal" is just the same word that we get in the passage, "Blessed is he . . . whose sin is covered." So the text runs thus,—I will give it to you again that I may further impress it upon you,—"It is the glory of God to cover a matter, but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."

First of all, I will give you the common interpretation which is given to these words, and the topic which is suggested to most minds thereby, namely, that it is God's glory to conceal much of the great truth which concerns himself and his dealings with the sons of men. "Clouds and darkness are round about him." It is his glory that he is not seen,—his glory that he is concealed; while, as for kings, it is their honour "to search out a matter." This is the general interpretation, which almost every expositor gives of this passage, but I am not able wholly to agree with it. However, I will speak upon it for a little while.

It is certain that such an explanation as this would have to be taken in a limited sense, for it cannot absolutely, and without qualification, be the glory of God to conceal a thing; for, if so, he might have concealed everything from us. It is evidently for his glory that some things should be revealed; or, else, why has he revealed them? He might have dwelt for ever in that wondrous solitude in which we suppose he did dwell before he commenced the

work of creation. We know not what he was doing in that past eternity of which it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to conceive,—when there was no creation, when not a single star had begun to shine, nor an angel had fled through space on rapid wing. If it were God's glory to be absolutely concealed, it seems to me that he would have remained alone in the thick darkness that surrounded him, for he would not have wanted to have a single creature to know his love, to realize his power, or to contemplate his wisdom. It is at once obvious that, if this is the true and correct interpretation, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," it must be taken in a very limited sense. If it had been his glory to conceal everything, he would have continued to conceal it; but, as far as I can see, his manifested glory is his glory. The glory of God is not so much to conceal as to reveal himself to those whom he prepares to receive the revelation.

There are many things which it would not be for God's glory to conceal. You could not say of everything, "It is the glory of God to conceal this." Take, for instance, his righteous law, would it have been for his glory to have left our race utterly ignorant of it? I cannot conceive of such a thing. And then his matchless redemption he has revealed to us in many wonderful ways. Would he have taken all the pains that he has done to reveal himself, in Christ Jesus, if it had been for his glory to conceal himself in that respect? Would he bid us go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, if it could be for his glory to conceal that? No, it is high treason against the majesty of heaven for any man to obscure the blessed revelation of God in Christ Jesus. I am afraid that all of us, preachers of the Word, do that, in some measure, by reason of our infirmity; but God forbid that we should ever wilfully keep back a single ray of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

There are many great and glorious truths which do not need that God should conceal them. If we do not perceive them, probably it is because it is not necessary that they should be concealed, for their own inherent glory is their concealment. If I were to take, for instance, the mysterious doctrine of the eternal filiation of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son,—these wondrous truths need not be concealed from us because they are, in themselves, such deep mysteries that, however clearly they may be revealed to us, it is not possible for us to understand them. Even the grand doctrine of the Trinity, which is so plainly set forth in the Scriptures,—the Trinity in the Unity of the Godhead,—need not be concealed; as, indeed, it has not been, yet we cannot comprehend it. God need not seek out any method of concealment; for, if he were to unveil his face among us, the glory would be too bright to be beheld. Go and stand, O mortal man, and gaze upon the sun at mid-day! Canst thou do it? Would not thine eyes be thereby blinded? Yet, yon sun is only one of the myriads of servants in the courts of God; then, what must the face of the King himself be? It needs not that he should veil it; his own glory is, surely, veil enough unto itself. Our minds are finite, contracted, limited. There were

certain men, who called themselves "Encyclopædists", because they fancied that they knew everything; yet they knew nothing perfectly, and many of them broke down altogether in their attempt to learn even all that might be known by men; but, as for God himself, who can possibly comprehend him? The archangel, who standeth nearest to his august presence, must veil his face with his wings, for even he is not able to gaze upon the glory of that excessive light. It does not seem to me to be so great a truth that it is the glory of God to conceal as that his very glory doth conceal itself, not by being concealed, but by being so exceedingly unveiled. The glory itself blindeth, for the finite mind of man is not able to gaze thereon.

Yet the truth, which our English Version seeks to convey to us, may be accepted without hesitation if we regard it thus: if God has concealed anything, it is God's glory to conceal it, and it is right that it should be hidden. If God has not told us any truth, it is for his glory not to tell it to us. Perhaps we have as much reason to bless the Lord for what is not in the Bible as for what is there; and what he has not revealed may be as much for our benefit, and, certainly, is as much for his glory, as what he has revealed. For instance, if he does not tell us all about himself, and the mystery of his person, do we want to know it? Can we not believe in him, and love him all the better because we do not understand him? Surely, a God whom we could understand would be no God. We delight in being out of our depth,—in finding waters to swim in,—where understanding, with its little plumb-line, finds no bottom, but where love, with a restful spirit, finds perfect peace. Doubtless, there is a glory in the Lord not revealing himself, so far as the past or present is concerned.

As to the future, it is, no doubt, for the glory of God that he has not revealed to us all concerning the history of this world. It may be all in the Book of Daniel, and the Book of Revelation. Some friends think it is, and it may be; but this I venture to say, there is no man who understands it, and I do not think any man will understand it until the Word shall explain itself; and then, possibly, when history becomes the commentary upon the prophecy, we shall wonder that we did not see it. Yet we cannot do so at present. It is to the glory of God, and to thine own profiting, that thou dost not know what will happen to thee on the morrow. Thou knowest not what afflictions may await thee, nor when thou shalt die; it is well for thee that thou dost not know. If it had been for God's glory that thou shouldst read thy history from its first page to its last, and be able to foretell every event in thine own life-story, or in the history of the nations of the earth, God would have revealed it to thee; but be thou content not to know what God doth not tell thee, and say, in thy spirit, "Let it be so; for, in some things, it is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

Still, I think that this is not the teaching of the text. I conceive that it has quite another meaning, which I will try to give you. You know that, in a proverb like this, with a "but" in the middle, there is what we call an antithesis, or an expression of opposites.

The text does not run thus, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to publish a thing." That is not what is said here; it is quite a different sentence, which is not an antithesis at all. Then, again, the antithesis is not complete, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter," for it is not so much the business of kings to search out matters that refer to wisdom as it is the business of wise men to do so. If there are doctrines that are not known to us because God conceals them, it is the business of wise men to search them out, and not so much the business of kings to do so. Neither can we read the passage thus, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honour of kings to make things plain," because the third verse of the chapter does not agree with this rendering. Solomon did not think that it was to the honour of kings to make things plain. He was a believer in diplomacy, for he says, "The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable." He could not, therefore, have intended to convey that meaning.

Now let me give you what I think is the true meaning of the passage. What is the business of kings? Why are they set up above their fellow-men? What is their honour? Why, it is the honour of kings to search out matters that concern the administration of justice, to bring prisoners before their bar, laying bare their crimes, and convicting them if they are guilty. It is the glory of God to cover a matter, that matter being sin; but it is the honour of kings to search that matter out, and bring the guilty one to justice. You know that we think less and less of our police if they are not able to discover criminals. It has sometimes happened that justice misses its mark. Perhaps there is an attempt made to get a certain important witness out of the way, or to suborn another, or to suppress some testimony that might be brought against the accused persons. It is never to the honour of kings when that is done. When, for instance, a murder has been committed, and the criminal cannot be traced, it is not to the credit of the governing powers that it should be so; and though it must be so sometimes, for no human government can be perfect in its detective forces, yet it is not to the honour of "the powers that be." It is to the honour of kings that they search matters out till they bring home the guilt to the proper individual. Nor is it to the honour of kings if they give their verdict and sentence at first sight according to prejudice. It is their honour to search out a matter,—to hear both sides of the case. The magistrate, who sits in the king's name, is bound to enquire thoroughly into the matter brought before him, and at last to adjudicate as justice demands. This is sometimes very difficult, but it is to the honour of kings and their representatives when they attempt it.

Now, to God, such a thing as this is impossible. Nothing is concealed from him; the whole universe is but one great prison for those who offend against him, and he can find them at any time that he pleases, and he can execute his just sentence upon them without a moment's delay. He needs no witnesses, he need not

summon this person or that, who has seen a certain deed done, for the transgression has been committed in his own sight. His glory is that he covers the matter; and as it is the glory of God to cover the matter, it is also the honour of kings to search the matter out, that matter, in each case, being the breach of law. I am persuaded that this is the meaning of the text. Even if it were not, it is a grand truth of Scripture, well worthy of our meditation.

So, we shall dwell upon it thus. First, *it is the glory of God to cover sin*. Secondly, *this is a great encouragement to penitent sinners*; and, thirdly, *it ought to be a great stimulus to saints*.

I. First, IT IS THE GLORY OF GOD TO COVER SIN.

This is the expression which is commonly used in Scripture to describe *the putting away of sin, and forgiving it*. God covers the very thing which the magistrate searches out,—guilt, the breach of his law, the aggravations, the multiplied repetitions of sin, the base motives, the many excuses and deceits with which sin is sought to be extenuated,—all this God covers. Hear this, and be astonished, O ye sinners,—God can cover all your sins; no matter how black they are, or how many, or how deep their dye, he can cover them all!

“This is his grand prerogative,
And none can in this honour share.”

But he can do it, glory be to his blessed name!

He can cover the sin which is known and confessed. He never covers the sin which is unconfessed. When a man will not acknowledge himself to be guilty, he stands convicted of his rebellious refusal to take his proper position before the Lord. But if thou dost stand, O sinner, and confess thy guilt; if thou sayest, O rebel, “There is no doubt about the matter; I own that I am guilty,” it is the glory of God that he can cover that sin which no other can cover, and which thine own conscience will not permit thee to conceal! He can cover the transgression of that man whose mouth is stopped by the consciousness of his guilt. O glorious act of divine grace, that sin and transgression can be covered,—covered, though it be confessed and acknowledged, and covered because it is confessed and acknowledged!

The glory of this truth lies in the fact that *God can do this justly through the work of Jesus*. To cover up sin,—why, standing, as it does, alone, and without any qualification,—it might seem to be a dreadful thing for God to do; but he can do it righteously. Without the slightest violation of his law,—without endangering the stability of his kingdom,—he can forgive and cover up all manner of sin and blasphemy so that it shall never be seen again. Do you ask me how this can be done? The answer lies in the great substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God steps down from his eternal throne when man must be punished for his sin, and he says, “I will bear the punishment; lay it all on me.” And that he might bear it, Jesus took upon himself the form of a man, and dwelt among men; and, at last, upon the accursed tree he bore the guilt of man. It was a wondrous recompense which he made to his own

law by being himself punished in the stead of the offender. Now, beneath the whole heavens, there can be none who can justly object to the covering of sin by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That singular, that remarkable, that unique transaction of the Just suffering for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, has enabled God to cover our sin, and to do it justly.

Further, he can do this *without exacting any sort of compensation from the offender*. Marvellous is this truth,—too marvellous for some to believe. The Romish Church teaches us that we must do penance if our sin is to be forgiven. There must be so many lashes for the bare back, or so long abstention from food, beside purgatorial pains to be inflicted after death, and I know not what beside. Ay, but this is the glory of God,—that he can cover all this sin now, upon the spot, without any price being paid by the sinner, or any suffering being endured by him. He has but to come, and confess his sin, and accept the divine covering, namely, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the whole of it shall be covered once for all.

It is the glory of God that *he can do all this without any injury to the person who is forgiven*. It sometimes happens that, if a man has offended you, and you forgive him again and again, he may thereby become hardened in his sin; but the Lord's sweet way of covering sin is one which always melts and changes the heart. Sin is never so heartily hated as when it is covered by the blood of Christ. No man does ever thoroughly loathe sin till he has seen it put away in Christ; but when he has seen Jesus put it away by his own griefs and death, then he really hates the sin that made the Redeemer mourn, and nailed him to the tree. It is the glory of God that he can cover sin, in such a fashion as this, so as not to injure the offender whom he forgives.

And he can do it *without causing any injury to the rest of mankind*. There is no man who is any the worse because his fellow-man is saved. The example of saved souls is never injurious. There are some, I know, who can twist the truth till they find in it an excuse for sin; but the truth that God is able to forgive the grossest sin,—nay, more, that he has forgiven it in the case of many, and has pressed them to his bosom as his own dear children,—has done no injury, but much helpful service to the morals of mankind. Go where you will, and read the story of the prodigal son,—on board ship among rough sailors, or away there in the barracks amongst wild soldiery, or go into the worst slums of London, and read to fallen women that wondrous story of God's pardoning love, and see if it will do them any injury. You know that it will not. On the contrary, it conveys to them a message of hope, which helps to lift them up from that black despair which is one of the strongest chains by which the devil can hold lost souls in captivity. I am not at all afraid of the effect of preaching that it is the glory of God to blot out sin, for he put his Son between himself and the sinner, as we sometimes sing,—

“Christ and then the sinner see,
Look through Jesu's wounds on me.”

The greatest blessing of all is, dear friends, that, *when God covers sin, he does it so effectually that it never appears any more.* He declares that he casts it into the depths of the sea. He says that, as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove it from us. He even goes the length of saying, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none." So far as anything can be annihilated, that is what will happen to the Lord's people. You know that the work of the Messiah was, "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness;" and that is the work of which he said, "It is finished." Then it is finished, there is an end of it; that is the glorious way in which the Lord covers sin, and it is his peculiar glory that he is continually doing this. Kings may search out matters, and they ought to do so, or government will not be safe; but it is to the honour of God to forgive sin.

II. Now, secondly, to make a practical use of this doctrine, THIS SHOULD BE A VERY GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO THOSE WHO ARE SEEKING MERCY AT GOD'S HANDS.

Beloved friend, do you wish to have your sin forgiven? Then, do not attempt to cover it yourself, for it is the glory of God to cover that matter, so do not try to rob him of his glory. If you could have covered your sin, there would have been no need for a Redeemer. Do not attempt to excuse or extenuate your guilt, but make a clean breast of it. You are a sinner; therefore, say that you are a sinner. In all your approaches to God, seeking mercy at his hands, come in your true colours. Do not even plead your own repentance, or your tears, or your feelings. Plead as David did, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity: *for it is great.*" Call your sin great, as it really is. Never try to make it out to be little. You know that, if you were wounded on a battlefield, and a surgeon came where you were, you would not say to him, "Oh, I have very little the matter with me!" Oh no! I warrant you that you would cry as loudly as you could, "Doctor, do bind up my gaping wounds, lest I die." You know that, in such a case, you would make the most of it, and you would act wisely in doing so; and it is never wise for a sinner to make himself out to be a little sinner. It is the glory of God to cover sin, so do not you attempt to do it. I say again, lay it all bare before him, and ask him to cover it with the atoning sacrifice of his dear Son.

Now, poor sinner, I pray the Holy Spirit to enable thee to give God glory, at this moment, by believing that he can cover sin. When the conscience is thoroughly awakened, it seems impossible that sin should ever be covered. The convicted sinner says, "My sin, my sin, I always see it; can it ever be hidden from the sight of God?" Canst thou not believe that God in Christ can cover thy sin? Glorify God, O son, glorify God, O daughter, by believing that he can do so! Do not limit his mercy by thinking that he cannot pardon thee, for he has forgiven so many that, assuredly, there is proof enough that he can pass by iniquity, transgression, and sin, and remember not the guilt of those who trust his Son. If thou believest that, give glory to God now by believing that he is willing

to pass by thy sin. Every man is willing to do that which honours himself, and it is inconceivable that God should be reluctant to do that which glorifies himself. So, as it is for his glory to cover sin, he must be willing to cover it; therefore, may the Holy Spirit help thee now to believe that he can and will cover thy sin! There is Christ on the cross; look to him with the eye of faith, and take him to be thine own Saviour. Christ on the cross is nothing to you until you trust in him, but it glorifies Christ when a poor guilty sinner cries to him, "Purge me with hyssop." You know what the use of the hyssop was. They took a bunch of it, and dipped it in the blood of the sacrifice, and those who were sprinkled with it were made ceremonially clean. David prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;" and that is the prayer for you to present. You believe that, if God were to wash another man in the blood of Jesus, he would become whiter than snow, but canst thou not believe it for thyself? May the blessed Spirit take away thine unbelief, dear heart! Canst thou not believe that he can wash thee, and make thee whiter than snow? He will do it in a moment if thou dost but trust him, rely upon him, and receive his dear Son to be thy salvation. This is the true covering of sin. Oh, how the Hebrews loved that word "covering." Noah's ark was pitched within and without with pitch: that was its covering. So, everything under the Mosaic law had its covering; and God has a way of covering sin, and covering the sinner, too, within and without, till all his sin is gone, and he that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ may know at once that his transgression is forgiven, his sin is covered.

"But," someone asks, "am I to do nothing?" Nothing but believe in him that justifieth the ungodly. If you do that, you will begin to do something more directly afterwards, for you will love God for having pardoned you, and you will say, "I am not my own now, for I am bought with a price; and, therefore, I will live to his glory." But, in order to get thy sin forgiven, thou hast nothing to do except to—

"Cast thy deadly doing down,
Down at Jesu's feet;
Stand in him, in him alone,
Gloriously complete;"

"for he that believeth on him is not condemned." "He that believeth in him is justified from all things, from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses." Oh, what an encouragement this ought to be to all sinners who are seeking the Saviour!

III. Now, lastly, THIS GRAND DOCTRINE OUGHT TO BE A GREAT STIMULUS TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

First, it should excite you to glorify God in having covered your sin. Do not go and talk to everybody about what you used to be before conversion, as I have known some do. They will almost glory in what they were. I have more than a little hesitation about what is sometimes said by converted burglars, and men of that sort. I am glad they are converted, but I wish they would not talk so much about that which is covered. Let it be covered.

Still, never be backward to glorify God for having covered your sin. Speak of it with delicacy and modesty; but, if the grace of God has saved you, tell all men of it, and do not let people imagine that God has done only a small thing for you. When he saved you, it was the grandest thing he could do for you. Do you not think so? Well, then, tell the story of it.

“Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am—I am—out of hell.”

And what is more, I never shall go there; but shall see God's face with acceptance in heaven. Tell this to sinners while you live; and when you get to heaven, make the streets of glory to ring with the tidings of the almighty grace that covered all your sin.

The next thing for you Christian people to do, now you know that God can cover sin, is to *aim at the covering of the sins of your friends and neighbours by leading them to the Saviour*. To see sin, should always be a tearful sight to you. As soon as ever you see it, breathe the prayer, “Lord, cover it.” Do you live where you can hardly lie in your bed at night without hearing sounds of ribaldry and blasphemy? Then, the moment you hear them, say, “Lord, cover that sin.” Do you see, in the streets, foul transgression that makes you blush? Never see it without saying, “Lord, cover that sin.” If we were in a right state of heart, this would be our habit, every sin that we noticed in ourselves or in others,—in our children, or our servants, or our neighbours, or that we read of in the newspapers, would make us pray, “Lord, cover that sin.” So, always be telling others about the covering of sin by Christ's precious blood. Show them what a perfect covering it is. You know that the Lord spoke, through Isaiah, of “a covering which is narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.” But the atoning sacrifice of Christ is a covering which will cover all sin, and cover the sinner from head to foot; therefore, tell others about it with all your might.

And, once more, you who have proved the power of this covering, *imitate the Lord in forgetting the sins of those who repent*. If ever they offend you, let that atonement, which satisfied God for sin, also satisfy you, and say, “Though this man has offended me, I ask no atonement at his hands, because Christ's atonement is to my soul the satisfaction for every sin against me as well as against God.” Never harbour any resentment for a single moment, beloved. “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Do you think that Christ's blood and righteousness are not sufficient to cover those unkind words of your brother, or that ungenerous action of your son, or that slanderous speech of your neighbour? Go and put all offences against yourself where God has put all offences against himself. It is a dreadful thing to hear a man talking about God having forgiven him ten thousand talents, and then to see him take his brother by the throat, saying, “Pay me what thou owest.” Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” This spirit of forgiveness would keep us always in a state of love, and this is exactly what the Lord Jesus aims at. “It is the glory of God to cover a matter.”

Then, do you cover matters too. I know some people who always like to be poking into any filth there is. They keep a long stick, and stir it up, and they seem to be quite pleased with the sweet perfume. Let it alone, brother; let it alone. "Oh, but you do not know how they have offended me!" No, and I do not want to know; but I am quite sure that they have not offended you as much as you have offended God, and yet he has forgiven you. Then, do you forgive them. The less said, you know, in such matters, the sooner are they mended. Solomon wisely says, "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out." Blessed are they who always act as firemen, throwing cold water upon every spark of dissension or ill-will that they see. It is the glory of God to cover it up, so do you also cover it up with the spirit of love, and the mantle of gentleness; and, above all, with the reflection that the precious blood of Christ, that made peace between you and God, has also made peace between you and all mankind. And now, for love of Christ, if they smite you on the one cheek, you should turn the other also; if they will have your cloak, for love of Jesus let them have your coat also, sooner than live in the spirit of perpetual contention and strife. May God enable you to act thus, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

EXODUS XXV. 10—22; AND PSALM XXXII.

Exodus xxv. Verses 10, 11. And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about.

The ark of the covenant was the most sacred object in the tabernacle in the wilderness. It stood at the extreme end of the holy of holies. It was the place over which the bright shining light, called the Shekinah, which was the token of the presence of God, shone forth. The ark was, doubtless, typical of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a sacred chest made to contain the law. Blessed are they who know the law in Christ. Out of Christ, the law condemns. In Christ, it becomes a blessed guide to us. This ark was made of wood, perhaps to typify the human nature of our blessed Lord; but it was of unrotting wood, acacia, which resists the worm; and, truly, in him there was no corruption in life by way of sin, and no corruption sullied him in death when he slept for a while in the grave. Wood is a thing that grows out of the earth, even as Jesus sprang up like a root out of a dry ground. But the ark must be made of the best kind of wood, —unrotting and untainted. Yet the ark, though made of wood, did not appear to be so, for it was completely overlaid with pure gold; so, everywhere, the Deity, or, if you will, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ could be seen. The ark was of shittim wood, yet it was an ark of gold; and he, who was truly man, was just as truly God, blessed be his holy name. Round about the top of this ark there was a crown of gold. How glorious is Christ, in his mediation, as covering the law, and preserving it within himself! He is King, glorious in holiness, and honoured in the midst of his people.

12—14. *And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the*