

## Two Coverings and Two Consequences

A Sermon

(No. 3500)

Published on Thursday, February 24th, 1916.

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At [the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.](#)

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper."—Proverbs 38:13.

"Thou Hast covered all their sins."—[Psalm 85:2.](#)

IN THESE two texts we have *man's covering*, which is worthless and culpable, and *God's covering*, which is profitable, and worthy of all acceptance. No sooner had man disobeyed his Maker's will in the garden of Eden than he discovered, to his surprise and dismay, that he was naked, and he set about at once to make himself a covering. It was a poor attempt which our first parents made, and it proved a miserable failure. "They sewed fig-leaves together." After that God came in, revealed to them yet more fully their nakedness, made them confess their sin, brought their transgression home to them, and then it is written, the Lord God made them coats of skin. Probably the coats were made of the skins of animals which had been offered in sacrifice, and, if so, they were a fit type of him who has provided us with a sin-offering and a robe of perfect righteousness. Every man since the days of Adam has gone through much of the same experience, more or less relying on his own ingenuity to hide his own confusion of face. He has discovered that sin has made him naked, and he has set to work to clothe himself. As I shall have to show you presently, he has never succeeded. But God has been pleased to deal with his own people, according to the riches of his grace; he has covered their shame and put away their sins that they should not be remembered any more.

Let me now direct your attention, first, to man's covering, and its failure; and then to God's covering, and its perfection.

May the Holy Spirit be pleased to give you discernment, that you may see your destitute state in the presence of God, and understand the merciful relief that God himself has provided in the bounty of his grace!

### I. MAN'S COVERING.

There are many ways in which men try to cover their sin. Some do so by denying that they have sinned, or, admitting the fact, they deny the guilt; or else, candidly acknowledging both the sin and the guilt, they excuse and exonerate themselves on the plea of certain circumstances which rendered it, according to their showing, almost inevitable that they should act as they have done. By pretext and presence, apology and self-vindication, they acquit themselves of all criminality, and put a fine gloss upon every foul delinquency. *Excuse-*

*making* is the commonest trade under heaven. The slenderest materials are put to the greatest account. A man who has no valid argument in arrest of judgment, no feasible reason why he should not be condemned, will go about and bring a thousand excuses, and ten thousand circumstances of extenuation, the whole of them weak and attenuated as a spider's web. Someone here may be saying within himself, "It may be I have broken the law of God, but it was too severe. To keep so perfect a law was impossible. I have violated it, but then I am a man, endowed with passions that involve propensities, and inflamed with desires that need gratification. How could I do otherwise than I have done? Placed in peculiar circumstances, I am borne along with the current. Subject to special temptations, I yield to the fascination; this is natural." So you think; so you essay to exculpate yourself. But, in truth, you are now committing a fresh sin; for you are abasing God, you are inculcating the Almighty. You are impugning the law to vindicate yourself for breaking it. There is no small degree of criminality about such an unrighteous defence. The law is holy, just, and good. You are throwing the onus of your sins upon God. You are trying to mane out that, after all, you are not to blame, but the fault lies with him who gave the commandment. Do you think that this will be tolerated? Shall the prisoner at the bar bring accusations against the Judge who tries him? Or shall he challenge the equity of the statute while he is arraigned for violating it? And as for the circumstances that you plead, what valid excuse can they furnish, Has it come to this—that it was not you, but your necessities, that did the wrong and are answerable for the consequence? Not you, indeed! you are a harmless innocent victim of circumstances! I suppose, instead of being censured, you ought almost to be pitied. What is this, again, but throwing the blame upon the arrangements of Providence, and saying to God, "It is the harshness of thy discipline, not the perverseness of my actions, that involves me in sin." What, I say, is this but a high impertinence, ay, veritable treason, against the Majesty of that thrice holy God, before whom even perfect angels veil their faces, while they cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts"? I pray thee resort not to such a covering as this, because, while it is utterly useless, it adds sin to sin, and exposes thee to fresh shame.

In many cases persons violating the law of God have hoped to *cover their transgression by secrecy*. They have done the deed in darkness. They hope that no ear of man heard their footfall, or listened to their speech. Possibly they themselves held their tongue, and flattered themselves that no observer witnessed their movements or could divulge their action. So was it with Achan. I dare say he took the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment, mid the confusion of the battle, and hid it when his comrades seemed too much engaged to notice so trivial an affair. While they were rushing over the fallen walls of Jericho, amidst the debris and the dust, he might be unmolested; and then, in the dead of night, while they slept, he turned the sod of his tent, dug into the earth, and buried there his coveted treasure. All looks right, to his heart's content. He has smoothed it down, and spread his carpet over the grave of his lust. Little did he reckon of the Omniscient eye. Little did he count on the un-

erring lot that would come home to the tribe of Judah, to the family of the Zarhites, to the house of Zabdir, and, at last, to the son of Carmi, so that Achan himself would have to stand out confessed as a traitor—a robber of his God. Men little know the ways in which the Almighty can find them out, and bring the evidence that convicts, out of the devices that were intended to cover their sin.

Do you not know that Providence is a wonderful detective? There are hounds upon the track of every thief, and murderer, and liar—in foot, upon every sinner of every kind. Each sin leaves a trail. The dogs of judgment will be sure to scent it out, and find their prey. There is no disentangling yourselves from the meshes of guilt; no possibility of evading the penalty of transgression. Very wonderful have been the ways in which persons who have committed crimes have been brought to judgment. A trifle becomes a tell-tale. The method of deceit gives a clue to the manner of discovery. Wretched the men who bury their secrets in their own bosom. Their conscience plays traitor to them. They have often been forged to betray themselves. We have read of men talking in their sleep to their fellows, and babbling out in their dreams the crime they had committed years before. God would have the secret disclosed. No eye had seen, neither could other tongue have bold, but the man turned king's evidence against himself; he has thus brought himself to judgment. It has often happened, in some form or other, that conscience has thus been witness against men. Do I address anyone who is just now practicing a secret sin? You would not have me point you out for all the world, nor shall I do so. Believe me, however, the sin is known. Dexterous though you have been in the attempt to conceal it, it has been seen. As surely as you live, it has been seen. "By whom?" say you. Ah! by One who never forgets what he sees, and will be sure to tell of it. He may commission a little bird of the air to whisper it. Certainly he will one day proclaim it by the sound of trumpet to listening worlds. You are watched, sir; you are known. You have been narrowly observed, young girl; those things you have hidden away will be brought to light, for God is the great discoverer of sin. His eye has marked you; his providence will track you. It is vain to think that ye can conceal your transgressions. Before high heaven, disguise is futile. Yea, the darkness hideth not; the night shineth as the day. I have known persons who have harboured a sin in their breast till it has preyed upon their constitution. They have been like the Spartan boy who had stolen a fox, and was ashamed to have it known, so he kept it within his garment, till it ate through his flesh, and he fell dead. He suffered the fox to gnaw his heart ere he would betray himself. There are those who have got a sin, if not a lie in their right hand, yea, a lie in their heart, and it is eating into their very life. They dare not confess it. If they would confess it to their God, and make restitution to those whom they have offended, they would soon come to peace; but they vainly hope that they can cover the sin, and hide it from the eyes of God and man. He that covereth his sin in this fashion shall not prosper.

Again, full many a time sinners have tried to *cover their sin with falsehood*. Indeed, this is the usual habit—to lie—to cloak their guilt by denying it. Was not this the way with Gehazi? When the prophet said, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" he said, "Thy servant went no whither." Then the prophet told him that the leprosy of Naaman should cleave to him all the days of his life. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira, in lying in order to hide their sin, how quickly was it discovered, and how terrible was the retribution! I wonder that men and women can lie as they do after reading that story. "Hast thou sold the land for so much?" said Peter. And Ananias said, "Yea, for so much." At that instant he fell down and gave up the ghost. Three hours after, when his wife, Sapphire, said the same, the feet of the young men who had buried her husband were at the door, ready to carry out her corpse, and bury her by his side. Oh! sirs, ye must weave a tangled web, indeed, when once ye begin to deceive; and when you have woven it you will have to add lie to lie, and lie to lie, and yet all to no purpose, for you will be surely found out. There is something about a lie that always deludes the man who utters it. Liars have need of good memories. They are sure to leave a little corner uncovered through which the truth escapes. Their story does not hang together. Discrepancies excite suspicions, and evasions furnish a clue to discoveries, till the naked truth is unveiled. Then the deeper the plot the fouler is the shame. But to lie unto the God of truth, of what avail can that be? What advantageth it you to plead "not guilty," when he has witnessed your crime? That infallible Eye which never mistakes is never closed. He knows everything; from him no secret is hid. Why, therefore, dost thou imagine that thou canst deceive thy Maker?

There are some who try to *cover their sin by prevarication*. With cunning subtlety they strive to evade personal responsibility. Memorable is the instance of David. I will not dwell upon his flagrant crime; but I must remind you of his sorry subterfuge, when he tried to hide the baseness of his lust by conspiring to cause the death of Uriah. There have been those who have schemed deep and long to throw the blame on others, even to the injury of their reputation, to escape the odium of their own malpractices. Who knows but in this congregation there may be someone who affects a high social position, supported by a deep mercantile immorality? Merchants there have been that have swollen before the public as men of wealth, while they were falsifying their accounts, abstracting money, yet making the books tally, rolling in luxury, and living in jeopardy. Have they prospered? Were they to be envied? The detection that long haunted them at length overtook them; could they look it in the face? We have heard of their blank despair, their insane suicide; at any rate, a miserable exposure has been their melancholy climax. "Be sure your sin will find you out." You may run the length of your tether. It is short. The hounds of justice, swift of scent and strong of limb, are on your trail. Rest assured, you will be discovered. Could you escape the due reward in this life, yet certainly your guilt is known in heaven, and you shall be judged and con-

demned in that great day which shall decide your eternal destiny. Seek not, then, to cover up sin with such transparent cobwebs as these.

Some people flatter themselves that their sin has already been *hidden away by the lapse of time*. "It was so very long ago," says one, "I had almost forgotten it; I was a lad at the time." "Aye," says another, "I am gray-headed now. It must have been twenty or thirty years ago. Surely you do not think that the sin of my far-off days will be brought out against me? The thing is gone by. Time must have obliterated it." Not so, my friend. It may be the lapse of time will only make the discovery the more clear. A boy once went into his father's orchard, and there in his rough play he broke a little tree which his father valued. But, rapidly putting it together again, he managed to conceal the fact, for the disunited parts of the tree took kindly to each other, and the tree stood as before. It so happened that more than forty years afterwards he went into that garden after a storm had blown across it in the night, and he found that the tree had been riven in two, and it had snapped precisely in the place where he had broken it when it was but a sapling. So there may come a crash to your character precisely in that place where you sinned when yet a lad. Ah! how often the transgressions of our youth remain within our bosoms! There lie the eggs of our young sin, and they hatch when men come into riper years. Don't be so sure that the lapse of time will consign your faults and follies to oblivion. You sowed your wild oats, sir; you have got to reap them. The time that has intervened has only operated to make that evil seed spring up, and you are so much the nearer to the harvest. Time does not change the hue of sin in the sight of God. If a man could live a thousand years, the sins of his first year would be as fresh in the memory of the Almighty as those of the last. Eternity itself will never wash out a sin. Flow on, ye ages; but the scarlet spots on the sand. Flow on still in mighty streams, but the damning spot is there still. Neither time nor eternity can cleanse it. Only one thing can remove sin. The lapse of time cannot. Let not any of you be so foolish as to hope it will.

When the trumpet of the resurrection sounds, there will be a resurrection of characters, as well as of men. The man who has been foully slandered will rejoice in the light that reflects his purity. But the man whose latent vices have been skilfully veneered will be brought to the light too. His acts and motives will be alike exposed. As he himself looks and sees the resurrection of his crimes, with what horror will he face that day of judgment! "Ah! ah!" says he, "Where am I? I had forgotten these. These are the sins of my childhood, the sins of my youth, the sins of my manhood, and the sins of my old age. I thought they were dead and buried, but they start from their tombs. My memory has been quickened. How my brain reels as I think of them all! But there they are, and, like so many wolves around me, they seem all thirsting for my destruction." Beware, oh! men. Ye have buried your sins, but they will rise up from their graves and accuse you before God. Time cannot cover them.

Or do any of you imagine that your *tears can blot out transgressions*? That is a gross mistake. Could your tears for ever flow; could you be transformed into a Niobe, and do

nothing else but weep for aye, the whole flood could not wash out a single sin. Some have supposed that there may be efficacy in baptismal water, or in sacramental emblems, or in priestly incantations, or in confession to a priest—one who asks them to disclose their secret wickedness to him, and betrays a morbid avidity to make his breast the sewer into which all kinds of uncleanness should be emptied. Be not deceived. There is nothing in these ordinances of man, or these tricks of Romish priestcraft (I had almost said of witchcraft, the two are so much alike) to excuse the folly of those who are beguiled by them. You need not catch at straws when the rope is thrown out to you. There is pardon to be had; remission is to be found; forgiveness can be procured. Turn your back on yonder shavelings; lend not your ear to them, neither be ye the victims of their snares. In the street each day it makes one's soul sad to see them. Like the Pharisees of old, they wear their long garments to deceive. You cannot mistake them. Their silly conceit publishes their naked shame. Confide not in them for a moment. Christ can forgive you. God can blot out your sin. But they cannot ease your conscience by their penances, or remove your transgressions by their celebrations.

Thus I have gone through a rough, not very accurate, list of the ways by which men hope to cover their sin, but they "shall not prosper." None of these shall succeed.

A more joyous task devolves on me now, while I draw your attention to my second text, "Thou hast covered all their sin."

## II. GOD'S COVERING.

This fact is affirmed concerning the people of God. All who have trusted in the atoning sacrifice which was presented by the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary may accept this welcome assurance, "God. has covered all their sin." How this hath come to pass I will tell you. Before ever God covers a man's sins *he unveils them*. Did you ever see your sins unveiled? Did it ever seem as if the Lord put his hand upon you, and said, "Look, look at them"? Have you been led to see your sins as you never saw them before? Have you felt their aggravations fit to drive you to despair? As you have looked at them, has the finger of detection seemed to point out your blackness? Have you discovered in them a depth of guilt, and iniquity, and hell—desert which never struck your mind before? I recollect a time when that was a spectacle always before the eyes of my conscience. My sin was ever before me. If God thus makes you see your sin in the light of his countenance, depend upon it he has his purposes of mercy toward you. When you see and confess it, he will blot it out. So soon as God, in infinite loving-kindness, makes the sinner know in truth that he is a sinner, and strips him of the rags of his self-righteousness, he grants him pardon and clothes his nakedness. While he stands shivering before the gaze of the Almighty, condemned, the guilt is purged from his conscience. I do not know of a more terrible position in one's experience than to stand with an angry God gazing upon you, and to know that wherever God's eye falls upon you it sees nothing but sin; sees nothing in you but what he must hate and must abhor. Yet this is the experience through which God puts those to whom he grants forgiveness. He makes them

know that he sees how sinful they are, and he makes them feel how vile and leprous they are. His justice withers their pride; his judgment appals their heart. They are humbled in the very dust, and made to cry out—each man trembling for his own soul—"God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Not till this gracious work of conviction is fully wrought does the Lord appear with *the glorious proclamation* that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus shall have his sins covered. That proclamation. I have now openly to publish and personally to deliver to you. With your outward ears you may have heard it hundreds of times. It is old, yet ever new. Whosoever among you, knowing himself to be guilty, will come and put his trust in Jesus Christ, shall have his sins covered. "Can God do that?" Yes, he can. *He alone can cover sin*: Against him the sin was committed. It is the offended person who must pardon the offender. No one else can. He is the King. He has the right to pardon. He is the Sovereign Lord, and he can blot out sin. Beside that, he can cover it lawfully, for the Lord Jesus Christ (though ye know the story, let me tell it again—the song of redemption always rings out a charming melody), Jesus Christ, the Father's dear Son, in order that the justice of God might be vindicated, bare his breast to its dreadful hurt, and suffered in our room, and place, and stead, what we ought to have suffered as the penalty of our sin. Now the sacrifice of God covers sin—covers it right over; and he more than covers it, he makes it cease to be. Moreover, the Lord Jesus kept the law of God, and his obedience stands, instead of our obedience; and God accepts him and his righteousness on our behalf, imputing his merits to our souls.

Oh! the virtue of that atoning blood! Oh! the blessedness of that perfect righteousness of the Son of God, by which he covers our sins!

There are two features of covering I should like to recall to your recollection. The one was the mercy-seat or propitiatory, over the golden ark, wherein were the tables of stone. Those tables of stone seemed, as it were, to reflect the sins of Israel. As in a mirror they reflected the transgression of God's people. God was above, as it were, looking down between the cherubic wings. Was he to look down upon the law defied and defiled by Israel? Ah! no; there was put over the top of the ark, as a lid which covered it all, a golden lid called the mercy-seat, and when the Lord looked down he looked upon that lid which covered sin. Beloved, such is Jesus Christ, the covering for all our sins. God sees no sin in those who are hidden beneath Jesus Christ.

There was another covering at the Red Sea. On that joyous day when the Egyptians went down into the midst of the sea pursuing the Israelites, at the motion of Moses' rod the waters that stood upright like a wall leapt back into their natural bed and swallowed up the Egyptians. Great was the victory when Miriam sang, "The depths have covered them. There is not one of them left." It is even so that Jesus Christ's atonement has covered up our sins. They are sunk in his sepulchre; they are buried in his tomb. His blood, like the Red Sea, has drowned them. "The depths have covered them. There is not one of them left." Against the believer

there is not a sin in God's Book recorded. He that believeth in him is perfectly absolved. "Thou hast covered all their sin." I shall not have time to dwell upon the sweetness of this fact, but I invite you that believe to consider its preciousness; and I hope you who have not believed will feel your mouth watering after it; to know that every sin one has ever committed, known and unknown, is gone—covered by Christ. To be assured that when Jesus died he did not die for some of our sins, but for all the sins of his people; not for their sins up till now, but for all the sins they ever will commit! Well does Kent put it:—

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,  
It matters not how black they're cast  
And O, my soul, with wonder view  
For sins to come here's pardon too."

The atonement was made before the sin was committed. The righteousness was presented even before we had lived. "Thou hast covered all their sin. It seems to me as if the Lamb of God, slain from before the foundation of the world, had in the purpose of God, from the foundation of the world, covered all his people's sins. Therefore, we are accepted the Beloved, and dear to the Father's heart. Oh! what a joy it is to get a hold of something like this truth, especially when the truth gets a hold of you—when you can feel by the in-wrought power and witness of the Holy Ghost that your sins are covered—that you dare stand up before a rein-trying, heart-searching God, and give thanks that every transgression you ever committed is hid from the view of those piercing eyes through Jesus Christ your Lord.

Some people think we ought not to talk thus, that it is presumptuous. But really there is more presumption in doubting than there is in believing. For a child to believe his father's word is never presumption. I like to credit my Father's word. "He that believeth in him is not condemned." Condemned I am not, for I know I do believe in him. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Beloved, the covering is as broad as the sin. The covering completely covers, and for ever covers; for as God sees to-day no sin in those who are washed in Jesus' blood, so will he never see any. You are accepted with an acceptance that nothing can change. Whom once he loves he never leaves, but loves them to the end. The reason of his love to them does not lie in their merits nor their charms; the cause of love is in himself. The ground of his acceptance of them is in the person and work of Christ. Whatever they may be, whatever their condition of heart may be, they are accepted, because Christ lived and died. It is not a precarious or a conditional, but an eternal acceptance.

Would you enjoy the blessedness of this complete covering? Cowering down beneath the tempest of Jehovah's wrath, which you feel in your conscience, would you obtain this full remission? Behold the gates of the City of Refuge which stand wide open. The grace of



our Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed! to the thirsty, needy, labouring, weary soul. Not merely open are the gates, but the invitation to enter is given. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You are bidden to lay hold upon eternal life. The way of doing so is simple. No works of yours, no merits, no tears, no preparations are required, but trust—trust—that is all. Believe in Jesus. Rely upon him; depend upon him; depend upon him. I have heard of Homer's *Iliad* being enclosed in a nutshell, so small was it written; but here is the Plain Man's Guide to Heaven in a nutshell. Here is the essence of the whole gospel in one short sentence. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Trust him; trust him. That is the meaning of that word believe. Depend upon him, and as surely as thou doest it, nor death, nor hell, nor sin shall ever separate thee from the love of him whom thou hast embraced, from the protection of him in whose power thou hast taken shelter. The Lord lead you to cower beneath his covering wings, and grant you to be found in Christ, accepted in the Beloved. So shall your present peace be the foretaste of your eternal felicity. Amen.