

## Love Covers a Multitude of Sins

*Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.*

*James 5:20 He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

*1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*

What does the Bible mean when it says that our love for others covers all (or a multitude of) sins/transgressions?

We can begin to answer this question by noting what this statement does *not* mean, according to other biblical passages.

- It does not mean that our love atones – or pays the penalty – for others’ sins. Only God’s love, expressed through Jesus’ death on the cross, can pay for human sins. As 1 John 2:2,3 says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”
- It does not mean that love always conceals others’ sins. Hiding a father’s chronic abuse of his wife and children, for example, is not loving. Such behavior should be confronted so that that the father might repent and his family might have a chance to heal and flourish. This is why Paul says, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).

When we look closely at each of these three passages, we discover that they each apply this maxim in a different way.



- *Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.* Here, Solomon contrasts how hatred and love respond to someone’s sinful acts. “Hatred stirs up strife,” presumably by delighting to tell others about the sin. Hatred asks, “How can I use this information to hurt the offender, or to impress others that I am in the know?” Such gossip, like gasoline on a fire, only increases the damage of the original sin. Love, however, is discrete with such information. It “covers” such sin by not telling others about it unless doing so is necessary. Love asks, “Is there a good reason why someone else should know about this? If not, I will keep it to myself.”
- *James 5:20 He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.* James is referring in context to a fellow-Christian who has turned away from God and His truth (James 5:19). How should we respond to this situation? We might respond vindictively: “I hope he gets what he deserves!” We might respond apathetically: “Oh well, she has chosen to go down that path; there is nothing I can do.” Such responses are uncaring, and overlook the possibility of having a redemptive influence on our straying brother or sister. We can certainly pray for God’s loving discipline, as Elijah prayed for straying Israel (James 5:16b,17). As we pray for them, God might lead us to plead with them to return to Him, or to show them a special kindness. If we cooperate with God in these ways, they might turn back to God. Then we will have “covered a multitude of sins.” That is, by influencing them toward repentance, we will have helped to rescue them from further ruin and sorrow.
- *1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.* Why is ongoing, sincere, intentional love for our brothers and sisters so important? One answer, according to Peter, is: “because love covers a multitude of sins.” Peter recognizes that because Christians are sinners, our churches are bound to be full of all kinds of sins – not only overt



sins like drunkenness and sexual immorality and anger outbursts, but also covert sins like jealousy and resentment and relational apathy (see for example Galatians 5:19-21).

How can we combat these sins? How can we minimize the damage they cause? Not primarily by simply resisting them or correcting them (though this is often necessary). The main way we “cover” these sins in our relationships is to prioritize intentionally loving one another.

Suppose my home church friend has a bad habit of speaking insensitively. I think: “His insensitivity is hurtful and offensive. I will try to get him to stop this bad habit.” I bring up his insensitivity, and he agrees it is a problem – but he remains pretty insensitive. But the more I focus on this short-coming, the more annoyed I become. Annoyance gives birth to resentment, and I begin to withdraw from the relationship. What a mess!

But what if instead of focusing on his short-coming, I choose to focus on his strengths? I keep a new list – not of the times he has been insensitive, but of how he has grown in other areas, how he is loyal to God’s truth, how he is willing to speak up on important matters. His insensitivity remains, but now I see it in a more accurate context. Now I can bear with his insensitivity more easily. Now I choose to encourage him about his strengths, and express gratitude for our friendship, and praise his strengths to others. A miracle has happened! His sin is still there, but it no longer defines him in my eyes or dominates our relationship. Active love has “covered” his sin.\*

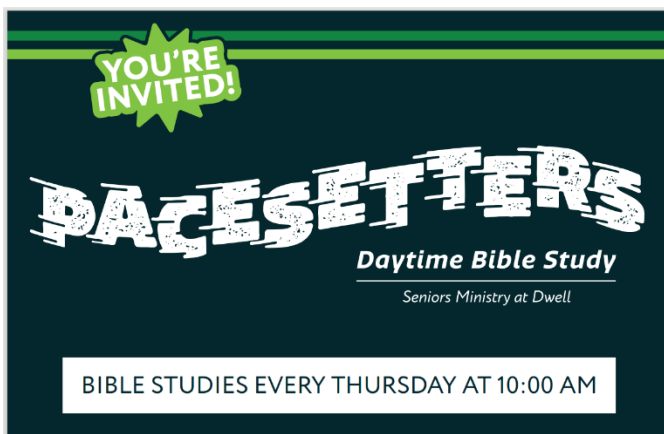
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\* “Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offences, and even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten. But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding, and conflicts abound – to Satan’s perverse delight.” Grudem, W. A. (1988). [\*1 Peter: an introduction and commentary\*](#) (Vol. 17, p. 181). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



*Lord Jesus, thank You for not only paying the penalty of my sins through Your death, but also for covering my many sins by Your steadfast love. You don't define me by my sins; You view me as a beloved child of God. You correct me when necessary, but You always encourage me and have a positive vision for my life. Help me to love my brothers and sisters in the same way.*

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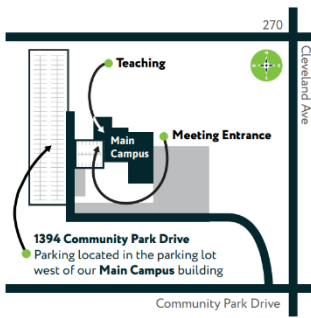


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