

Three approaches to sin

by Warren Wiersbe

This sermon emphasizes the costly nature of salvation and sin, highlighting the importance of dealing decisively with sin in our lives. It explores the three possible approaches to sin: concealing it, confessing and renouncing it, and ultimately conquering it by walking in the light of God's Word and in fellowship with other believers. The message focuses on the mercy and grace of God in forgiving sin and the transformative power of true confession and repentance.

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Scripture: Proverbs 28:13, 1 John 1:9, Psalms 51:10, Zechariah 3:4, Micah 7:18

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Description

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Transcript

The most costly things in the world are salvation and sin. Salvation is costly to God because sin is so costly to man. Sin is expensive, and because sin is so costly it can rob us of that which is beautiful and blessed and wholesome and holy.

The word of God reminds us repeatedly that God's children must deal deeply and decisively with sin. It isn't my purpose tonight to put anyone under a guilt trip. It is my purpose tonight to magnify the mercy and grace of God in the forgiveness of sin.

But if I am going to deal decisively and deeply with sin the way Jesus told me to, surgery, I must understand something about it. If my spiritual surgery is to be real, sincere, successful, it must be according to the word of God and the Spirit of God. When it comes to dealing with sin in my life, there are only three possible approaches I can take.

These three approaches are summarized in a verse you know, but I invite you to turn to it, Proverbs 28. The word of God says, "...he who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and

renounces them finds mercy. Here are three possible approaches to dealing with sin in our lives, and it's something that we want to do.

Nobody here gets up in the morning and says, I'm going to sin. I'm going to make this a good day. I'm going to sin.

Quite the contrary, we begin our day saying, Our Father, thy will be done, lead me not into temptation. The first possible approach is, we can conceal our sin. He who conceals his sins does not prosper.

This is my natural response. I learned this from Adam. When I was born with Adam's nature, I found myself leaning toward Adam's methods of dealing with things.

You'll recall that when our first parents sinned, they ran and hid. Fear came in. Then when God confronted them with what they had done, deception came in.

Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. The American evangelist Billy Sunday used to say that an excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. That's a good definition.

The skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. I suppose ultimately they were blaming God, the woman you gave me, the serpent you made. My first inclination is to conceal my sin, even though, as I read in the word of God, those who did it did not prosper.

Cain did it. Am I my brother's keeper? Achan did it. God found him out.

David did it. That tragic blot in David's memory. When I kept silence, he wrote, when I kept silence, my bones waxed old within me.

And David, who was so young and youthful and virile and athletic and so full of life and song, put down his sword, pick up his harp, was walking around like an old man. The springs of life within him had dried up because he covered his sin. I know this.

It's in the word. Ananias and Sapphira did it. You know the story, how they sold a piece of property, kept part of the price.

They could have kept all the price, as far as that goes. Campbell Morgan said that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not in stealing money from God, it was trying to make people think they were more spiritual than they really were. Some of us have perhaps tried that.

Our natural response is to conceal our sin. And how do we do it? Well, 1 John 1 tells us how we do it. I want to read that passage.

I'd like to invite you to turn there, 1 John 1, beginning at verse 5. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you, that God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. You know this, but I'll remind you of it.

Three times he's now going to say, if we claim, or if we say, if we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim, we have not sinned.

We make him out to be a liar, and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. Now, you'll notice the sequence here. Verse 6, if we claim.

Verse 8, if we claim. Verse 10, if we claim. Here is concealing sin by the things that we claim.

We're lying, we're deceiving. In verse 6, we're lying to others if we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. We're lying to one another.

The word for this in the Bible is hypocrisy. People sometimes come to us and say, I feel like such an awful hypocrite. And I say, well, why? Well, I'm just not living up to what I know.

Who does? Hypocrisy is not missing the mark when you're striving. Hypocrisy is trying to make people think you've hit the target and you aren't even shooting. The word hypocrite means a play actor, one who wears a mask.

So how do we conceal our sin? By deceiving one another. But it gets worse. Remember, the scripture we read says, he who conceals his sins does not prosper.

It doesn't say he will not prosper. When he starts concealing sin, something starts to happen down inside. One of God's purposes in salvation is the building of character.

We talk about getting God's work done. The first thing God does is build the worker. And God's more concerned about the worker than he is the work.

That's why he spent so much time with Jonah. Jonah preached the greatest evangelistic meeting in Bible history and hated the people he was preaching to. And we would have ended the book at chapter 3. The city got saved.

What else matters? Jonah matters. And so God continues in chapter 4, dealing with his servant. Why? He wants to build character.

He had an angry preacher on his hands. And so what begins with lying to others in verse 6 gets worse in verse 8. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us.

Now we're lying to ourselves. That's not hypocrisy. That's duplicity.

Duplicity is the opposite of integrity. And it's possible for a child of God to try to deceive himself. Well, I've had my devotions, but they didn't touch my heart.

I'm going back to the same old life. Oh, but I've been to a service. Ah, but it didn't change me.

And so what begins with hypocrisy, lying to others, becomes duplicity, lying to myself, and it gets worse. Verse 10. Now I'm lying to God and making God a liar.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar. And his word has no place in our lives. When we start living by lies, there's no room for truth.

And you notice the sequence here. In verse 6, we're not living by the truth. In verse 8, the truth is not in us.

In verse 10, the word has no place in us. And yet it's possible for me to go through the external activities of a Christian walk and be concealing sin. It's frightening.

In the first two chapters of 1 John, the apostle deals with fellowship. And the illustration is light versus darkness. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, he deals with sonship.

And it's a matter not of light and darkness, but life and death. And the key phrase in chapters 3, 4, and 5 is born of God, born of God, born of God. But in 1 and 2, we're walking with God.

He's talking about fellowship. And he's saying we're either walking in the light, which means living by truth, or we're walking in the darkness. Did you ever walk through the Bible when you hit upon a spiritual truth and look for illustrations? I recommend that to you.

But when God gives you a spiritual truth from his word, some fundamental principle that just thrills your heart, something you can live by, start walking through the Bible and saying, where is this illustrated? He's talking about light and darkness. And I was pondering this. And I said, where do we find in the Bible people who started in the light but ended in the darkness? Well, there are several of them.

King Saul, early in the morning as the sun was coming up, says 1 Samuel 9. As the sun was coming up early in the morning, Samuel took Saul off by himself, anointed him, kissed him, and made him king over Israel. His life began in the dawning of a new day. How did it end? At night, disguised, going to a witch's lair, seeking for help, and then ultimately dying on the battlefield after trying to commit suicide.

Saul started in the light, ended in the darkness. Samson. The very name Samson means sunny, S-U-N-N-Y.

He brightened up the home when he came. God endued this young man with power. And then he began to go down.

And where does he end up? Blinded in the darkness. I know at the end of his life he brought down the house and he killed more in his death than he did during his life. I know all of that.

But I'm also reminding myself of the fact that he started in the light and he ended in the darkness. Why? Saul lied to other people. I have done the will of the Lord, he said to Samuel.

And about that time they heard moo. And it wasn't the choir rehearsing. And Samuel says, what's this I hear? Well, the people, we kept the best of the spoils to sacrifice to the Lord.

Doesn't that sound pious? Saul lied to others. Samson lied to himself. He'd sin and say, well, I got away with that.

And he'd sin and say, well, I got away with that. And when that ultimate night came, he woke up and said, I'm going to shake myself like I always do. Oh, no you're not.

His power was gone. Saul started in the light and ended in the darkness. Samson started in the light and ended in the darkness.

Judas. Judas walked with the light for probably three years, was an intimate of the Lord Jesus as the treasurer of the disciples group. And I think one of the most ominous statements in the gospel of John, which is a gospel of symbolism, one of the most ominous statements is, And Judas went out, and it was night.

And for Judas it still is night, and it always will be night. Saul lied to others. Samson lied to himself.

Judas tried to lie to God. And all three ended up in the dark. He who conceals his sins does not prosper.

Psalms 51 makes that very clear. Oh, you see, we've read that so often. Would you look at it again? Now, let me hasten to say God forgave David.

God gave David another chance. David committed two great sins in his life. A sin of the flesh, Bathsheba, and a sin of the spirit, numbering the people.

From the sin of Bathsheba, four people died. From the sin of numbering the people, 70,000 people died. David married Bathsheba.

God gave them a son whom he loved dearly, Solomon. When David numbered the people, he bought a piece of property, and he put an altar on that property, and he offered a sacrifice to God and said, Oh, Lord, touch me, don't touch these sheep. And God heard his prayer, and God stopped the plague.

Now, here's an interesting thing. One day, Solomon, who was born of Bathsheba, took that piece of property that was purchased because of David's sin, and he built a temple on it. Only God can take a man's two greatest sins and build a temple out of it.

Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. That's not an excuse for sin. David paid dearly.

But I'll tell you what it is. It's an encouragement when the devil accuses you. Psalm 51, what did it cost David? Verse 3, something happened to his eyes.

My sin is always before me. Something happened to his mind. Verse 6, teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Something happened to his ears. Let me hear joy and gladness, says verse 8. Something happened to his bones. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Something happened to his heart. Verse 10, created me a pure heart, O God. Renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Something happened to his power. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me, the way God did with Saul. Something happened to his joy.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Something happened to his mouth. David was always ready with a song, ready with a witness, ready with a prayer.

But his mouth had been closed. Then I will teach transgressors your ways. Verse 14, my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. We can conceal our sins. But if we do, we won't prosper.

There's that deterioration on the inside and that discipline on the outside, and we're miserable. Well, thank God our verse doesn't end there. He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

We can conceal our sin, or the second approach is we can confess our sins. Now it takes us back once again to 1 John 1, a verse that some people use as an evangelical rabbit's foot. I will go out and sin because I know I can come back and confess it.

But that's not what he's saying. If we confess our sins, he says in verse 9, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Now, what is he saying here? If we confess, the word confess as we all know means to say the same thing.

If I say the same thing about what I have done, that God's word says about it, then I can claim God's forgiveness. That was the difference between David and Saul. Saul was good at excuses.

I've noticed that people who are good at excuses are rarely good at anything else. Whenever Saul did something wrong, he had an excuse. He could find somebody to blame.

And that tragic request that he made to Samuel, honor me, please, before the people. Saul's problem was pride. Samson's problem was lust.

Judas' problem was covetousness. By the way, those are the three great sins that will wreck any ministry and put you in the dark. If we confess, if we say the same thing that God says, that means I must go by God's definitions.

It doesn't say if we come with explanations. Now, Lord, let me tell you why I did that. He knows better why you did it than you know, than I know.

No, we don't come with explanations. We don't come with excuses. We come with confession.

We come saying, Lord, according to your word, my anger was murder, and I confess my sin. Lord, according to your word, what I did was deception, and I come and confess my sin. I want to say the same thing about it you're saying.

To a David man, when he said that you might be clear when you speak and true when you judge. The difference between Saul and David was that David kept the word before him. Saul kept himself before him.

Now, the thing that John is pleading for here is honesty, honest with God, honest with ourselves. I have to live with myself, and so I want to be good for myself to know. Edgar Guest wrote that many years ago, and it's true.

You don't have to live with me, and there are probably some silent amens going up at this point, but you do have to live with yourself. I have to live with myself. I don't want to live with two selves, duplicity.

Honest with God, honest with myself, and where necessary in the sphere of confession, honest with one another. It doesn't mean we hang all of our dirty wash out in public. Unfortunately, there are some evangelical exhibitionists who feel everybody wants to know what they've done.

That's not always necessary. In fact, it can do damage. But in the sphere of influence, honest with one another.

If we confess our sins, it's personal. David said a broken and a contrite heart God would not despise. That encourages me.

When we come, doing what Ezekiel said the Jews would do, he said they will loathe themselves because of their sin. Not weeping because I got caught. Not weeping because I hurt.

Not weeping because I'm being spanked. No, no. Anybody can do that.

But coming and saying, I have sinned. How could I, a child of God, sin against such love? How could I, a student of God's words, sin against such light? How could I, one indwelt by the Holy Spirit, sin against the Holy Spirit? Loathing ourselves. Sin not only confessed but judged, despised, renounced.

The promise is, if we confess our sins, he's faithful to his word and just toward his Son. Because Jesus died for our sins. And he was buried and he arose again.

And today he is at the right hand of the majesty on high. And he is our advocate. When I have problems with the law, I don't want a law book, I want a lawyer.

When I'm sick, I don't want a medical book, I want a doctor. When I've sinned, I need an advocate in heaven. As my high priest, he wants to give me grace to keep me from sinning.

But if I sin, as my advocate, he waits for my confession of sin, and then he forgives. The picture of this is beautifully given in Zechariah 3. I'm sure you've read it, but I'd like us to look at it. Zechariah 3. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

It's a law court scene. And Joshua, representing the nation, is dressed in filthy garments. And Satan is standing there as the prosecuting attorney, accusing.

When Satan talks to me about God, he lies. But often when he talks to God about me, he tells the truth. The Lord said to Satan, the Lord rebuke you, Satan.

The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire? Now, Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, take off his filthy clothes.

And then he said to Joshua, see, I've taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you. It sounds like the parable of the prodigal son. And the prophet got so enthusiastic, then I said, put a clean turban on his head.

So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him while the angel of the Lord stood by. When I have sinned, Satan accuses. When I come to my heavenly advocate who intercedes for me and represents me, it's not as though the Father is waiting, waiting to beat me.

And the Son has to say, no, don't do that. Oh, no, no way. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit work in perfect harmony and love.

Now, Satan accuses and says, look what Wiersbe has done. And then my Savior steps up. Bearing the wounds of Calvary, he took back to heaven the wicked works of men on his body.

And he says, I died for him. The Lord rebukes Satan. The Lord removes the dirty clothing.

The Lord restores Joshua with clean clothing and that turban that had on the front of it a golden plate that read, Holy to the Lord. We can conceal our sin. But if we do, we won't prosper.

We can confess our sin. And if we do, he's faithful to his word and just toward his Son to forgive us and cleanse us. But let's not stop there.

There is a third approach we can take in dealing with our sins. He who conceals his sins does not prosper. But if we'll confess and renounce, forsake our sins, we shall find mercy.

That's what I need, mercy. Mercy. Depth of mercy.

Can there be mercy still reserved for me? Yes. Yes. Because 1 John 1 has another if.

If we claim, that's concealing our sin. If we confess, that's confessing our sin. But verse 7 says, if we walk, that's conquering our sin.

Not enough just to be forgiven, restored, reinstated, and then tumble again. No, no. Conquering our sin.

How? By walking in the light. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, as he is, so are we in this world. As he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

And the blood of Jesus his son, the work of Calvary, purifies us from all sin. Walking in the light. In the light of what? His word.

Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path. Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Now you are clean through the word.

How can a Christian keep clean in a dirty world and conquer sin if he ignores the word? Walking in the light of the word. Walking in the light of the Lord in worship. The greatest definition of worship in the English language, I think, and I've not read them all, is the one by Archbishop William Temple.

For to worship God is to quicken the conscience with the holiness of God, feed the mind with the truth of God, purge the conscience with the beauty of God, open the heart to the love of God, devote the will to the service of God. That's walking in the light. God's church is a light where lamp stands in a dark world.

I don't think it's possible for a believer to conquer sin in isolation. I think we need each other. We need the fellowship of God's people if we're going to walk in the light.

And as we walk in the light, we can see the dirt coming. As we walk in the light, we have a better view of the path. As we walk in the light, particularly in the fellowship of God's people, there are those praying for us and standing with us.

And the path becomes easier. It's not enough just to confess sin. He said, let's go on and conquer sin.

Let's put it away. Let's forsake it. Let's renounce it by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Most expensive things in the world are sin and salvation. And we have a God who pardons. Again, I don't want anyone to be on a guilt trip under a dark cloud.

I'm not here to preach judgment. I'm here to preach mercy. Therefore, I want to end with those marvelous words.

Words that meant so much to Alexander White, that great Scottish preacher. From Micah. Don't turn to it.

Let me read them to you. It's the last chapter of Micah. Listen to what he says.

Remember our text. He who conceals his sins does not prosper. But whoever confesses and renounces them shall find mercy.

And the prophet says, who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

God's hand is waiting for me to turn it over to him, and he will hurl it in the depths of the sea, and it will be remembered no more as far as the east is from the west. What shall we do with our sins? Cover them, confess them, conquer them. We come, our Father, knowing that all things are open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

And our prayer is the prayer of the psalmist. Search me, O God. Know my heart.

Try me. Know my thoughts. And see if there be some wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

We long to be clean vessels, meat for the Master's use. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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