

Job 31: Living With Integrity

Adapted from a series of studies by Brian Haines



Job 31:33-35

Don't Cover Up Our Sins

"Job 31:33 If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I feared the great multitude, and dreaded the contempt of families, so that I kept silence and did not go out of the door- Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark. Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my Prosecutor had written a book!?" Job 31:33-35

It is a very natural thing to want to hide our transgressions. Even animals seem to want to hide their bad behavior. Children want to cover up their misdeeds. Perhaps this speaks not to the evil nature of men but the good; that we do not want to be seen as transgressors.

Job points to Adam as the example that he seeks to avoid. He reminds us that Adam hid his sin when he hid himself in the Garden. Job points out one of the reasons that men hide their sins: some do so because they fear being judged by others.

This is not a matter of boasting of our sins. We should not be those who glory in their past transgressions. Instead, we need to be those who willingly admit that they have sinned, and to self-examine at all times for the possibility that they are in sin now.

Admitting Our Sins To Ourselves

Perhaps the most difficult step in the work of avoiding hiding our sins is admitting them to ourselves. In 1 John 1:6-10 there are three lies that are discussed in regards to hiding sins. In verse 8 the point is made that *"if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"*. Too many people deceive themselves and do not admit their sins.

How is it we do not admit our sins to ourselves? Perhaps we work to be self-righteous and justify ourselves. Perhaps we simply overlook our behavior that is sinful, choosing not to see it. Maybe it is similar to the words of James in James 1:21-25. There he describes a man who looks in a mirror but does not see himself. So it is with the word; can we often say to ourselves when reading of the sinner in Scripture that "this is me"?

Confessing Our Sins for Forgiveness

In the passage we read earlier (1 John 1:5-10), John wrote about making a confession of our sins for forgiveness. This confession is the one we make to God; we confess our sin and He is just to forgive us. In 1 John 5:7 it speaks about a cleansing in being faithful; this does not negate the need to confess for forgiveness.

We need to understand that confession alone is not enough to be forgiven. There must be a commitment to change involved. We cannot expect to be forgiven of sins that we intend to continue to do.

Confessing Our Sins for Support

In James 5:14-16 we read about the confession of sin to one another. It is important to know that this is not speaking about a confession for forgiveness, but a confession to seek support. We know this because we are not able to retain or forgive sins of ourselves; forgiveness for sin is the work of God alone (Mark 2:7). So why do we confess our sins? Part of the work of the Christian family is to encourage one another. James goes on to speak about turning a sinner from their sins (James 5:19-20). Paul tells us in Galatians 6:1-2 about restoring those in sin by bearing their burdens.

Sometimes we present the idea that it is necessary for a public confession of sin in order to receive forgiveness. This is not a Scriptural idea, but one which is more traditional. There are times when a public confession of sin is useful; Paul speaks about elders in sin in 1 Timothy 5:20 being rebuked before all (perhaps any in a public work in the church, as seen in Galatians 2:14). We also might consider the importance of public confession when someone has sinned in a manner that might cause others to be led astray.

Overcoming Pride

There are a number of reasons that men may be unwilling to confess their sins. Ignorance of sin is a likely candidate. But one of the reasons we often are unwilling to confess is our pride. We want to believe we are righteous, and refuse to allow that idea to be changed. We want others to see us as righteous before God. Perhaps this is why Job sees the fear of others as a reason many hide their sins.

In Alcoholics Anonymous their philosophy is that an alcoholic is an alcoholic for life. This is not to say they are a drunk for life, but that they will always have a weakness for alcohol, even if they never drink again. In a similar way humans are creatures of the flesh. Even if we put on Christ, there is always flesh present to be tempted. We are not sinners for life, but we are always going to be tempted to sin. We cannot deny this; if we do, we risk falling.

Questions to consider:

1. Why might hiding our sin be an unforgiveable sin?
2. How might we be forgiven for sins about which we have forgotten?
3. Should we tell others to confess their sins before the church?
4. What ways do people risk sin when they deny they are tempted?
5. What part does pride play in this challenge?
6. What action would need to take place if a leader in the church sins?