

Love Covers A Multitude Of Sins

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[0 : 0 0] Well, for a wee while together tonight, I'd like us to turn to the passage that Alistair read in 1 Peter chapter 4. And we're going to focus our attention tonight on a wonderful verse in this chapter, the words of verse 8. Peter, having given lots of different instructions to his recipients, says in verse 8, above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. And really that phrase at the end there, love, covers a multitude of sins. That's our title for tonight, and that's what I want us to think about. It's one of those phrases that just speaks so powerfully about, well, about two things. It speaks so powerfully about what lies at the heart of the Gospel. And it speaks so powerfully about what a church community should look like. And I want us to unpack both of those things as we work our way through this phrase. The fact that this really is getting us to the heart of what Christianity is all about, but it's also getting us to the heart of what a church should look like. And I hope we'll see both of those things as we study this amazing phrase together. We're going to work through it backwards.

Not sure why I'm doing it backwards, but that was just the way my mind went in terms of preparing for this. So we're going to start at the end, and we're going to work our way back to the middle of the verse, and so that's just the way we're going to do it. So we're going to think through each word one by one, or each of the main words one by one, starting with the end, starting with sins. That's a concept that I think a lot of people maybe find difficult to deal with. I think in many ways, there's lots of things that make the Gospel offensive to the world around us and to the culture that we live in. I think the word sin is probably one of the things that people find most offensive. Now for many of you, that may not be the case, and I think that it is, that for many of you it's not the case that you don't find the word sin a difficult word to accept. But I think we do need to recognize that the society that we live in does, and they don't like the language of sin, and the fact that the Gospel emphasizes that is something that people have difficulty with. It seems critical, and it seems judgmental, and it can seem just a bit hard. I think the secular alternative to it, which presents the idea that everybody's really deep down fundamentally good, and actually everybody is actually fine, is something that people are drawn to, and it seems much more attractive than the concept of sin, which just seems a little bit strict, a little bit negative, and for many people a little bit difficult to stomach. What we need to recognize is that sin is a concept that we all crave. Now by that I don't mean like sin as in doing sins is something that we crave to do, that's true but in a different way. What I mean is that sin as a concept is something that we all crave in our world view, because sin is just recognizing that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and everybody craves that. And so when we see injustice in the world, we recognize instantly that that's wrong. When we see people being exploited, we instantly know that that's wrong. When we see awful actions being committed by world leaders in terms of war, we know that that's wrong. And when we see people suffering with all sorts of awful things happening in the world, we don't look at that and think, oh well isn't that wonderful, that's nature's way of working. We think that's wrong. We all crave that recognition that there is such a thing as right and there is such a thing as wrong. The Bible's word for wrong is the word sin. And I think that's a helpful thing for us to recognize because it means that we're starting off with something that actually is really talking our language.

And that might sound surprising that that word sin, to say sin is really talking our language, but actually it is. It is resonating with that deep seated sense of right and wrong that we all have. That when we see poverty, when we see injustice, when we see inequality, when we see people being treated badly, when we see people getting hurt by the actions of others, and when we are on the receiving end of that ourselves, we know that it's wrong.

And that's why I think we can say that the concept of sin is actually something that we all deeply crave and that we need to recognize. And I think that helps us to make sense of the world around

us because we see the manifestation of sin, of just stuff that's wrong in the world around us all the time. And we see that at a global level, we see that at a national level, local level. In so many ways, it's not hard to look around and find people who are suffering and find people who are being treated badly. So we see sin and the effect of it in the lives of other people. We also see the effect of sin in our own lives, where we get hurt by others and where things have happened to us that have felt unfair and where we've had to go through experiences where it's felt unjust and it's felt like that's wrong and we've just wished that it hadn't happened to us. And all of that's the evidence of the fact that sin is a reality. But that is only half the story because alongside looking in our hearts and seeing the effect of sin on us, committed by others, we also see the reality of sin committed by us. When we are the ones who have said things that we shouldn't have done, done things that we regretted, treated people in a way that's unfair, or even just harbored thoughts that are unhealthy and that maybe might not manifest themselves in actions but still stir up all sorts of unhealthy feelings and emotions about other people or about our circumstances. And I think that's one of the fascinating things about humans. We have this deep rooted sense of right and wrong and that's what marks us as those who bear the image of God. Just as God has a sense of right and wrong, so do we. That's why you never see sheep protesting. You just carry on with life. But humans protest. Humans know what's right and what's wrong. But at the very same time, we ourselves are also sinners. We ourselves see things in our own hearts, in our own actions, in our own lives that we regret and that we wish we hadn't done. And I know that's absolutely true for my own life and I hope that I'm not in any way sending like I'm, you know, that this doesn't apply to me so much in my life, but I wish I hadn't done. And so many things I still struggle with that I wish I didn't struggle with. So sin is a reality that we crave. It's a reality that we see in the world around us, but we also recognize it in our own hearts. Theologians have often had two categories of sin which I think are helpful just to remind ourselves of, you may well have heard of this, there's sins of omission and sins of commission. I never know how many

M's and S's to put in all of this, but you know what I'm trying to say. Sins of omission are what we mean when we fail to do the things that we should do. So there's certain expectations that God sets before us, things that we should do and we fail to do it. So a great example would be, you know, would be honesty, you know, where we are expected to be honest all the time. And so when we are not that, when we are dishonest, we fail to do what God expects of us. And there's lots of other examples, failing to give to those who are in need, failing to be patient with people who push our buttons or whatever it may be. Sins of omission, stuff we should do that we don't do. And then sins of commission are things that we do that we shouldn't do. So when we, when we commit actions that, that we are told not to, so, you know, we, we are commanded not to be angry in a way that's unrighteous.

[9 : 56] And yet we often do that when we react really badly with if someone pulls a car out in front of us or somebody, you know, doesn't reply to us as quickly as we want to, or whatever it might be, we commit that sin by, by doing something that God has asked us not to do.

So that's a very helpful distinction to have. When we're talking about sin, we talk about sins of omission, stuff that we are expected to do by God, that we don't do. We talk about, talk about sins of commission, things that we do that we shouldn't do. Now, there's obviously different, different, what's the word I'm looking for, like levels of sin.

Some sins are more serious than others. We see that even in our society, you think of our criminal justice system, it has more severe punishments for certain crimes than it does for others. That just makes perfect sense to us all. But when we think of sin as a whole, we are talking about ethical behavior in response to the commands that God has given to us.

And so God's given us commands. He set us as an ethical standard of what's right and wrong. And we are talking about how our conduct and behavior compares to that standard. And what we have to recognize is that in regard to that ethical framework of what's right and wrong, God's standard is impeccable. And so God operates in the level of absolute sinlessness, total purity, utter holiness, impeccable perfection. And I think, I often think that sometimes we tend to think of, when we think of God and sin and things like that, we can sometimes think that God's like the police and our sin is like our driving.

So we all drive and we kind of stick to the speed limit. But if we're a bit busy, if we're a bit of a rush, we don't, maybe we don't slow down enough, maybe new market, oh man, that's so slow when you're going to a new market at 30 and you just want to kind of go a little bit faster and you think,

oh, it's fine. And we tend, we can easily think of sin as like, well, you know, God's like the police. And some people, you know, some people really speed, they do 120 miles an hour, that's bad. But, you know, like 40, that's not too bad, that's okay. And we tend to kind of often think, well, you know, yes, there are serious sinners, we are a bit, but we're not so bad. We think of God like that.

[12:40] That's the wrong way to think about God. That is the wrong way to think about God. When you think about God and sin, you need to be thinking about an operating theater in a hospital. And you think how many people are allowed in that room without washing their hands? None.

How many instruments can be used in the surgical procedure that haven't been sterilized? None. It's not like, oh, well, that's just only a little bit dirty that scalpel. I'm sure it'll be fine. No, nothing, absolutely nothing. And it's that standard of perfection. How many people with COVID are allowed in an operating theater? None. It's not like, oh, well, it's just the nurses got it, surgeon does. No, no one, none. And that's the way we need to think in terms of how sin and God stand in relation to each other. God's standards are impeccable and sin, there cannot be anything, any sin at all in the presence of God. So when we talk about sins, that's, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about what we, what we know is wrong, what God has set before us in terms of the ethical framework of his law given to us. And we recognize our own failings in that regard, both in terms of what we omit to do and of what we commit. But the verse here doesn't just speak about sin, it speaks about a multitude of sins. And you think, oh, man, okay, it gets even worse. That's the word for a great crowd. And in the Gospels, when it talks about a great crowd, the same word that's used. So I think that's a really interesting illustration to have, image to have when we think about sins, you're talking about a great crowd of sins, a multitude of sins. And I think when you think about that great crowd, when you think about multitude, there's two things there. There's quantity and variety. So you think about a big crowd of people, you know, you've got, you've got a huge number of people and you've got loads and loads and loads of different people within that crowd. And I think that that's really a helpful image to describe, to help us understand sin. There's a vast quantity of sin in the world and in us. And I think that that's something that's really important to recognise. I think that human history proves this. If you look at history, you see the same mistakes and the same problems and the same actions that cause suffering, recurring, again and again and again and again. I mean, a great example of this. I remember a few years ago hearing a speaker who worked for a Christian organisation that helped people who were caught up in slavery. You know, we think just now, we talk about slavery, we think of slavery as this awful stain in the past of Western society and it is an awful stain in the past of Western society. And we see all the awful things that happened and the way people suffered so desperately as a result of slavery and we think, you know, we're so ashamed of what was in the past and we're thankful that it's in the past. That guy who came speaking to us from International Justice Mission said, there's more slaves in the world today than there have ever been. And you think, phew. It's hard to believe, but yet it just shows that the same problems keep coming up again and again in society. There's a multitude of sins affecting humanity. And we see that in our own hearts and, you know, and as we look at our own lives, we see that our own sin, it mounts up and it again is not tiny in terms of quantity. But in terms of sin, there's also a variety. We think about, you know, just, there's just so many different ways that our behavior can be contrary to what God has revealed and it can be hurtful and damaging to others. Loads of different ways we can think about it. I sometimes find thinking about what I think, what I say and what I do, our thoughts, words and deeds that I think is a helpful way of thinking about the different ways that we can sin. Sometimes it can be harboring thoughts, envy, jealousy, frustration. All these kind of thoughts can take root in our hearts, bitterness and anger. All of that can come, can just percolate in our hearts and minds. Our words, you know, it's with our words that we lie. It's with our words that we are cutting towards people. It's with our words that we gossip. It's with our words that we can say things that can hurt people. It's with our words that we are angry. There's a huge variety of ways in which we can sin with our words. And then with our actions, you know, you can think of lots of stuff that we can do. And very often, in terms of sin with our actions, it's not necessarily about doing the thing, but it's about doing the thing to excess. So drinking would be a great example. The Bible does not in any way prohibit drinking. And I think that's something that's, it doesn't inhibit drinking to an appropriate level. What it prohibits is drunkenness. So drinking to a level where you lose self-control and where what you do becomes inappropriate, damaging to yourself, damaging to others. In fact, there's a few examples of it in verse three in this chapter where Peter writes about living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness,

orgies, drinking parties, lawless, idolatry.

That's all just actions where we take good things and then we just go over the top and it leads us into sin. So there's a great multitude of sins in human experience and in our own hearts. And that's what Peter is setting before us here. You're probably thinking this is the most depressing sermon I've ever heard in my life. Well, it's going to get even more depressing because what do we do with sin? What do we tend to do with sin in our hearts and in society around us? Sometimes we highlight it. So somebody completely stuffs up in their life. So maybe they get caught drink driving or maybe they get caught up in a relationship that they shouldn't have got into. Maybe somebody gets pregnant, not expected to or whatever.

Maybe somebody makes a joke that they shouldn't have made. That happens and everybody else starts talking about them. And we highlight it. Now that happens in a local community.

[20 : 21] Everybody knows something does something awful. Something awful happens in someone's life. It's the talk of the village. It happens nationally. Nothing sells like a newspaper that's got a juicy story about somebody. Can you imagine just now how many reporters are trying to find some dirt on the potential candidates for the S&P; leadership? And if you can find dirt on any of the people who might be standing, it's worth a fortune because that's what we want to do. We just want to highlight sin, name and shame. So that's sometimes what we do with sin. We highlight it. Other times we amplify it. Now what I mean by that is that somebody sins towards us and then we just sin back in retaliation. So somebody gets maybe a wee bit angry with us. So we get even more angry with them and the thing gets amplified and amplified. Sometimes it can be the same, maybe with dishonesty, maybe someone tells us a lie. So we then tell them a lie and you get caught up into this kind of cycle of forgetting how many lies you've told. It can happen in so many different ways. Somebody can hurt us and then we respond by hurting them back and we amplify sin. Sometimes we go on the attack and we want to target sin or maybe more accurately target the sinner. So the person who's done something wrong, we kind of shun them. We make sure we keep them away or we

I don't know, just make them feel guilty for what they've done or distance themselves from them. Sometimes we kind of go on the attack with sin. Sometimes we hold on to sin. So especially if somebody's wronged us, we will hold on to that. We will never forget it and it will shape our relationship with that person forevermore because we resent the fact that they've hurt us, that they've wronged us and it just forevermore affects that relationship that is now strained or maybe broken. Or sometimes we even take pleasure in it. Sometimes somebody else might be sinning and we might want to join in with whatever it might be and the stuff that Peter talks about in verse 3 is the kind of thing that you could easily be sucked along into if you saw it happening because it can look appealing. So sometimes we highlight sin, sometimes we amplify it, sometimes we attack it, sometimes we hold on to it, sometimes we take pleasure in it. Peter tells us to do none of those things.

He tells us to cover it. And that instantly makes this verse so fascinating because you think about how our society will so often amplify sin highlighted, whether that's locally or nationally or maybe even in our own minds. That's maybe where the biggest problem is where we see mistakes that we've made in our lives and we just can't get past it and we're so frustrated with ourselves for the stupid thing that we've done and we keep going over it and over it and over it and just punishing ourselves for the fact that we've let God down or let people that we love down or let ourselves down. All the time we are just constantly trying to, we're constantly feeding that sin and giving it more strength and more power and more life and more presence in our lives. Peter talks about covering sin. Covering so that it's hidden, gone, fixed. You think, well, how is that possible? Well, that takes us back. We're working backwards from sin to multitude to cover. The key for covering sin is love. And I think that that's just amazing this verse. You know, we've gone from that word sin, which in many ways speaks of all the horrific things that we experienced and that goes on in life. And it's contrasted with that word love. That is our favorite word. And it's the thing that we all crave and that we know is at the heart of peace and joy in life. Peter is telling us love covers a multitude of sins. Now, I want to say absolutely that that is not like a nice, wishy-washy, positive statement, as if to sort of say, you know, oh, yes, you've sinned, but it's okay, darling, la-dee-da, sort of, no, it's not that kind of thing at all. Because when the Bible talks about love, it's not talking about kind of fuzzy niceness. When the Bible talks about love, it's talking about the deepest level of commitment that you can have towards another. And so that means that love from a biblical perspective involves

effort, huge effort. And so that immediately kind of gets us beyond this idea that love's just all about feelings. It's about so much more than that. Love is about effort that you are committed to and that you will keep on making and making and making and making. And I think that that's an amazing thing, you know, for us all to think about, when we think about our parents, I know that some people have grown up with a difficult relationship with their parents, and I hope what I say is not insensitive to that. But for those who've grown up with parents who've loved them and cared for them and supported them, you don't have to think about that for long to recognise that they've had to put in a lot of effort to do that. My parents had to put in a lot of effort to keep loving me. And yet they have. And it was something that they poured their energy into. And you just only have to think about it for 30 seconds to realise that that's true, that makes absolute sense. You want to love anything, even if you want to love your dog, it takes effort. And all of that uses up energy. Love involves cost. And so in order to love somebody else, you have to make sacrifices. It can never just be always on your terms, it actually involves you giving yourself to them, you pouring your energy into them, you showing kindness, you taking bruises and hits for them, you being ready to support them and love them and care for them, even though you know that it's going to cost you. And love involves commitment, as we've been saying that, that you're not just saying, I love you whilst you make me feel good or whilst things are going well. When you say, I will love you, you're saying I will love you no matter what. I love you no matter what. And that's what real love looks like. And that's the kind of love that's been spoken about here. And this is where we come to what I said at the start. This verse is pointing us to the reality that lies at the heart of the Gospel. Because the Gospel message about Jesus Christ is centred on the cross. And on the cross Jesus died and in dying, Jesus covered a multitude of sins. He covered a multitude of our sins. And I think that's so incredibly important that when we think about the cross, we are recognizing that when Jesus died on the cross, he died in our place.

And the reason he did that was to make atonement for our sins. So that all of our sins, all of the mess that we have, every mistake that I've made, every single stupid decision I've made, every word that I've said, everything that I've done, everything that I regret is taken before God, placed on Jesus, and it's covered. It's covered with Jesus' blood.

[28 : 53] My line's not good enough. It needs to be an even thicker line. Because it is covered. And that's what makes the Gospel so amazing. Because so often we can feel overwhelmed by a multitude of sins that we see in our lives and that make us feel guilty before God. That we think we've let him down, we feel unworthy of him. We realize that we've made mistakes and we see stuff in our lives that we wish was different and we're aware that our sins are a massive problem and we come to Jesus and he says, see that multitude of sins in you is covered, is gone, is hidden. And when Jesus says covered, he doesn't mean like, you know, oh, it's just sort of, it's tucked away for now, but we might bring them back later. He means gone, covered, washed away, cleansed, forgiven. And that's what makes the cross so amazing and so powerful that, you know, remember we said God's standard is impeccable. Well, Jesus is cleansing is totally perfect. So that, that, that you can be the child of the God whose standards are impeccable so that you can come into his arms and be held forever so that you can be forgiven and freed. And the whole reason that Jesus does that is because he loves you. His love takes him to the cross and his love bears the cost and his love endures that suffering all so that the multitude of my sins and yours can be covered. That's what the gospel is all about. That's why it's so amazing. That's why Jesus is the perfect savior that if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you put your trust in Jesus and say, Lord, please forgive me for my sins. They're covered and it does not matter one bit how big that multitude might be. His blood cleanses us from it all. This is what lies at the heart of the gospel. But what I want us to see in closing, oh man, it's seven o'clock. So what I want us to see in closing is that this doesn't just, this isn't what, it isn't just what lies at the heart of the gospel. It's also at the heart of how we are to behave towards each other because that's what the verse is talking about. Keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. Now here Peter is presenting us with a principle that is fundamental to the gospel. And that is this, the realities that create our community must shape our community. So what creates the Christian church must shape the Christian church. So the Christian church, our gospel community, the church family that we are part of and that every other Christian is part of is created by Jesus covering a multitude of sins through the cross. And that reality which creates us has to shape us so that as we interact with one another, as we share our lives together, as we learn more and more and more about the multitude of sins in each other's lives and that we are all capable of, we cover them with love for one another.

And that instantly makes the church an incredible thing to be part of if we actually do it. Where you can be part of a community where, where, where you think, oh man, I've made a stupid mistake this week, but my church family loves me. And where, you know, you, you maybe do slip with a bad comment or a bad reaction or just, you make a daft mistake in your life and you feel exposed and you feel embarrassed and you feel ashamed of yourself and yet we can be part of a community where all of that is just covered with love for each other. And I want you to think about the difference that that can make. We live in a world that's so quick to expose sin, like especially if you're a famous person just now, you're like one tweet away from just, from being canceled, from wrecking your life because you can say or do something stupid and, and everybody loves to expose and highlight all of that. In the Christian community, we cover all that. Now, I'm not saying that we just turn a blind eye to sin. I'm saying that we carry on loving each other even when we make mistakes. It doesn't say a blind eye covers a multitude of sins. It says love covers a multitude of sins. And so we keep on loving each other even though we make mistakes, even though we disagree, even though we say and do stupid things, even though we react badly, even though someone else might hurt us, we keep on loving one another. And I want you to think about the difference that can make from two perspectives.

I want you to think about being the person who does the loving. So you think about, you know, somebody, one of us, actually one of us makes a massively stupid mistake this week and we end up on heaven news for whatever reason. Imagine with me, who did that, which could happen. As part of a Christian community, you can all pour love and care into the person who's made a massive mistake and who needs mercy and kindness and grace as they heal and learn from what they've done wrong. So think about being the person who can offer that kind of love, not the person who offers a bit of gossip or whatever or a criticism or a snide remark or a glare or whatever. That's, that's worldly stupidity. And we don't want any of that. The love that Jesus has shown to us is a love that is so kind and compassionate and forgiving. That's the love that we want to show. But even more so,

I want you to think about being the person who sinned. I want you to imagine that, that the thing you are most embarrassed about in your life is on that screen. And you think, oh man, how do I want people in that situation to treat me? I don't want them to laugh. I don't want them to hate me. I don't want them to talk about me. I don't want them to shun me. I don't want them to judge me. I just want them and need them to love me. And that's exactly what we're being commanded to do. And it's such, and this is why following Jesus is brilliant because it gives us so much wisdom for dealing with all the difficult situations in life. And I want you to think about that. I want you to think about the next time you come across somebody who makes a terrible mistake in their life, the one thing, what's the one thing they're going to get from you? They're going to get love. Because that's the one thing that we got from Jesus. And we got it in utter abundance. And these are magnificent words.

Love, coverage, and multitude of sins. It lies at the heart of how the gospel works. It lies at the heart of how we want to be as a church community. Amen.