

Dealing with Hidden Sin

by David L. Talley

Sin is a reality with which we all must live. No one can escape the struggles we have with rebelling against God's call on our lives (cf. Romans 3:10-23). However, it is possible to choose whether one will vigorously fight the battle that wages against the flesh or not. The battle can be overwhelming, but it does not have to result in demoralizing defeat.

One, among many, devastating strategies of Satan, which is fed by our own shame, is to fight, or rather retreat, in silence. From the very beginning, sin resulted in hiding and shame as Adam and Eve hid from one another by covering themselves (cf. Genesis 3:7) and from the presence of the Lord in the garden by crouching among the trees (cf. Genesis 3:8). A similar type of "hiding" is also evidenced in the refusal to own the sin when confronted. What do Adam and Eve do when confronted? They blame-shift in order to direct the attention of the Lord away from self. They do not want to be "seen" in their sin so they justify it. The belief seems to be that, if the eyes of the Lord shift to the other and away from themselves, they can remain hidden. In either case the sin is avoided, hidden away, and not dealt with in an honest manner. Our natural tendency is to not deal with sin. Out of sight... out of mind... or is it?

The beauty of the cross is that we are clearly judged to be "sinners" but given a new identity as "redeemed," "children of God," and "joint heirs with Jesus Christ." We do not have to hide our sin or justify it because Jesus has paid the penalty for us, bringing us undeserved forgiveness. He "hides our sin" as far as the east is from the west, and he justifies us by his shed blood. However, until we reach heaven, we, the "redeemed," wrestle with the realities of that old flesh (cf. Romans 7). It does no good to be pretentious about our sin. It is useless to pretend that we are better than we are. I would rarely advocate "wearing" our sin "on our sleeve," but it is futile to deny it or pretend it does not exist.

A good example of the futility of denying the reality of sin in our lives is King David in 2 Samuel 11, Psalms 32, and Psalms 51. In these passages, we find:

2 Samuel 11-12: King David lusts, sins, seeks to hide the sin by committing more sins, and then, after confrontation, repents. Psalms 32 and 51 are probably found within the "hiding" context of this story.

Psalms 32: King David reveals the struggle that results from hiding his sin and the subsequent peace that results from repentance.

Psalms 51: King David shows us that repentance is seeing our actions in the way the Lord sees them and coming to him honestly, without hiding.

Let's look at each of these passages more closely to see if there is any help found in King David's experience.

2 Samuel 11-12

In 2 Samuel 11, King David hides his sin so that it is not exposed. It is clear that a major point of this story is that hiding sins leads simply to more sin. He executes two plans, which involve even more sin, to keep his sin hidden:

Plan #1: King David brings Uriah home to give him a report on the war. He throws him a party, gets him drunk, and hopes that he will have intercourse with Bathsheba, offering a cover-up for her pregnancy. The lies, manipulation, and impact on the armed forces who remain in battle without one of their leaders is obvious. Plan fails.

Plan #2: King David puts Uriah on the front line so that he will be killed in the intensity of battle. The disregard for human life in order to keep his sin hidden is again obvious. Plan succeeds.

It is important to note the plans King David is willing to pursue in order to keep his sin from being exposed. It takes all of his energies, and the one sin multiplies itself into more sin. If it were not exposed by Nathan, the multiplying of sin might continue on for years.

Psalm 32

Psalms 32 is probably scribed in the context of David's manipulative plans to cover-up his sin. Verses 3 and 4 teach us that to hide sin leads to this experience:

"When I kept silent (about my sin), my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah (i.e., let this sink in)."

What kind of life is this? We all know the experience to varying degrees. Hiding sin can drain us of our resources. It can "eat" at us. In a sense, we have no energies to invest in the lives of others for fear of being exposed or found out. Our energy is invested in covering up our sin, not in ministering to others. A good example of this is found when one chooses to speed while driving. It is difficult to sit back, put on an easy-listening CD, and enjoy the beauty of God's creation. One's energies are spent being on the lookout for the next police officer, who might ruin his day with a ticket at a high price. He is seeking to hide his sin, to not be found out. However, if he drives the speed limit, then he can sit back and relax. Peace is not available in deception. In fact, unfortunately, we can find ourselves frantically falling deeper and deeper into sin.

Being in this state of deception should be contrasted with the freedom that comes with openness. When King David comes to a place where he is willing to be honest about his sin, note the result in verses 5 through 7:

"I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;' and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah (i.e., let this sink in). Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you in a time when you may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach

him. You are my hiding place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with songs of deliverance.”

This is obviously a good place to be in life. Previously in verses 1 and 2 it shows that a man is “blessed” who comes to the Lord and openly acknowledges his sin. Hiding does not bring this blessing. In fact, later in verse 10 it states, “Many are the sorrows of the wicked.” Sorrow upon sorrow upon sorrow. There is an appearance of being intact, but inwardly the sin eats away at the sinner. But, here in verse 5-7, when David acknowledges his sin, the Lord becomes his “hiding place,” “preserv(ing him) from trouble,” and “surrounding (him) with songs of deliverance” (verse 7).

Psalm 51

Psalms 51 explains the process of repentance that King David likely undertook when/after he was confronted. In 2 Samuel 11:25 King David states literally, “Do not let this thing (i.e., the thing that he did) be evil in your eyes.” Later, in 2 Samuel 11:27, it states, “But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord.” No questions asked. King David had done evil in the eyes of the Lord. Of course, he had not seen it this way. He saw it as an obstacle that needed to be overcome or an inconvenience that needed to be fixed. So he devised his two plans to “fix” the situation. He was hiding and running from honestly dealing with his life. However, in Psalms 51:3-4, he pleads for forgiveness because he has come to realize:

“For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, I have sinned and done what is evil in your eyes, so that you are justified when you speak, and blameless when you judge.”

Note the process:

King David’s assessment: “do not let this thing be evil in your sight” 2 Samuel 11:25

The Lord’s assessment: “the thing that David had done was evil” 2 Samuel 11:27

King David’s repentance: “I have sinned and done what is evil in your eyes” Psalms 51:3-4

The primary turning point for sinful humanity is to see with our eyes what the Lord sees with his eyes. We need to see our lives as he sees them. Hiding is simply an attempt to divert one’s and other’s attention away from what is true about self with the hopes that everything will be okay. King David’s life reminds us that it is not that simple. After seeing our sin as God sees it, we need to acknowledge it before him and ask for his forgiveness. King David’s prayer in Psalms 51:1-2 was “be gracious to me,” wash me thoroughly,” and “cleanse me” (see also Psalms 51:7-17).

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