

*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.* Proverbs 28:13

Bob Harris was a well-known weatherman, for both a New York television station and a nationally syndicated independent network television station. All that changed on his fortieth birthday when it was discovered that he had forged his credentials. Though he had studied math, physics and geology at three colleges, he left school without a degree but with a strong desire to be a media weatherman. And so he phoned WCBS-TV, introducing himself as a Ph.D. in geophysics from Columbia University and he was hired as an off-camera forecaster. For the next decade his career flourished. He became widely known as "Dr. Bob" and was also hired as a consultant by the New York Times, the Long Island Railroad and Major League Baseball. And then an anonymous letter prompted WCBS management to investigate his academic credentials. After he was found out both television stations fired him, as did the New York Times. While he still kept his job with professional baseball and the railroad, he did lose his wife and his family to divorce for his dishonesty. "I took a shortcut that turned out to be the long way around" he said, "and one day the bill came due. I will be sorry for as long as I am alive."

This morning we continue in our Seeking Him series which is focused on how we can know a deeper intimacy in our relationship with God - and today we will looking at how God's Word reveals to us that *honesty* is one of the means by which by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can seek God and grow in our walk with God. While in many ways the issue of *honesty* may seem somewhat easier to deal with than that which we looked at last week in humility – I found that not to be as true as I thought it would be. Perhaps one could say that honesty is a fruit or effect of humility, and if people were more humble they would be more honest. Which is true, yet I was not able to find any direct connection between the two in Scripture. What I did find interesting is that while there are almost 900 verses in the Bible that speak of humility and only 400 that talk about honesty - *that there are not very many sermons that have ever been written or preached specifically on Proverbs 28:13*. And that is not too hard to understand when you take a closer look at the elements and meaning of the verse.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” This verse is clearly divided, as two different types of persons are introduced who pursue two opposite courses of action, which leads to two correspondingly opposite results. What makes this verse so unattractive is that the one common object of concern for both people is *sin* - and neither person's response to their sin is very personally appealing (one lacks spiritual prosperity and the other requires confession and forsaking). Yet God placed this verse in His Word so that we might understand that while dealing with our own personal sin might be difficult for us to think about and take action on – there is a heart response of honesty about our sin before God and ourselves and one another that will draw us closer to God and empower us by His Holy Spirit to passionately seek God and grow ever deeper in our walk with God. Our verse tells us that one type of person deceitfully covers their sins and does not prosper, while the other confesses and forsakes their sin and is blessed with God's mercy.

The truth is, we don't like to hear or talk about sin because it's *painful*. In fact we don't like to talk about or hear about any truth that is painful. The story is told of a man who received a call from his wife just as she was about to fly home from Europe. "How's my cat?" she asked. "Dead," he said. She replied: "You don't have to be so honest. Why didn't you break the news to me slowly? You've ruined my trip." He asked: "What do you mean?" She said: "You could have told me the cat was on the roof. And when I called you from Paris, you could have told me he was acting strange; and when I called from London, you could have said he was sick; and when I called you from New York, you could have said he was at the vet. Then, when I arrived home, you could have told me he was dead." The husband thought a moment and said: "I'm sorry. I'll do better next time." "By the way," she asked, "How's my Mom doing?" There was a long silence, and then the husband replied, "Well - she's on the roof."

One thing that is clear today is that *honesty* is not held in very high regard in the culture and society we live in anymore – because *truth* itself has now become relative depending on personal opinion or political position or subjective viewpoint. But we who claim Christ know only one truth and that is the Word of God - properly interpreted by study and knowledge and experience, under the guidance of and by the power of the Holy Spirit, spoken to us through Jesus who is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. And so in order for us to seek God and grow in our walk with God we need to humbly pursue truth - and be honest with God and with ourselves and with one another about our sin.

As we step into our text for today, may we embrace the humble, honest heart of King David, who expressed his desperate need for God’s divine intervention in seeing and acknowledging and dealing with his fallen, sinful nature in Psalm 139:23-24: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" In these words we hear King David cry out to God in his desperate rebellious condition to a level of self-awareness to a place of honesty beyond his depraved nature that would lead him "*in the way everlasting*" with God. Our text for today speaks of the steps we must take in being honest with God as we seek God so that we might fully know the relationship with God in Christ we were created for.

*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Proverbs 28:13*

1) The first step we must take in being *honest* with God begins *with an awareness of the depth of the sinful rebellion that lives within our hearts*: "*Whoever conceals his transgressions.*" Our natural fallen tendency is to lean away from this truth in thinking that we are somehow exempt from being one who has "*transgressions*" going on in our lives. Yet the word "*transgressions*" in the original Hebrew here literally means "*rebellion*" – and God’s word is replete with references to our rebellion. Isaiah 53:6: "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way*". Romans 3:9-12: "*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside.*" These things are hard for us to accept because our fallen nature naturally wants us to think we are better than we are. As our hearts and consciences bear witness to the reality of our sin, we naturally seek to conceal/cover our sin by renaming it or denying it or ignoring it or diminishing it or excusing it or forgetting it. But when we do that - the verse we are looking at today tells us that we "*will not*" spiritually "*prosper.*"

Awareness of our rebellion against God is the beginning of true spiritual sensitivity. The reality is, many who even claim Christ are not fully aware of how rebellious they truly are in their hearts because they have developed their own definition of sin rather than how sin is defined in the Bible. James 4:17 tells us that "*Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin*" – yet for many the "*right thing*" comes right out of the Judges 21:25 which tells us "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*" because there was "*no king in Israel.*" When Jesus does not reign sovereign and supreme in our hearts we are free to pretty much do whatever is "*right*" in our own eyes. The problem within the culture we live in today is that we often "*conceal our transgressions*" by running everything in our lives through the filter of our feelings and emotions, which then elevates ourselves above our depraved nature and dethrones the supremacy of King Jesus in our hearts. Our Lord once said that: "*Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known*" (Luke 12:2). Oh, God save us from ourselves and make us fully aware of our rebellion so might fully know You!

We praise God that while we might try to conceal/cover our continuing, remaining sin with dishonesty, deceit and hypocrisy - God is covering our condemning sin *because* when we come to faith we receive salvation by the glorious grace of the shed blood of the cross of Jesus Christ! The truth is that while we "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23) – we all also choose different ways to deal with the aggravation of our conscience regarding our sin. The choice we have is not whether or not to uncover and acknowledge and deal with our sin - but rather whether to uncover and acknowledge and deal with our sin honestly or deceitfully, wisely or foolishly, righteously or wickedly.

2) The second step we must take in being honest with God, is that after we become aware of the depth of our sin and rebellion, *we must confess our sin and rebellion to God: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses . . . them."* Hidden sin, concealed rebellion is dangerous and fatal. It's like a termite that secretly and gradually eats up the strength of a good wood; an internal destroyer that infects one's heart, and eats up one's conviction and obscures one's conscience. Scripture tells us that the earlier we confess our rebellion, and our sin, the better. 1 John 1:8-10 tells us: *"If we say we have no 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 cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* Confessing sin and rebellion heals our hearts, builds and strengthens our relationship with God, and clears our conscience from guilt.

This is something we all need to do, brothers and sisters. The story is told of four pastors who were talking together, and one said: "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confessing certain sins to us. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." They all agreed. One confessed he liked to drink beer, the second confessed he liked to smoke cigars and the third confessed he went to R-rated movies. When it came to the fourth pastor, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come on now, we confessed ours. What is your secret sin?" After some prodding he finally he answered, "Well, I confess that I love to gossip - and I can hardly wait to get out of here and talk to somebody."

Confessing our sin means we agree with God about our sin. And while we may attempt to conceal or cover or rename or deny or ignore or diminish or excuse or forget sin – we will be judged by God's definition of sin, not ours. The word "sin" in the Bible means "to miss the mark." What is the mark? The *mark* is *God!* – and His standard of perfection that He has established, evidenced by and through and in the life, death and the risen Christ. Viewed in that light, it is clear that we are all sinners. Romans 14:23 says: *"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."* What this means is that we will never know the reality of terrible condition of our fallen hearts when we assess ourselves by the standard of ourselves and other people. Our sinful depravity is a condition in relation, first and foremost, to God. This is the great awakening, the revival and the renewal that we need as God people. 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us: *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

We will never fully realize the glorious greatness of our Lord Jesus as Savior until we become aware and confess the desperate depth of our sin. We see this in the words of John Newton, the notorious slave ship captain, who ultimately became a humble pastor, who at the end of his life said: "Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." These are the words of the man who wrote: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see." John Newton never got over the fact that God saved him through Jesus Christ *because* he never forgot how sinful he was and he never concealed how sinful he continued to be: "I AM a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior."

Our verse for today tells us that our lack of spiritual prosperity comes from un-confessed sin. This is an immutable divine principle that we far too often think that we can ignore or defy. God's Word calls us to confession of sin so that we might escape the consequences of sin and rebellion – the greatest consequence being the greatest loss of intimate fellowship that occurs when we refuse to acknowledge and confess our sinful rebellion. 1 John 1:6-7 tells us that, *"if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, (being honest with God about the depth of our rebellion and sin, owning our sins and confessing our sins) we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."* When we agree with God about our sin and confess our sin we will experience release, freedom, forgiveness and a new beginning. Confession of sin begins with God and ends with confession to one another – and we are only to do so in the circle of those who have been affected or influenced by our sin – whether it be we as individuals or our spouses or our families or our friends or our church as a whole.

3) The third step we read of here that we must take in being honest with God, is that after we become aware of the depth of our rebellious hearts, and we confess our rebellion and sin - *we must then abandon our rebellion and sinful ways against God: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses - and forsakes them - will obtain mercy."* Our God is a most loving and gracious and merciful God - Numbers 14:18: *"The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression."* Yet the Word of God also tells us we must turn away from, abandon, "forsake" our rebellion and sin before we can know *fullness* of God's mercy. In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God declares: *"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways - then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."* Forsaking rebellion and abandoning enslaving sin opens the doors of God's heart so that we might enjoy the joy of the fellowship with God we were created for. The way that God has designed us is that we are welcome to taste and see the deep, wonderful mercy of God - *once we confess* our sins and *forsake* rebellion. Honesty before God means we must both confess *AND* forsake. We must not only confess and name our rebellion and sin against God out of a sincere sorrow of heart - but we must also forsake and abandon that rebellion and sin. Confessing and forsaking is not like the alcoholic who confesses his drunkenness, knowing that there still is a bottle in the car or under the bed at home, knowing he can drink when no one is around. That's not honesty, that's blatant hypocrisy.

2 Timothy 2:19 says: *"The Lord knows those who are his . . . Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."* If we were truly honest with God and with ourselves, we would not pretend that our rebellion and sin is something we can put into a cage like a bird and take out and play with when we want. God will meet us in our honesty, but He will not meet us our hypocrisy - because God is holy. You can't pray "Lord, forgive me and cleanse me of my gossip or my lust or my anger or my pride" and then pray that the Holy Spirit would empower you to win the battle over gossip or lust or anger or pride - and then just do nothing to change your attitude and behavior, and do nothing to remove the temptations, or stay away from the situations or people that make you do those things. Yes, God does forgive and cleanse, and the Holy Spirit does empower us win the battle - but we have a part, a responsibility in the battle. God's part is victory and our responsibility is *humble, honest obedience*.

You see if we are truly seeking God with all of our hearts, we will do whatever it takes to abandon and forsake the sins and rebellious ways that live deep within our hearts - knowing the power to abandon sin and forsake sin and gain victory over sin is the power of God through the Holy Spirit - and that He will give spiritual prosperity to those who humbly and honestly obey God's call to uncover and confess and forsake their sin. This is the picture Paul gives us in Philippians 2:12-13 when he wrote: *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* If, after you become self-aware of your rebellion and sin, and confess that rebellion and sin, and then you pray - but still struggle with that rebellion and sin - then stop just praying and start forsaking. Get up and get out. Flee from rebellion and sin and run to God and receive His mercy.

While God's grace is defined as God giving us what we don't deserve, God's mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. Mercy is God's undeserved favor towards those whom He has chosen in Jesus Christ to not give them what they deserve in their rebellion and sin. Scripture tells us that rebellion and sin is deserving of God's condemnation, which leads to death: *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). But the Bible also tells us God has said: *"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy"* (Exodus 33:19). God shows mercy simply on the basis of His love for us, a love which is not based on who we are or what we have done - but totally on God: *"So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy"* (Romans 9:16). Yet we read a few verses later that the same God who shows mercy to some also pours out His condemnation on others: *"God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory"* (Romans 9:22-23).

What we are reading here is that not everyone receives God's mercy: He divinely chooses to give His mercy to some and not to others. Yet God does not choose to give mercy in an arbitrary manner. What we've seen is that by God's sovereign grace He grants mercy - *based on Spirit empowered honesty*. When we are honest with God and with ourselves, we confess and forsake our rebellion and sin – and God pours out into our lives His great mercy through Jesus Christ. In his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* Pastor Jim Cymbala writes: “I have discovered an astonishing truth. God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him.”

When we are honest before a holy God - the searchlight of His Word, His truth will shine in our hearts and reveal our rebellion and sin. It is then, brothers and sisters, by the sovereign grace of God, we can look to the crucified and risen Christ - *because* it's in Jesus that God has concealed/covered your rebellion and sin by his blood, through his death on the cross as Calvary. In Jesus we find God's heart, a heart that is fully aware of the rebellion and sin in our lives, a heart that seeks to restore us back to Himself through His mercy – by means of our confession and abandonment of those things that are rebellious and sinful and not of God. The apostle Paul writes: *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory"* (Colossians 3:1-4).

There is a risk in being aware of our sin, and there is a risk in confessing and forsaking it. It is a human risk but a risk nonetheless. The risk we face in this is the risk of admitting that we have a problem and that we need help to solve that problem – because we cannot solve our sin and rebellion problem by ourselves. Only God can do that. But God also uses fallen human beings to be instruments of his mercy and grace. James 5:16 says: *"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."* Confessing our rebellion and sins to one another is risky business. It's much safer to keep quiet about your struggle with lust or anger or pride and selfishness or greed. It's much safer not to do so – in the short run. But in the long run, like Dr. Bob, we are in deep trouble, for if it true that *"he who confesses and forsakes . . . will obtain mercy"* - then it is also true that those who *do not* confess and *do not* forsake their rebellion and sin *will not* obtain God's mercy.

The path to God's heart is one that is paved with not only honesty but also integrity and righteousness and authenticity. If you are not willing to take the significant risk of confessing your rebellion and sin, and take the next dramatic step of seeking the partnership of accountability to abandon and forsake your rebellion and sin – you will slowly die under the lie of hypocrisy that believes that God knows your heart and situation, and His mercy is simply there for you when you want it and need it. That's a lie. While we face a number of barriers in taking those significant and dramatic steps, I pray the Holy Spirit would empower us beyond our sin and rebellion so we as individuals and as a church - might be fully released to confess and forsake those things which are keeping us from seeking God and growing deeper in our relationship with God and going longer and farther in our walk with God. And I pray also that the Spirit of God would give us the wisdom of God to know the clear difference between an unhealthy indulgence in self-exposure and the joy-filled, Christ-exalting Biblical risk of the humble authenticity and honest confession with one another that will lead us to forsake and receive His mercy.

History tells us that Columbus kept two records of the distances traveled on his first voyage to the New World. One was true, he thought, but he deliberately faked the other to alleviate his crew's fears that they were getting too far from home. When the crew found out about his deception, they threatened to mutiny. But before they did - a New World appeared. Ironically, though he didn't know it, Columbus' "true" distance records were overestimated and his faked distances came out closer to the actual distances traveled. In the short run dishonesty worked for Columbus, but in the long run, history tells us he died an angry, bitter, broken man. May we be a self-aware, confessing, forsaking people of God who humbly and honestly admit how desperately we need God, so we might know His gracious mercy!

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Psalm 51:1-17

*Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity."
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Psalm 96:1-13

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