

Covering Sins

James 5:20 Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife but love covers sins.

These passages have been hotly debated over the centuries. Interpretations depend on the assumptions of the theology.

1. Many assert that good deeds counteract bad deeds. These passages are used to support a balance system of judgment.
2. Those with a legalistic mindset focus on what these passages do not say (that good deeds cancel bad deeds), but have no explanation for what they do say.
3. The largest debate concerns whether James is referring to the sins of the erring brother or of the teacher. Most assert the sins of the erring brother are covered when he is turned from the error of his ways.
4. These two verses have been used to illustrate the Jewish mindset of the authors. The assumption is made that all Jews had a works mentality.
5. Some assert that Peter means that love causes us to overlook the faults of others.
6. Some assert that James refers to the sin that would have occurred if one had failed to attempt to turn a sinner from the error of his ways.

The faith mentality knows only two rules: believing that Jesus is in charge and love for people.

1. James uses evangelism as his example of faith; Biblical faith is focused on spreading the good news, motivated by fear for the future plight of the lost.
2. Peter uses love as his example of Biblical faith. Difficult times are mentioned several times in this context. The sins that are covered seem to be those that result from dealing with that, as in verse 9.
3. In neither case does a good deed cancel a bad deed. Cancelling bad deeds after we are redeemed is not part of the system, like owing taxes to a country in which you no longer live or continuing to make payments on a debt that has been paid in full. Redemption happens once. After that, bad choices are irrelevant because we are justified by faith. God lets it go because Jesus paid off the right-and-wrong system.
4. We love because He first loved us. The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Spirit. Faith brings us to being transformed into the image of Jesus, so we are sacrifices for others.