

Conflict: Should I Deal With This? – Colossians 3:12-17

1/18/26

The first time I really had a situation where I had to consider whether to deal with another person's sin issues was when I was a senior in high school. I was staying at a friend's house for the night with a couple of guys and the two of them thought I was asleep, so they were talking quietly about something my friend had done that was clearly sinful and a major problem. I heard the whole thing and didn't know what to do with the information. I knew it could get my friend in major trouble, but I also knew that he was already down a road that would cause major problems in his life and future. He didn't realize it but he needed someone to attempt to keep him from continuing down this road.

The dilemma of whether to deal with an issue by talking to a person happens regularly in our lives. It may be like this where you clearly hear of another person's wrong choices, or it could be an argument you have with another person where things get heated and it doesn't come to a resolution. Maybe someone said something to you that caused offense, but you didn't respond. Any number of circumstances fit this description. There's conflict, offense, sin, or fighting and it doesn't come to a definitive and peaceful end. What do you do in this circumstance? How do you handle it?

There are only two options biblically and we are going to explain one of these options this week and one next week. Here they are: You can Cover the Offense or you can Confront the Offense. *"When you witness someone else's sin - be it grumbling, a snarky tone, a white lie, or something more serious - there are two paths open to you: cover the offense or confront the offender."* – Alasdair Groves

To cover is not to ignore, to avoid, or to stuff down inside you. To confront is not to angrily and harshly point out the sin or problem or aggressively try to handle the conflict. We'll get into the details of both, but for now understand that you probably naturally gravitate toward one or the other.

Some Christians and churches aggressively cultivate an environment where confrontation is the norm. Hey, if someone has a sin issue and you see it or know

it, you gotta talk to them. It's a matter of love and honesty. If you had a giant booger on your face and you didn't realize it, you would want a friend to tell you, right? And there's some truth to this line of reasoning. I do want people to tell me if I'm causing relational problems and not seeing it. But just like anything confrontation, a good gift from God, can be abused and overused.

Other Christians avoid confrontation at all costs. They can't handle a straightforward conversation and can't deal with the difficulty of telling someone they might be wrong. They attempt to cover everything.

Both extreme approaches have inherent problems. If you confront everything, you will create an environment where people tend to hide from one another. It would be an environment that lacks grace and kindness. It fosters arrogance and harshness with one another. You feel like you are always getting called out and corrected. On the other hand, if you never deal with sin issues, and if you never have hard conversations, you will foster an environment where nothing gets dealt with. Things will fester under the surface and bitterness, and cynicism will develop over the long term.

Biblical wisdom is careful and balanced. The Bible trains us to respond to life circumstances with wisdom and skill. If you are a hammer everything looks like a nail, but biblically speaking, Scripture trains us to see things for what they are and respond appropriately. Everything is not a nail, and the hammer is not the proper tool for each relationship.

Just listen to Proverbs 26:4-5 for a great example of this. There are times when you ignore a fool and there are times when you correct a fool. How do I know which one I'm encountering? Ahh, this is the training the Bible does in us. As we open ourselves up to Scripture and immerse ourselves in God's perspective, we are formed to be people who can tell the difference. We see things as they are and know which moment we are encountering.

So, this morning I want to help us learn how to cover offenses and conflict in a way that sustains the relationship and honors God. **3 Questions to Help You Determine When to Cover an Offense.**

1. When Should I Cover?

There's an entire thread of biblical teaching that encourages us to cover offenses up. We are instructed to let things go, to not bring it up, and to deal with the foibles and annoyances of others with kindness and grace. Again, this is not avoiding a tough conversation and it's not stuffing it down or deceiving ourselves about how significant the conflict or sin is. Here's how Ken Sande explains covering:

"Overlooking is not a passive process in which you simply remain silent for the moment but file away the offense for later use against someone. That is actually a form of denial that can easily lead to brooding over the offense and building up internal bitterness and resentment that will eventually explode in anger. Instead, overlooking is an active process that is inspired by God's mercy through the gospel. To truly overlook an offense means to deliberately decide not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness.- Ken Sande

Listen to how often Scripture encourages us to do this and let these verses paint a picture of someone who is not easily upset or offended and who can let things go with kindness and grace. Proverbs 19:11. Proverbs 12:16. The prudent ignores an insult. Proverbs 10:12. Proverbs 15:18. Proverbs 20:3. 1 Peter 4:8. Proverbs 17:9. Proverbs 26:17. Man, some people love the drama. They love to be in the middle of it. It's wise to let love cover it and not take the dog by the ears.

So, when should I cover an offense or annoyance? I'll give you two straight forward answers. Most of the time and with Minor Offenses. Most of the time you can let it go, not get upset, and let love cover it. Most conflicts, arguments, and offenses are relatively minor, and we don't have to get angry and let it turn into something significant. This leads us to our second question.

2. When Should I Not Cover?

The biblical teaching is clear that we ought to be the calm, kind, and grace filled type of people who can let cover an offense. However, we have to perceive when something has moved from being a coverable offense to something I have to deal with. When should I not cover it?

First, do not attempt to cover it when you are simply afraid to confront or have a tough conversation. Don't avoid the conversation because you are uncomfortable or it will be hard or because you haven't really done it before. Sometimes I will hear people say, "Well, I just really don't like confrontation" and when I hear that I hear them saying, "Well, I just really don't like surgery." Well of course you don't.

When you avoid an offense, a conflict, or even a disagreement that needs to be addressed simply because you are nervous or afraid to talk, you are simply avoiding paying off a credit card with a high interest rate now when you could, and compounding the amount owed in the future. You are making the situation about you and your feelings and not about love and concern for the person who is caught in sin.

Second, do not attempt to cover it when it's a significant issue. Certain sin issues rise to the level where confrontation is needed. Certain conflicts or offenses must be dealt with. When it's not a minor matter. If you find out your friend is having an affair, that would not be a situation where you let love cover a multitude of sins.

Third, when conflict, offense or sin is negatively impacting your relationship and you cannot let it go, you have to deal with it. One Christian counselor put it like this: *Do not cover an offense when it is causing significant harm to the offender's relationship with you or others...If the offense is affecting your relationship, despite your efforts to cover it and move forward, you should talk about it.* – Alasdair Groves

Now, the flip side to this is that sometimes people are overly sensitive and end up focusing in on minor grievances or holding onto conflicts that should be let go. How often does this happen? Family conflict, neighborhood disagreements, and workplace drama turn into full blown disputes because people can't let it go and won't deal with it.

But let's be honest. Covering is hard. We may know we are overly sensitive or that it's a minor issue or something we really can just let go. But it's hard to emotionally release the offense. How can we learn to be the kind of person who can regularly cover?

3. What Enables Me to Cover?

Scripture does not encourage us to act in grace, kindness, and to cover offenses and then leave us to our own devices. The Bible always provides motivation for the way we are called to live. And that motivation is rooted in the truth about God and us. Let's start with the truth about ourselves.

- Knowing My Own Weakness and Sin

Turn to Matthew 7. One of the most famous verses in the Bible, but this verse isn't telling us to avoid making moral judgments. Look down to verse 6. This whole section is about dealing with personal relationships and verse 6 tells us we have to be able to discern what type of person we are dealing with. Verse 6 is the balancing instruction to verse 1. Don't judge unfairly is the message of verse 1 and the message of verse 6 is that you must be discerning about people. How do you balance a life of proper evaluation of others? The answer is in verses 2-5.

Knowing your own weakness and sin is the first place to go when you are determining whether to cover or confront. When you properly assess yourself, it sharpens your perspective. We all tend to give ourselves a ton of grace and are quite stingy when it comes to others. But when we turn the evaluation honestly on our own lives, we see our own weakness and even sin and this causes us to handle others with more grace.

- God's Grace and Forgiveness to Me

Now let's turn to Colossians 3. Notice the flow of this section. Verse 5 tells us to put off certain behaviors that characterize fallen sinful life. Verse 12 tells us to put on certain qualities and behaviors because we are God's chosen and beloved. The putting off and putting on flow from verses 1-4 and our union with Christ.

As we get into the qualities to dress in the first one we find is compassionate hearts. It's feelings of mercy and pity toward those in need. Display of concern. With this we grow in humility, kindness, meekness, and patience. We also grow in the ability to bear with one another. What is this? To regard with tolerance, bear with one another. Put up with. To endure.

Can we talk honestly here for a second? God knows we all need this category for certain people and God gives it to us. Sometimes it's personality differences and other times it's sin, but maybe it doesn't rise to the level of confrontation and so you must endure.

But notice how Paul continues in verse 13 and what motivates the compassion, mercy, kindness, bearing with and forgiveness that we offer to one another. It's the forgiveness we have received.

When you think about that person who just bugs or who is constantly stepping in it and saying things that verge on sin, a posture of forgiveness is able to bear with it and let it go because God has graciously forgiven me.

And so, behind the ability to genuinely cover and bear with others is God's gracious forgiveness of you. Do you remember this reality daily? God has wiped your sin away because of Jesus Christ based on no goodness or merit of your own. All is covered and now you are dealt with as a beloved child because of Christ. Allow that reality to soften and calm your heart and to flow out into your relationships with those around you. Eph. 4:32. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 1/18/26

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- Describe a time when you had to decide whether to speak to a person about an offense or sin?
- What are the only two biblical options for handling an offense?
- Which of these two options do you personally tend toward?
- What happens in an environment (church or family) that exclusively practices only one option for handling offenses or conflict?
- Describe what it does and doesn't mean to cover an offense.
- If we determine that we need to confront an offense, but we are too nervous to do it, what should we do?
- How can you determine if you are being overly sensitive and making a minor issue into an extended conflict?
- Explain the relationship between Matthew 7:1 and 7:6.
- How does assessing your own weakness and sin help you to better handle other people?

- What does it mean to bear with another person? (Colossians 3:12-13)
- How do we grow in our ability to do this?
- Does bearing with another person require close friendship with everyone?

3 Questions to Help You Determine When to Cover an Offense

1. When Should I Cover?
 - a. Most of the Time
 - b. Minor Offenses
2. When Should I Not Cover?
 - a. When I'm Afraid to Confront
 - b. When It's a Significant Issue
 - c. When it Negatively Impacts Your Relationship
3. What Enables Me to Cover?
 - a. Knowing My Own Weakness and Sin
 - b. God's Grace and Forgiveness to Me