

The Covenantal Life: Being the Church
Week 10 - Restoration, Forgiveness, and Lawfully Leaving a Church
Colossians 3:12-17

- As hard and humbling as it is for a sinner to repent, it is just as difficult for one genuinely wronged to truly forgive
 - Biblical requirement of forgiveness is as clear as requirement to repent (Matt. 6:12)
 - Matt. 18:21-35 - instruction on how to forgive sin immediately follows directions on how to confront sin
 - No artificial limits imposed on our forgiveness
 - Must cultivate a forgiving heart disposition before the sinner has repented to you
 - Very tempting to become bitter because we really have been wronged
 - Acts 7:59-60, Luke 23:33-34 - the kind of forgiving disposition we should aspire to
 - Heb. 12:14-15 - warns of the opposite disposition
 - When a person repents we must forgive fully
 - “Covering” the sin, never bringing it up again, treating the person as a brother
 - Not imposing our own arbitrary standard of penance
 - It is not our job to punish - we are called to forgive
- Not every sin or deficiency needs to be confronted - we are also required to “bear with” others
 - Same word is used to describe enduring persecution
 - Idea is not to overlook things that we are especially sensitive to and shouldn’t bother us, but to overlook true deficiencies that *should* bother us
 - To endure means to not complain, grumble, or make sure that everyone knows how much we are enduring
 - Jas. 1:2, 1 Pet. 1:6-7, 2:19-23 - all affliction is sanctifying and must be met by imitation of Christ’s own example
 - If this is the case for true persecution, how much more must we “endure” the quirks, oversights, immaturity, and insensitivity of other Christians?
 - We must biblically love others - put their needs and comforts above ourselves
 - Treat the shortcomings of others the same way you hope they would treat yours
 - Humbly acknowledge that there are things about you that others must bear with
 - Must guard our hearts and minds from being constantly annoyed by others
 - Avoid arrogance and judgment in your heart
 - Actively resist the temptation to complain, look down on, or be irritated with others, even when there are genuine reasons why you could be
- Unity within the church is crucial (Eph. 4:1-3) - but what happens when we must leave?

- Leaving a local church can never be haphazard or without cause - must be a last resort
- Acts 15:36-41 - it is possible to have disagreements so serious, yet not sinful, that separation becomes necessary
- Illegitimate reasons for leaving:
 - Worship style, lack of “programs,” personal disagreements with other members
- Clearly legitimate reasons for leaving:
 - Anything having to do with the nature and essence of what a church is
 - Preaching false doctrine, failing to faithfully administer the sacraments, refusal to exercise church discipline
 - Even in clear cases, leaving should be a last resort after confrontation and reform have been attempted
- Unclear situations:
 - Providential relocation (i.e. moving away for a job)
 - Changes of conviction not definitional to the gospel (i.e. eschatology, baptism, church government)
 - Non-essential but genuine concerns about direction and emphasis (i.e. seeker-sensitivity, drift based on political trends, (mis)use of church funds, theological concerns over music)
 - A “better” alternative becomes available in the area