When Should “Love Cover” Sin?

Introduction

- 1 Cor. 4:6 – “…not to exceed what is written.”
- Acts 17:11 – “…they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.”

1. The Main Present-Day Views on the “Love Covering” Principle
   A. Love covers everything or almost everything (thick-skinned and always taking the “high-road”)
   B. Love covers some sins (personal offenses and some non-personal offenses) but not other sins (the “big ones,” ones you cannot cover). Usually a man-made list is provided to instruct you what sins to deal with and what ones to ignore.
   C. Love doesn’t cover clear sins at all until the sin is first dealt with

2. The Perplexities of the “Love Covering” Principle
   A. How do you define various terms (i.e., sin vs. mistakes, immaturity, love, confess, repent, forgiveness, etc.)?
   B. Who determines what sins to cover and what ones you don’t?
   C. Who determines when you cover sins?
   D. How does the “love covering” principle fit into forgiveness?

3. The Passages of Scripture Dealing with the “Love Covering” Principle
   A. Psalm 32:1 – “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!” (cf. :5; Ps.51)
   B. Proverbs 10:12 – “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.”

1 A common response to “what sins do we cover (ignore or overlook) and what ones don’t we,” is this answer, “Cover what you can cover unless the sins blow the covers off.” This is a very perplexing and unhelpful response.
2 “In particular, we are here instructed…Concerning the nature of the pardon of sin…1. It is the forgiving of the transgression…upon our repentance, the transgression is forgiven…” Matthew Henry’s Commentary, 608.
3 “Other’s faults, not my own, I am called upon to cover. Not by indifference to evil, but by faithfully, in love and grace, showing my brother his sin, and seeking to exercise his conscience in the presence of God, that confession may be made, and thus the sin be covered. Where love is lacking, it is a common practice to play the part of a talebearer…” H.A. Ironside, Proverbs, 100.
C. Proverbs 17:9 – “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.”

D. Proverbs 19:11 – “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.”

E. Proverbs 27:5-6 – “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”

F. Proverbs 28:13 – “He who conceals his transgression will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”

G. 1 Corinthians 13:5 – “…does not take into an account a wrong suffered,”

H. James 5:19-20 – “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”

I. 1 Peter 4:8 – “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

4. The Presuppositions in Dealing with the “Love Covering” Principle
   A. God’s purpose is to grow us in holiness (sanctification, 1 Pt 1:16)
   B. All sin is serious (Gen 3; Rom 6:23)
   C. The nature of sin is to separate (Gen 3; Isa 59:2)
   D. The Bible doesn’t give a complete detailed list of sins to cover and sins not to cover (Matt 18:15; Luke 17:2)
   E. There is an apparent conditional aspect to dealing with sin (faith and repentance) throughout Scripture (Prov 27:5-6; 28:13; Matt 18:15ff; Luke 17:2)

---

To overlook does not mean forgive but to initially let the sin pass by so that you don’t have a knee-jerk reaction but can carefully weigh all the facts and deal with them appropriately and in the Christlike manner.

The same phrase “keeps no record of wrong” is used in Rom 4:7-8 to refer to David’s dealing with sin first and then it was covered, and the Lord will not keep a record of it.

“That does not mean that love condones or hushes up sins before God or men. The reference is not to sins in their Godward relation, but to sins and failures in our human relations…Whenever offenses occur, love will deal with them according to the principles Jesus set forth in Matthew 18:15-17. That multitude of sins calls for a love that is fervent, willing to forgive “until seventy times seven” (Matt.18:22).” D. Edmond Hiebert, I Peter, 272. Alexander Maclaren writes, “Perhaps Peter was remembering the lesson which he had once had when he was told that ‘seventy times seven’ was not too great a multitude of sins against brotherly love to be forgiven by it in one day.” Commentary, Vol 16, 130.
F. The heart is to always reflect love, humility, mercy, kindness and compassion to everyone – free from anger, bitterness, and revenge – a “forgiving spirit” “always willing to forgive” “a pursuing forgiveness with the offender” (Eph 4:32)

5. The Pondering of the “Love Covering” Principle
   A. How God deals with sin and instructs us to deal with it (God covers sins when they are confessed and forsaken – Atonement in O.T. and Gospels (Kaphar, cover, hide), 1 Jn 1:9

   B. Are there examples of sin that were seemingly covered before dealing with it?
      - Joseph with brothers – Gen.42-50
      - David with Shimei – 2 Sam.16:5-8; 19:16-23
      - Stephen with Saul – Acts 7:58-8:1 (cf. 9:1ff)
        - Mark 11:25-26
        - Other Gospel accounts:

6. Dealing with our own heart
   A. The purpose of dealing with sin – God’s Glory and the believer’s sanctification.
   B. One’s loving attitude towards others
      - Humility (Phil.2:1-11; Eph.4:1-3)
      - Consider oneself first (Mt.7:3-5)
      - Seeking peace (Rom.12:18; Eph. 4:3)
      - Patience with all men (1 Thess.5:14)
      - After full inquiry (Prov 18:13,17; 2 Cor.13:1)
      - Gentleness (2 Tim.2:24-26)

---

7 Bitterness is not an absence of offering forgiveness to the offended but rather it happens when we (1) focus on ourselves and our hurt, (2) we don’t focus on God’s glory and their good, (3) our hearts are not intentional on actively loving them regardless of what has happened, (4) if after confession is made and forgiveness granted we continue to talk to others about it, bring it up to the offender or dwell on it ourselves.

8 You would not want to form a conclusion on this verse without the rest of the teaching in Scripture on forgiveness. Just as you would not want to form a theology on the verse before it (:24) without the rest of God’s Word on prayer and the will of God. Sadly, it has already been formed – the faith movement and prosperity gospel.
C. Dealing with the rationalizations of our heart
   - “It’s no big deal”
   - “Compared to others – not that serious”
   - “It’s not my responsibility to confront”
   - “My skin is thick – I can handle it”
   - “Take the high road”
   - “You’ll be doing this all day”
   - “I’d be some sort of Gestapo”
   - “Graciousness is letting sin go”
   - “No one is perfect, I’m only human”
   - “It’s too late, the past is the past, it’s water under the bridge”
   - “This would be an unforgiving spirit”
   - “My goal is ‘peace’ and this might lead to conflict.”
   - “I don’t think what they are doing is sinful.”
   - “If I deal with their sin in this area, then I’ll have to deal with it in my life as well.”
   - “This would be so time-consuming – I hate the hassle.”
   - “This is “Law” and not “Gospel Grace””
   - Etc.

D. Dealing with the actions of another’s sin(s)
   1. It must be dealt with graciously.
   2. It must be dealt with reasonably.
   3. It must be dealt with righteously.
   4. It must be dealt with consistently.

7. The Practical Application of the “Love Covering” Principle (Both with the Unsaved and Saved)

A. Dealing with the offenses of the Unsaved
   1. Loving them with the Saving Gospel of Jesus Christ
      - Their greatest need is God’s judicial forgiveness
      - You can point out what they are doing wrong, but only for evangelism.

   2. Definitely confront and report when the offense is criminal (Rom.13).

   3. If sinned against, always be willing to:
      - Suffer for Christ – Mt.5; 1 Pt 2
      - Pray – Rom.12:14-21
• Put off vengeance – Prv.19; Rom.12; Mt.5
• Turn away from anger and bitterness – Mt.5
• Intentional and an aggressive love – Rom.12

4. But this is actively loving and having a “heart ready to forgive” (Ps.86:5)

B. Dealing with the sins of the Saved

1. **Only clear sins are to be dealt with** (clear violation of God’s commands), not matters of conscience (Rm. 14), not preference issues (Phil.2), not motives of the heart (1 Cor.4), not physical maturity issues, not wisdom issues, “halo” data issues, personhood (personality) issues (e.g. irritations, rubs, insensitive, personal differences) — unless they greatly affect one’s ministry or witness. These are clear sins that “love believing the best” can’t spin it any other way.

2. Must be done in love (Prv 27:5-6)

3. Realize we are members of one another (1 Cor 5; 12; Eph.4:25)

4. There is a heart always ready to forgive (Ps.86:5)
   • Eph.4:31-32
   • Mk.11:25-26

5. There is the humble and loving inquiry/confrontation (timing?)
   • Lk.17:2
   • Mt.18:15ff
   • Mt.7:1-3
   • Mt.5:23
   • Prv.27:5-6

6. There ought to be acknowledgment/confession (repentance)
   • 1 Jn.1:9 (to God)

---

9 When a believer sins against you: 1. Pray for and examine yourself (Mt 7:3-5) and pray for them; 2. After some time, go ask questions (Prv 18:13); 3. After some time, bring the Scriptures to bear on the sin; 4. After some time, ask another believer or two to go with you (Mt 18:15-20; Rom 12:18); 5. If it becomes this serious, then it could be a whole church matter (but not because of the first sin issue but their entire life is troubling as over time their heart is hardened about sin in their life and they refuse to humble themselves or submit to God’s Word).
Counseling Discipleship Training

- 2 Cor. 7:9-11
- Lk. 17:1-3
- Mt. 18:15ff
- Prv. 28:13

7. Then there is forgiveness (“release” from the heart outward, immediate and unlimited)
   - Mk 11:25-26
   - Lk. 17:1-3
   - Mt. 18:15ff

8. Coupled with forgiveness is “covering the sins” (bury, keep no record, blot it out, hide)

Conclusion

- Take all sin seriously!!! (Rm. 12:9; 1 Pt. 1:13-16). “It might be a small act, but it is a great sin.”
- The process seems to be (among Christians) to have the right heart – always loving “a “forgiving spirit”, ask questions and if necessary humbly and graciously confront in love (Prov. 27:5-6), upon confession/repentance then forgive/cover.
- The result of taking all sin seriously:
  - If none is dealt with = no purity (lots of “leaven,” 1 Cor 5), no love, no fellowship, no glory to God
  - If only some is dealt with = some purity (still “leaven,” some love, skewed relationships and glorifying God is hindered
  - If all clear sin is dealt with = purity, love, genuineness manifested, spiritual growth, God’s truth is honored, godly relationships and God’s glory is on display = true Christlikeness.

---

10 “…there is no more conspicuous misuse of language than when we speak of anything which has in it the virus of rebellion against God, and the breach of His law, as being a small sin. It may be a small act; it is a great sin. Little rattlesnakes are snakes; they have rattles and poison fangs as really as the most monstrous of the brood that coils and hisses in some cave.” Alexander Maclaren, Commentary on Matthew, 40.

11 The place to start is in your relationships by asking other Christians to please point out where you clearly sin against them and humbly deal with these in your own life first (Matt 7:1-3). Maybe in time you can explain and practice this in all your Christian relationships to the Glory of God.