

## Love Bears All Things By Wendy Wood



**Love bears all things.** The Greek word for “bears” is *steg* . Literally translated this means “roof”. Paul is saying that love protects and covers. Wayne Mack is helpful in describing this. ‘According to the Greek dictionary, [1 Corinthians 13:7] can literally mean “to put a roof over what is displeasing in another person,” “to throw a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person,” “to pass over in silence or to keep confidential or to protect and preserve by covering.” “In other words, it means to cover over with silence, to keep secret, to hide or conceal the errors or faults of others. What Paul is saying in verse 7 is that when we tell someone, “I love you,” we are telling that person that we will function as an umbrella or roof that will shield and protect that person from harm or unnecessary and unhelpful exposure.’<sup>20</sup>

It will be helpful to look at other scriptures to get a really clear picture of what is meant by ‘love bears all things’. When we read that description, we immediately want to jump to our own defense of confronting others when we are sinned against. That “inner lawyer” in us that wants to defend ourselves reveals a self-justifying heart. We need to pay attention to rising up in our hearts. Our desire to self-justify is a rejection of Christ’s

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<sup>20</sup> Maximum Impact by Wayne Mack

justification on our behalf. When you feel that need to prove yourself right, take time to examine what's really going on in your heart. Why do you feel the need to prove yourself? Is this a time to quiet your heart, ask God to make you teachable, seek to learn to discern truth from scripture, and rejoice that you can't and won't ever be able to justify yourself!

The Apostle Peter says something very similar in 1 Peter 4:8 - "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers over a multitude of sins". Similar to being long-suffering or patient, bearing with other people's sin means we don't have to point out every offense or wrongdoing. We can endure graciously with the faults of others knowing that God has dealt graciously with our sin. Real love covers over and protects other people from unnecessarily or unhelpful exposure of their sin. By unnecessary and unhelpful exposure I mean that love doesn't gossip or tell others who don't need to know about the sin. We'll discuss this further in a moment.

Proverbs 17:9 says, "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends."

Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses". Love never enjoys exposing the sin of others. Put yourself in the place of the sinner. When you have done something wrong, do you want others who are not involved, who do not have your best interest in mind, or may not even know you, to hear about your sin? Would you feel loved if your husband or friend told other people about how you sinned? Of course not! A loving relationship provides the safety of cover and a promise of concealment when sin happens. Not because sin doesn't matter, but because love is willing to overlook sin knowing that we are all sinners. To love someone means that you will be a safe place for others to learn, make mistakes, and grow in becoming more like Christ.

But the bible also tells us to confront sin at times. In fact, Paul confronted sin in the bible. Paul was writing 1 Corinthians in response to the Corinthian church sinning in disunity, adultery, marriage issues and more. His letter pointed out their sin and called them to change their ways. Jesus confronted sin also. When talking with the woman at the well, Jesus asked her about her husbands and told her to "go and sin no more". Matthew 18:15 tells us "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." And, Galatians 6:1-2 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you

too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Clearly there are times to confront sin and not "cover" it up.

First, when deciding if love should cover something up, assess whether or not what has happened is actually sin, or just a preference issue. Sometimes, in our pride, we elevate what we want to have happen to the level of right. Just because you don't get what you want or are offended by something doesn't necessarily mean that sin has occurred. Take time to assess if God's law has been broken, not just yours. This may just be a time to humble yourself and accept other people's differences.

Second, is this a one time offense or is this a pattern of sin in the other person's life. Galatians 6:1 uses the term "caught". "If anyone is caught in any transgression". Caught implies that someone is bound up in or unable to get free from something. The Greek phrase of "is caught" pictures someone that is taken over by something. So, when deciding if you should cover over a sin or confront it, it is important to assess the seriousness of the sin in the sinner's life. If the sin falls into a pattern of behavior that the sinner is unaware of or if the pattern of sin is harming their walk with God, it is time to confront the sin. Everyone of us needs to be practicing sanctification with putting off old ways of living and putting on new, Christlike ways of living. If exposing the sin to the sinner would help them to grow in godliness and holiness, it may be time to talk with them.

Third, are you truly able to cover the sin and not let it affect your relationship with the person. Covering a sin doesn't ignore sin, but rather covering a sin acknowledges that God is grieved by this sin, you or someone else has been hurt by this sin, and is a choice to absorb the cost of the sin. If you cover over the sin, but allow then replay the sin in your mind or any way hold that sin against the other person, the sin has not been covered over. The protection or roof concept of love means that the relationship stays safe and completely reconciled. Jay Adams puts it this way:

"Covering sins means not allowing offenses to come between brothers. It does not mean ignoring them. God allows no grudges or resentment. One must cover sins in such a way that they never bother him anymore. If some sin keeps throwing the covers off, then you must confront the brother and bring the matter to a successful conclusion. God does not allow for unreconciled relationships. Nor does covering sins mean never offering help to another who is stuck in some trespass out of which he is not extricating himself."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The Christian Counselor's Commentary: Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter by Jay Adams

Psalm 32:1 says, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." God covers our sin so completely that we do not need to fear that He holds it against us. Covering sin means that it is no longer an issue. If the offender has done something that you cannot truly cover over, it is better to have a conversation about the offense and bring the relationship to reconciliation.

When you believe that the sin must be confronted, attitude and motive are crucial. The desired outcome is repentance. First and foremost, we must desire to see the sinner repent to God and be drawn closer to Him. We must desire that the sinner be exposed for their good in leading them to put off sin and put on living in a godly way. Love seeks the good of the other person ahead of its own comfort or preference. Selfish attitudes and motives must play no part in exposing the sins of others. When you are sinned against and are about to expose the sin, consider these issues:

Am I about to confront this sin because it inconveniences me to sinned against in this way?

Am I about to confront this sin because I want to be proven right in this matter?

Am I about to confront this sin because I've been called out on the same sin and I don't want to be the only one?

Am I about to confront this sin because I am angry at this person?

Am I about to confront this sin because it makes me feel better about my own sin?

The right motive to expose sin is to help the other person acknowledge and confess their sin to God. To seek forgiveness and to turn from the sin to please and honor God in their thoughts, words, and actions. It's not about you. It's not about your life being easier if this sin stops. Love for God and love for others is the only God pleasing motive when confronting the sin of others.

Galatians 6:1-2 also talks about keeping a watch on ourselves. This is similar to the idea of examining and removing the log in our own eye before dealing with the speck in the other person's eye. Before talking about other people's sin, we must deal with our own. We must be living a lifestyle of repentance. We need to be aware of our need for God's grace and forgiveness and be deeply grateful for it. We need to humble ourselves and see ourselves as fellow sinners and not approach the other person in a

condescending way. Starting with our own sin first makes us a credible voice in someone's life.

We must approach someone else with a spirit of gentleness. Another word for gentleness is meekness. Jesus was "gentle and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:28-30). Meekness or gentleness is about being under God's authority and submitting your will and desires to God's. It is also about being compassionate toward other people. Gentleness is a heart attitude that overflows into our speech, body language, and actions. A gentle heart is patient and kind. A gentle heart is focused on being sensitive to other people's feelings and needs. Meekness involves seeking peace, a willingness to let go of preferences and yield to other people's way.

Consider these examples from Wayne Mack:

"Restoring in the spirit of gentleness means that we will:

- Be sensitive to the feelings of others; be reluctant to do or say anything that would embarrass them.
- Do what we can to make others feel at ease, gentle people don't enjoy making people squirm.
- Be willing to hear different ideas, even foolish ideas, without doing or saying anything that would belittle or demean someone else.
- Treat people with respect and dignity even when we disagree with them or think they are wrong
- Avoid unnecessary and unhelpful criticism
- Avoid the use of intimidation, coerciveness, violence, manipulation, or authoritarianism
- Use "soft answer" not harsh words (Proverbs 15:1-2)
- Uses words that build up, fit the occasion, and give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29)
- Approach others with a servant attitude rather than as a master or lord.
- Avoid talking to others about someone else's sin unless to do so is absolutely necessary for knowing how to help the person stuck in sin<sup>22</sup>

Love does not take pleasure in pointing out the sins of others. Yet our sinful nature delights to report on the sins of others. We see it in children who can't wait to tattle on a sibling or report a fellow student to the teacher. Yet we do the same thing when we try

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<sup>22</sup> Maximum Impact by Wayne Mack

to hide our uncovering of sin (gossip) in the pretext of a prayer request or in getting help to deal with the situation when we don't really want or need help but it just feels good to share the information. Love doesn't take pleasure in exposing sin so that you feel better about yourself.

Jay Adams explains what it looks like to restore someone in the spirit of gentleness:

“Meekness is difficult to define; it is more easily understood by describing its opposite. To say to a brother caught in sin, “Well, I guess this is to be expected. After all, how many times have I said...,” is to kick him when he is down. No, any such superior attitude is the opposite of meekness. Meekness acts more like this, “Brother, I am here, not because I consider myself better than you, but because in Galatians 6:1, God tells me to come. As a matter of fact, I may need you to help me out of some difficulty in the future.”

Humility is key in knowing when to cover over sin or expose it. Humility is key when we know we need to expose sin because how we do it is just as important as if we do it. The only motive that honors God in confronting sin is to help bring the fellow sinner to repentance so that God receives glory as His power is on display in a changed life. Proverbs 19:11 says, “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense”. Always ask yourself, can I overlook this offense. Can I choose in love to absorb the cost of this sin and not say anything and treat this person like nothing has happened in our relationship? Have I examined my own life for sin and am I humble about being a fellow sinner? Is this a sin that needs to be confronted so the other person has the opportunity to repent and change? Am I aiming to please myself or God in this confrontation? Once those questions are answered rightly, then, and only then, should you proceed.

Application:

1. What were the two things that stood out to you the most in this facet of love?
2. Rate yourself. Are you careful to cover sin (1) or are you quick to expose others failures (10)?
3. Who do you tend to be quick to confront and correct and what motive do you tend to have in doing so?
4. Thinking through the people and situations you wrote in #3, which of these is it appropriate to cover over or bear?
5. Still in regards to #3, what would it look like to confront these sins with humility and seeking to honor God and not self?