

## Proverbs 17:9

*He who covers over an offense promotes love;  
But whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. (NIV)*

What does it mean cover over an offense?

It means to respond with love, even when someone acts ugly, rude, or hateful.

The second line, whoever repeats the matter, means that it is talking about a specific incident.

So, what this verse is saying is when someone does or says something to offend or hurt us, we should respond with love.

If someone steps on my foot, for example, I have the choice to either say, it's okay and let it go, or to fuss at them for it.

But, what if it's something they did on purpose?

We should act in a loving way toward them instead of striking back at them or getting down on their level and being ugly back to them.

Notice the second part of this verse -

*But whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

If someone does something to us we have a choice.

We can tell everyone about it or we can be discreet and keep it between us and the Lord.

It is okay to talk to someone about a situation we are concerned about so we can get advice on how to handle it, find out if the other person thinks we are being reasonable, and/or to be pointed in the right direction.

It is never okay to talk about the incident to run the other person down.

Sometimes we do that without meaning to because our feelings are hurt and we want someone to tell us we were in the right.

Instead of worrying who's right or wrong, we should prayerfully love the other person and give them the benefit of the doubt.

This does not mean letting people run over us.

It doesn't mean we don't set healthy boundaries.

It does mean to not jump on the offended wagon every time something happens.

Not all things are about us.

Sometimes they are about the other person.

We don't really know what people are going through behind closed doors.

What they are struggling with.

Instead of making it worse by calling them out on things, sometimes we just need to love them and keep going.

One of the things I have noticed about the book of Proverbs, and really all of the Old Testament, is that there are Scriptures that speak to it or refer to it in the New Testament.

For this verse, it's in the book of [1 Peter](#).

[1 Peter 4:8](#) says, "*above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*"  
NIV

When we cover over an offense we promote love.

It's not about condoning or promoting sin, It's about having a forgiving attitude toward others when they stumble.

It's about seeking to love them and apply love to them when they make a misstep.

When someone wrongs us, we have a choice.

We can respond in love, or we can respond in hate.

[Proverbs 10:12](#) tells us -

*Hatred stirs up dissension; but love covers over all wrongs.* (NIV)

When someone does us wrong and we respond in hate we make it worse.

When we choose to love them anyway and to apply that love, we have the opportunity to show God's love to them.

We do this by loving them and being kind to them.

This is exactly what the Lord did for us when He loved us before we loved Him.

[1 John 4:10](#) says, "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*". NIV

He reached out to us in love.

He loved us first.

When we love others we are modeling God's love.

This does not mean we condone or approve of ugly behavior or sin.

It means we accept that it happened and we choose to respond with Godly love.

Since we don't know what's going on in a person's heart and life, by responding with love we have an opportunity to be a part of the Lord's efforts to heal them, sometimes without them even knowing it.

The second part of the verse we're looking at ([Proverbs 17:9](#)) says,

*"But whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."* (NIV)

We touched on this above, and it's repeated in [Proverbs 16:28](#)

*"A perverse man stirs up dissension and a gossip separates close friends."* NIV

So, say we call a friend and start complaining about what someone did to us or telling them about something we heard that other person did.

What does that do?

It sows division and dissension.

It causes strife.

What we're saying doesn't have to be true for people to have doubts about them and to believe us.

What if that person we called to complain or gossip to is close friends with the person we are gossiping about?

What then?

Either the person is going to have doubts about the other person and their friendship is going to be harmed, or else they are going to be upset with us for talking bad about their friend.

Either way, the person we are talking to is put in a position to take sides.

They have to choose which one of us to support.

We haven't helped any of us.

We've hurt ourselves as well as the other two.

Nothing good can come of that.

The verse we just looked at ([Proverbs 16:28](#)) says someone who does that is perverse.

So, let me ask you.

When you talk to someone about other people, not just the wrong they've done to you, but things they are doing or how they are living, are you doing it to get advice on how to help them?

Or, are you gossiping?

They don't have to be doing anything bad for it to be gossip.

What is your motive for sharing?

And just for the record, saying they are doing something, "bless their heart," does not make it right!

It is okay to call someone because you need to talk about what happened and to process it. but calling just to "blow off steam:" or vent about it is not right.

That's not seeking to cover it with love.

Those things that they are doing - are you covering them with love?

Or counting the missteps?

One of the best ways to cover them with love is to pray for them instead of talking about them.

Whenever you get the urge to talk about someone or what they're doing - talk to the Father not your friend.

Ask Him to help them with whatever it is you see.

Ask Him to help you, too, so you know you have the right mindset about it.

Bottom line, love covers a multitude of sin, and it's our job to make sure we are loving them but not judging them.

Homework - this week spend a few minutes thinking about the people in your life. Are you responding to them with Godly love?

Are the conversations you are having about others gossip?

Are you gossiping?

Or, actively seeking help with a situation?

[Proverbs 10:19](#) - *Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.* NIV