



WHEN SOMEONE WRONGS YOU

What should you do when someone wrongs you? Let's examine the biblical procedure step by step.

1) Recognize the fact that people, even the best of friends, will sin against one another (1 Sam. 19:4–5; Matt. 18:21; Luke 17:4). No one's perfect. We're all sinners (1 John 1:8, 10); we all have tongues that can't be tamed (James 3:8); we all do things we wish we hadn't (Rom. 7:15–25). Since "you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren" (1 Cor. 6:8), you can afford to be more patient and tolerant the next time someone wrongs you.

2) When you sin against someone you've also sinned against God (1 Cor. 8:12). The sin must be confessed (1 John 1:9).

3) You have a right to be angry when someone wrongs you—God is (Rom. 12:19). That's righteous indignation (Eph. 4:26). Justice had been violated.

4) In addition to being angry you usually have a desire to get even (Prov. 24:29). A desire for vengeance is not wrong. We find people in heaven crying out to God to avenge them (Rev. 6:9–11). What's wrong is avenging yourself (Lev. 19:18; Prov. 20:22; 24:29; Rom. 12:17, 19). God has promised to do it for you (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

5) Overlook the sin if you can and be defrauded (Prov. 19:11). Jesus did this on the cross when He said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). It's better to be defrauded than to make an issue of it (1 Cor. 6:7). If you choose to overlook it, you must forgive him, forget the offence, and put away your anger. The life of Joseph is a good example of overlooking sin (comp. Gen. 37:18–36 with 50:15–21).

6) Be patient (1 Thess. 5:14). Patience is being angry with someone for a long period of time without retaliating or asking God to avenge you. It's giving the person who wronged you a reasonable amount of time to apologize and make amends. He's responsible to come to you and seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23–24; Luke 17:4). Go to him as soon as you're aware something's wrong. Don't put it off. Delay increases the chance of misunderstanding, hard feelings, sins of the tongue, and retaliation.

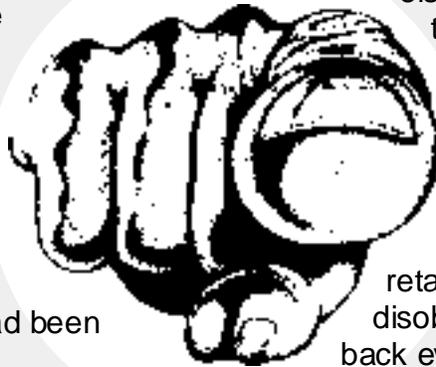
7) Cover the sin. Hide it from others by not talking about it (Prov. 10:12; 17:9; 1 Cor. 13:7; 1 Peter 4:8). It's between you and him. No one else needs to know—unless it's a threat or danger to them (Gal. 2:11–14; 1 Tim. 5:20).

8) Don't incur sin because of him (Lev. 19:17). Righteous anger can lead to sin (Eph. 4:26). So be careful not to run him down or retaliate in any way. If you do you've disobeyed the command "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone" (Rom. 12:17).

9) Pray for him (Matt. 5:44). If we're commanded to pray for those who persecute us, should we not pray for those who sin against us? You can't persecute people without sinning against them, (e.g., confiscating their property or murdering their loved ones).

10) If you can't overlook the sin without harboring resentment, and if he doesn't come to you to repent within a reasonable length of time, go to him and rebuke him in private (Lev. 19:17; Matt. 18:15; Luke 17:3). Perhaps he's not aware he wronged you. If he apologizes and makes amends, the matter has been settled quietly and privately.

11) If he repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3–4). Forgiveness is putting the sin out of your mind completely and refusing to think about it or dwell on it any longer.



Forgiveness is unlimited. Forgive him every time he sins against you, but only if he repents each time (Matt. 18:21–22; Luke 17:3–4).

Forgiveness is also conditional. If he doesn't apologize and make amends, you don't have to forgive him. Of course you can choose to forgive and be defrauded at any time. God deals with us in the same way. We sin against Him many times, even many times a day, during our lifetimes and He forgives us each time—but only if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

If he repents but you refuse to forgive him, God won't forgive your sins (Matt. 6:14–15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37). If he apologizes and makes amends—perhaps even multiple restitution (Ex. 22:1–15; Lev. 6:1–7; Num. 5:5–8; Prov. 6:30–31)—you have no choice but to accept. It's all he can do. He can't go back and do it over. The sin is locked in the past and can't be undone. Repayment may even be impossible. How can you ever repay the loss of a loved one or the loss of an arm or leg? That's where grace comes in. Forgiveness is giving pardon for sins committed against you that can't be repaid. It's forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it. The alternative is being angry forever and holding a grudge—and that's forbidden (Lev. 19:18).

12) If he doesn't repent, go to him a second time with witnesses (Matt. 18:16). If, after this, he still doesn't repent, take the matter to the church for arbitration. If he refuses to abide by the church's decision, the church leaders should excommunicate him and the members of the church should separate from him socially (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:1–2, 9–13). Now is the time to pray imprecatory prayers asking God to avenge you (Psa. 109:1–20; Jer. 11:18–23; 18:18–23). You've done all you can. All your options for restitution have been exhausted and you're not allowed to avenge yourself. Claim this promise: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Then wait for God to avenge you. He decides how and when (Rev. 6:9–11).

13) When you forgive someone who sinned against you, the next thing you should do is comfort and express your love for him (2 Cor.

2:6–8). Comforting is saying and doing things to make him feel better when he's sad or grieved (Gen. 37:34–35; 50:15–21; Matt. 2:18; Acts 20:12; 1 Thess. 4:18). You can express your love in many ways: by being extra-friendly, by taking him to lunch, by giving him a gift, or by throwing your arms around him and giving him a big hug and kiss. Let him know it's all over and forgotten. You must take the initiative in this.

14) When someone sins against you, never stop loving him—even though you're outraged by his behavior. Keep loving him from the time he sins to the time you reaffirm your love for him. Love him but not what he's done. Love him as you love yourself (Lev. 19:18). If he's hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink (Prov. 25:21; Rom. 12:20–21). Look for opportunities to love him by supplying his needs—while you're waiting for him to repent. That heaps coals of fire on his head (Prov. 25:22; Rom. 12:20).

CONCLUSION

Every step in this procedure is an expression of love. Patience (1 Cor. 13:4), covering sins committed against you (Prov. 17:9; 1 Peter 4:8), praying for those who wrong you (Matt. 5:44), rebuking them (Prov. 3:12; Rev. 3:19), forgiving them (Num. 14:19), and comforting and reaffirming your love for them (2 Cor. 2:6–8) are obvious examples.

APPLICATION

Meditate for a moment on the following questions. Does God get angry when we sin against Him? Does God stop loving us when we sin against Him? Does God stop loving us when He's angry with us? Does God stop loving us when He disciplines us? Of course not! So the next time someone sins against you, you have a right to be angry—but don't stop loving them!