

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The recent JBEM article by Greg Rutecki and John Geib, "A Time to Be Silent ... " (Vol. 5, No. 4), was quite interesting. The paper focused on the Biblical justification for confidences ("secrets") as well as some Biblical limits of confidentiality. Protection of life, for example, is given as a clear reason to "break" confidentiality, at least with those most intimately concerned with the case.

I, and perhaps other readers, would be interested in the authors' comments concerning other cases that are not related to immediate physical abuse or life-threatening issues. For example, a health care worker is counseling and/or providing other assistance to an individual who professes to be a Christian with a regular but infrequent sinful behavior patterns (e.g., shoplifting). The worker clearly counsels the individual and offers to obtain other Biblical counseling assistance. The client does not change the sinful pattern over a substantial period of time. In addition, the individual refuses to allow the health care worker to talk to anyone else about the situation. Would verses such as Matthew 18:15-17 indicate that the health care worker must eventually "break" confidentiality and inform the individual's pastor/elder/deacon?

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The authors reply:

In the practice of Biblical counsel, any attempt to balance "silence" and "speech" (Ecc. 3:7) requires individual situations be framed in a spiritual awareness of the goal desired. Scripture itself reveals that goal as follows, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1a).

In the consideration of sins which do not involve threat to life (e.g., "shoplifting"), the authors feel that other

attempts at restoration are indicated ("gently"). The counselor can strongly urge the counselee to use his/her pastor, elders and biblical accountability group as arbiters who can successfully illuminate the necessary spiritual truths (Matt 18:15-17). As a later resort to the counselor can break the counseling relationship in an attempt to bring the counselee to repentance/restoration.

We both feel strongly that the injunction to silence in counseling situations can only be broken and Biblically justified by a threat to life.

Serving Him,

Gregory Rutecki, M.D.

John Geib

Editor's Note

The article entitled "Population Control" by Franklin E. Payne, Jr., M.D., which appeared in the Winter, 1992, issue, was reprinted from Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., with permission.