

## **The Issue of Confidentiality**

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I want you to think for a minute about the issue of confidentiality. This is an issue that crops up frequently in the body of Christ. It is common to hear someone state, "What I am about to share with you, you cannot share with anyone else." Sometimes, a person will go so far as to ask another to verbally state that they will not share a matter with another, before they will disclose what is on their heart. This may seem prudent and acceptable, but I want to look at it from another perspective.

When someone begins a conversation by requiring secrecy, at the heart of such a request is control. It is similar to requiring that a contract be signed, laying down the ground rules, before proceeding in a joint effort with another individual. In this case, the joint effort is discussing an issue. The ground rule is that what is said cannot be discussed with any other individual. Usually such contracts are made to protect against the unfaithfulness of the other party.

People used to trust others to a greater extent. It used to be common that agreements were entered into on a simple handshake, or merely on the word of an individual. Today, our society has lost faith in itself and in one another. This is why there is such an abundance of lawyers, contracts, laws, rules, policies, etc.. Even if the world we live in does not trust one another, this should not be true in the household of God. We are being conformed to the image of Christ and it would be unconscionable to think that we should lay down requirements for proceeding on an issue with Christ.

Words are powerful, perhaps the most powerful aspect of a person's life. Our words carry weight and have meaning. What we say and what we don't say communicates deep things. When a brother or sister comes up to me and reveals the vulnerable parts of themselves, and they say not a word about my protecting their vulnerabilities, it communicates to me that they trust me with their welfare. They are communicating powerfully that they believe me to have their best interests at heart.

I want you to think of the effect of someone who begins a conversation by stating that I must first agree to not share any part of it with any other individual. Their words convey a lack of trust in my heart toward them. It is similar to saying, "I have something to speak to you that, if mishandled, could prove to be to my detriment. It could hurt me. I therefore need to bind you by an oath, so that I know what I am sharing will not be mishandled." This conveys other things as well. It says, "I'm not sure I trust your judgment in this matter, so I will bind you to my judgment, and my judgment is that no one else should know of this conversation."

You realize that statements of confidentiality, even among counselors, only go so far. If a client tells a counselor that they are involved in child abuse, for instance,

the counselor is obligated to report the abuse to authorities. If a client cannot legally bind a counselor in such a matter, how much more so should those who answer to God refuse to be bound by the contracts of men? They must ultimately obey God. Does not such an oath forbid the person taking it from sharing something, even if they believe God tells them that they must do so?

You see, therefore, why I have said that making such a requirement a prerequisite for conversation involves issues of control. You are not allowing the other individual the opportunity to exercise their own judgment, nor to hear from God on the matter. It is somewhat of a contradiction that you would share things of a delicate nature with somebody whom you do not trust. Isn't sharing vulnerabilities with another an act of trust? Why then would you bind them at the outset as one whom you do not trust?

We must begin to exercise confidence in one another. If you doubt the reliability of a person, then simply choose to not share with them. Do not insult a worthy person by insisting that they meet your requirement for secrecy in order for you to share with them. Allow them the opportunity to judge a matter themselves and to obey the voice of God. If you feel you must control a matter, then you probably need to keep it to yourself.