

CHAPTER 43

CAN YOU BE TRUSTED WITH A CONFIDENCE? or CAN YOU KEEP A CONFIDENCE?

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A longstanding friendship between two men was shattered when one betrayed a secret the other confided in him. Information that was considered 'strictly personal' was divulged to other people. The betrayed man was stunned and heartbroken. A friend he thought he could trust turned out to be a devious traitor.

How highly do you value a confidence? How deep does your loyalty run? Can you be trusted — relied upon to keep private information to yourself? Do you conscientiously guard the personal secrets others confide in you? When friends and associates bare their innermost feelings and seek your advice, do you resolve to '*keep it quiet*'?

Let's reverse the situation!

How many of your friends can be trusted with your deepest secrets? Can you be honest and open with them about your personal hangups, problems and frustrations and know they will not betray you? Or do you fear they would react with shock and abhorrence and 'turn you in'?

True Friends are Scarce

Even among our closest associates it is rare to find a friend you can really trust. We hear gossip and rumors almost every day. Loyalties are betrayed with reckless abandon. This deplorable condition in our society has come to be an accepted way of life. We seem to have lost the meaning of integrity that true friendship demands. What an odious stench this must be to Almighty God whose character reflects the highest level of trust to His children.

This Condition Prophesied

The Bible forewarned that this condition would prevail at the close of this age. Matthew 24:10 states, '*And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another and shall hate one another.*' The apostle Paul more specifically emphasized that truce breakers and traitors would abound. '*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors...*' (II Tim. 3:1-4).

Have you and I become guilty of this sordid evil in violating the sacred trusts that others place in us?

Why Trust is Rare

Why are trusting friendships so scarce in the world today? A principle reason may be the 'loose tongue' syndrome or the callous disregard for the reputation of others. It seems that we give little thought or concern about the damage we inflict on people when we gossip and besmirch their good name.

For example, have you noticed how often a conversation which begins on an uplifting note soon deteriorates into destructive slander. Blunt opinions are carelessly expressed, sharp remarks and suspicions are freely voiced. This is highly displeasing to God and openly defies His Word. '*Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*' (Jas. 4:11)

It is of great importance to note that of the seven things God says He hates, three have to do with gossip and slander. 'These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren' (Prov. 6:16-19).

Another reason we are prone to break confidences is that we probably never were taught at an early age the importance of protecting our friendships. We were probably exposed to the hypocrisy and cynicism of our parents who indiscriminately prattled about the mistakes and foibles of their friends, neighbors and even relatives. Thus, we unconsciously absorbed the 'gossip habit' into our thinking processes. How very important it is that we teach our children to be faithful to the trusts placed in their care — to view them as a cherished obligation. (A word of caution. Please realize that we're referring to the moral obligation our children have of protecting the privacy of others and not to serious or immoral acts that need to be reported.)

God's Admonition to Forgive

One of the most destructive sins we should guard against is exposing past mistakes people have since repented of or revealing weaknesses they are presently striving to overcome. There probably is nothing more humiliating to a person who is genuinely repentant than to have his past life brought up and discussed by others who will not leave his sins buried under the blood of Christ. This is why the apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians to forgive and comfort the man who was put out of the Church for an immoral act but later was reinstated after repenting. *'So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him'* (II Cor. 2:7-8).

Unforgiving individuals are ruthless and cruel and will surely be judged by Jesus Christ for their merciless treatment. Mark 11:26 says, *'But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.'* Moreover, Jesus warned, *'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again'* (Matt. 7:1-2).

The Christian Attitude

Concerning what our attitude should be toward others who are struggling with sin, God's Word is explicitly clear. True love covers sin (Proverbs 10:17 and 17:9). That is, it thinks the best of others and gives them the benefit of the doubt. Instead of babbling their sinful deeds to the world, true friends will do all within their power to rescue a stumbling neighbor from his plight. *'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted'* (Gal. 6:1). For sure, true friends will not add to the share and disgrace of neighbor by spreading vicious rumors.

Are you given to gossip? Do you revel in advertising sin that others commit? Do you betray the trust of someone ensnared by an evil habit who is crying out to you for help? If you do, then God, in His Word, brands you a traitor whose very own character may be in greater peril than the one you are accusing. *'The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly'* (Prov. 18:8). *'A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends'* (Prov. 16:28).

A Different Kind of Talebearing

Related to the sin of talebearing is an opposite practice equally as harmful. This practice involves telling acquaintances or friends the juicy tidbits of gossip we hear others say about them. Obviously such indiscriminate mouthings do not serve the cause of peace nor build bridges of good will. Instead, they sow the seeds of discord and create division. God commands us to speak evil of no man (Tit. 3:4). In principle, this means it's equally destructive to pass on gossip to the person affected as to a second party. Try to make the theme of your life one of true and dependable friendship and you will rise in favor with God and man.

Importance of Trustworthiness

An excellent example of just how highly valued trustworthiness is can be seen through the screening procedures of the FBI. When a man is being considered as a prospective agent, everything about his life is gone into — his background, hometown, habits, known friends and acquaintances, after work activities and more. Every detail is taken into account. And, though a candidate may be found to have good character and reputation, if he cannot maintain a trust — if he habitually divulges confidential information — that man will never be appointed an agent.

On a grander scale, God is also looking for men and women who allow His Spirit to develop in

them even higher standards and nobler attitudes. Respect and fidelity are among the highest qualities of character he treasures. Notice the description of the kind of man who will stand before God and be blessed. *'Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoreth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved'* (Ps. 15:1-5). Are you striving to become this kind of steward?

Examine Yourself

We all need to look deeply inside and examine our attitudes. Are we guilty of the very things we distrust in others? Is it possible that the suspicions we often insinuate stem in part from our own guilt feelings, or our own tendencies to participate in rumor spreading? Is this why we are inclined to criticize others, impute evil motives, and put them through the meatgrinder (our own teeth) when they are not present?

Let's search our own hearts to see if our 'scandalous tongues' belie a twisted and depraved mind that wants to put others down in order to minimize our own shortcomings and lift ourselves above them.

Of course, we should not ignore or condone wrong doing. That is, we should not try to protect people from the law who are guilty of illegal or criminal acts. Or even more important, attempting to conceal the actions of a brother who is sowing discord among God's people and trying to divide the flock.

What the Bible instructs us to do in the case of a friend who is weak and sinning is to go to him privately in a spirit of meekness and try to restore him (see Matt. 18:15-17). We should not want to make him a public spectacle of ridicule so as to destroy his dignity.

Be a Faithful Friend

True and faithful friends are priceless. The Bible commends the brother who 'loves at all times' and the 'friend who sticks closer than a brother' (Prov. 17:17 and 18:24). The friendship between David and Jonathan is held up as a sterling example of unflinching loyalty — of what true friends should be like.

The Bible states that the love that they had for each other was stronger than a man's love for a woman (II Sam. 1:26). The friendship was so unshakable that they would have given their lives for each other. Can you imagine either of them turning 'Judas' on the other — betraying a secret, a confidence or spreading vicious gossip? Can the same be said of us in the way we treat and protect our friends? Can we also be trusted to carefully guard a confidence, to faithfully uphold and defend their honor? Are we a true friend?

God is a Trusted Friend

The greatest example of true friendship and devotion in the entire universe is God Himself. The Bible tells us that all our faults and secret sins are open to His view. 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do' (Heb. 4:13). He knows us through and through. Yet God, who is love, plainly reveals that He does not talk about our sins when we repent (Ezek. 18:22). He forgets them (Heb. 8:12) in His mercy and casts them far from His presence. 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us' (Ps. 103:12).

In stark contrast, Satan, our great adversary, constantly gossips and accuses us before God night and day (Rev. 12:10). He is a renowned liar and depraved slanderer (Jn. 8:44) whose primary aim is to destroy our character.

It behooves each of us to make sure we are emulating God and letting Him create His faithful character in us (Eph. 4:23-32). For if we are not on guard we'll find ourselves too often serving Satan, and doing immeasurable harm to God's earthly family.

As we serve God and draw close to Him let us strive to honor our neighbor and become trusted friends.