

WHETHER WITHHOLDING CONFIDENTIAL INFO ABOUT SOMEONE SINFUL?

This is a response to a question posed during last week's Bible Study on whether withholding confidential information about someone is "sinful". After discussing this within the class, I reasoned that it would be since the process for redemption and restoration has not been considered (Matthew 18:15). However, after further study, I must rescind that thought based on the following information:

Secrets can be difficult to keep and even more difficult to share. The Bible is not necessarily silent on the idea of confidentiality. The question of whether, or not confidentiality is good, or even possible, depends on whom the information is being kept from and for what purpose. Admittedly, there are some details of a person's life that are better kept out of the public eye, even if exposing those secrets would be to our advantage. At the same time, there are some things we might want to keep confidential, especially about ourselves, that would be better confessed and dealt with.

Surely, God knows if no one else does. According to Hebrews 4:13, "Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" So, confidentiality is an earthly concern, but it does not extend vertically to heaven. God is the ultimate revealer of secrets (Daniel 2:22). For instance, when the king of Aram sought to attack the Israelites, the Israelites were ready because Elijah (God's prophet) shared secret information with the Israelites prior to the Aramean's attacks. The king of Aram could not understand how the Israelites were getting their intelligence until one of his officers discovered the source of the leak: "Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom" (2 Kings 6:12).

My role as Pastor requires me to maintain confidential information, unless given permission to share it. It then becomes my discretion when information needs to be shared, even if the other person doesn't want it to be. For example, if someone becomes a threat to themselves or others. Biblically, there is great value in having the discretion to know when to keep something private and when to pass the information to others. We should be especially careful of hiding personal secrets so that we don't have to deal with our own sin and the temptation to expose others out of spite or vengeance. Rather than being gossips (Proverbs 16:28; 1 Timothy 5:13) or overly argumentative (1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:23), we should take the high road with what we know, because confidentiality is important, but it must be kept in a scripturally sound way.

The Bible teaches, indirectly, that keeping secrets can be either good or bad, but it does not clearly delineate the right and wrong uses of secrets. Scripture does not pronounce any moral judgments for or against the keeping of those secrets. However, in the story of Samson and Delilah (Judges 16:4-22), Samson reveals the source of his strength, an act which, based on the aftermath of his admission, was not a smart one. That was a secret he should have kept.

Another example is seen when Queen Esther decided to hide her nationality (Esther 2:20), which became an integral part of God's plan to save His people (Esther 4:13; 7:3-6). This same

story also supports the morality of revealing a secret that, if kept hidden, would cause great wrong or serious harm (Esther 2:21–23). But keeping secrets trying to hide sin is always wrong. As Proverbs 28:13 states, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” When it comes to our sin, God wants full disclosure, and He grants full forgiveness (Isaiah 1:18).

We then can conclude that God does not consider keeping secrets to be sinful in and of itself, for there are some things that people should know and some things they shouldn't. The concern is how those secrets are used, whether to protect someone or to hurt them, which then would be sinful.