

### Dealing Redemptively with Sin [1]

by: [Curvin Wenger](#) [2]

*This story has been written by the editor, from a first-person view of a minister's real life experience. The main facts of the story are true and were personally shared with the editor by this minister. Fictitious names have been used and some of the details have been changed, in order to protect identity and maintain a level of confidentiality. Permission was given by this minister to write the story in this manner.*

"The other day I was down town at "Jack's Repair Shop", getting my car worked on. While I was there, "Jack" was telling me that "John", from church, was seen the other day, in the early morning hours, on the porch of 'what's her name', you know, that lady who lives on the other side of town". This certainly was troubling, since this particular woman was commonly known to have loose morals. It was also known that men regularly visited her house during the night hours. What possibly could John have been doing there? Surely he wasn't... No, not John, he's a faithful brother in our church, a strong pillar, in fact.

As an ordained minister during the 1970s, I carried a particular concern for our church in the area of church discipline. Several of our founding members had come from a church background that had used some unbiblical methods in the area of discipline, resulting in some reaction. Because of my concern and then seeing the tendency towards this reaction, I had done some preaching on the subject, with an emphasis on the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 18.

Now this. This certainly sounded dire, but what should we do? What should I do? How would God want us as a church to respond in this situation? Adding strength and urgency to the need of doing something about this sooner rather than later was the fact that Jack, the mechanic, was known to be the town gossip, even though he was the deacon of the local Methodist church. Yes, he was known to be a gossip and to exaggerate a story, but could we afford to let this go, with the potential of ruining the reputation of the Gospel, whether the story was true or not?

I urged the brother who had come with the report to personally make contact with John and check whether the story was true, since that would be the biblical approach. However, as we discussed it further, it soon became clear that there were several legitimate reasons why he should not be the one to go. This left me as the one responsible to follow through on the job (which very often seems so difficult to do) of approaching the accused in order to verify the facts of the story.

I made an appointment to meet with John, the accused brother, and sometime later we were sitting down together in the study. With a heavy heart I gently repeated the gossip I had heard and asked whether it was true. Imagine my surprise as tears started to well up in his eyes and he began weeping uncontrollably. What had happened? I had been careful to not accuse him, but simply repeat the story and ask whether it was true. What a blessing to find out God's Spirit had been at work in his heart and my compassionate, gentle approach had broken down

his restraint and potential resistance.

“Yes,” he finally choked out, “It is true, I was there, but she didn’t answer the door, so no sinful behavior happened; but I went there planning to meet with her, with the intention of sinning, so I really did sin.” [see Mat 5:27-28] After a time of repentance, confession, and prayer, John asked me to call his wife to come join us there in the study. After she arrived, he was able to openly and humbly confess his sin to his wife and a time of beautiful forgiveness and reconciliation followed!

Presently, I started thinking about what should be done concerning a public confession. To my pleasant surprise, before I even had time to voice my thoughts, John spoke up and said, “I would like to confess this to the church on Sunday.” Praise the Lord, His Spirit was still quietly at work in this dear brother’s heart!

The following Sunday John shared a public confession in church. Tears flowed freely from the brothers and sisters as their wayward brother cleared his heart before them all! They freely expressed their forgiveness, even though his sin had marred their reputation as a church, as well as his own testimony. His open confession had helped to bring healing to the body which had become diseased by his sin.

Several weeks later my car developed a problem requiring a mechanic’s attention, so before long I found myself in the company of Jack, as he took a look at the issue. As he worked, true to form, he started asking questions of a personal nature. “Do you still pastor that church on the north end of town?” After getting a yes reply, he then proceeded to tell me the story of John being seen on the porch of ‘that woman’ during the wee hours of the morning. As soon as I realized which story he was telling me, I stopped him and shared that John had made an open, public confession in church about the matter. Therefore, I informed him that he should not continue telling the story since the matter had been cleared before God and man.

This deacon was amazed that a public confession had been made. It seemed to hit him harder still when I shared that John knew that he, Jack, was telling the story all over town, but John would rather be honest with his sin, and have the facts be known, than have a distorted version spread around. Needless to say, that was the last time I ever heard Jack share any gossip in my presence, so God was working on even more issues than the one personally involving our brother.

Jesus said, “Go tell him his fault between you and him alone”. Too often the practice is, “Go tell whoever will listen.” Another mistake we, as a church, have seen as a potential response, is to simply ignore the situation and hope it was not true. Or I could have knocked on the accused brother’s door, with a judgment already formed in my mind that he had sinned and thus demanded repentance from him. Instead, God brought beauty out of ashes by means of compassion, tenderness, and honesty.

Today, looking back on that experience, I rejoice to see how God kept me from making the mistakes that I so easily could have made in this type of situation. To Him be all the glory! May God help us to use the redemptive, Biblical approach when we are aware of sin in the fellowship of which we are a part. May God richly bless each one of you, as you endeavor to follow His will for you in the situations He allows you to go through.

Oh, and by the way, you are probably wondering how this situation is doing today, all these years later. People usually want to know, “Does it work?” or “Did it last?”. I am happy to say that in this situation, the brother did his part and has continued living a repentant, God-fearing

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life of simple obedience to Jesus. Today he is still faithfully serving God and is an active, committed part of our local body.

*Joh 8:1 Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. 2 And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. 7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

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