

# Key to the *Casebook*

by Jay E. Adams

[In this regular feature, the author presents solutions to problems presented in cases described in his *Christian Counselor's Casebook* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974). This time Dr. Adams focuses on Case #12, p. 24.]

The title of this case, “He Molested Our Daughter,” tells the story, a story ever increasingly in the headlines today. Pastors, therefore, at one time or another probably will face a case like this and should be aware of some of the problems and their solutions that are involved in such a situation.

Apart from the legal ramifications, which differ in various states (in some this is a felony involving imprisonment for more than a year; the situation in your state should be investigated), there are several issues that should be addressed:

1. Sexual molestation is *porneia* (“fornication” is the translation of this word in the KJV, “sexual sin” in most modern versions) with all of the implications of that fact (see my book *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* for factors regarding the relationship of *porneia* to divorce).

2. In the process of data gathering you must try to discover:

A. What was behind Shirley’s refusal to have sexual relations with Brad that presented the temptation to sin. You must instruct her that her refusal was also a sin on her part that, as God says, may lead to such consequences (cf. I Corinthians 7:5). Also if Brad and Shirley are Christians, you must show them how, when she refused to have sexual relations contrary to I Corinthians 7:5, he got into trouble by failing to follow the reconciliation process required of him by Christ in Matthew 18:15. This process should be spelled out for possible future problems. If Shirley had difficulties with Brad—whatever they may have been (we don’t know what ‘the incident’ was) — she also ‘set up’ the temptation by not following the process in Matthew 18:15. Clearly, here is a couple who on both sides have a good bit to confess to God and to one another, seeking forgiveness all around, and who obviously need instruction in biblical problem solving. But in making the points that are necessary, you need to stress each person’s own responsibilities, sorting these out and taking care not to allow either to blame his or her sinful behavior on

the failure of the other.

B. If possible did the daughter participate willingly in the sin and did she entice her father. You want to know this in order to deal properly with the daughter (and the mother) and in order to safeguard these relationships for the future; in so doing, you probably will want to make it clear that you are not interested in exonerating Brad by what you find. Regardless of what the daughter did, there is no excuse for his sinful action.

C. Whether these persons are professing members of the church of Jesus Christ. As in all cases, you will be able to summon adequate resources only if you are working with regenerate persons. If these are genuine Christians deep in sin, as was the unrepentant incestuous man in Corinth who was disciplined and then restored upon repentance, then the resources of the Holy Spirit, the Scripture, and the church will be adequate. Full restoration and change is possible. If they are not repentant or prove themselves to be ingenuine by lack of repentance leading to final excommunication, then you have no reason to expect that this situation can be turned around in a way pleasing to God apart from conversion.

Now, let us consider the situation as a whole. Assuming that Shirley did refuse sexual relations and that her husband did fall into temptation stemming from that, let us ask how it happened. Things like this rarely take place apart from long, previous thoughts about them. The self-pity, brooding, and hatred toward Shirley for refusal to grant forgiveness after ‘the incident,’ whatever that was (obviously you will probe for data on this), all combined to give him what, in his mind, became sufficient justification for his subsequent behavior. It was not, of course, as I have already pointed out. It would be important to check it out, just to be sure, but you will find that in almost all cases of this sort, the sin was contemplated, planned, and committed in the heart—in which it even may have been enacted over and over again — long before the overt act (cf. the case of Ammon who made himself sick over Tamar and planned to rape her: II Samuel 13:1f.).

It is true that sins like this take place only after some contemplation and talking one’s self into them; it is clear that it is possible to prevent future occurrences of them by taking the proper action at the outset. Point this out and show what to do about the thought-life (cf. Philippians 4:8). In working with Brad and Shirley you should also make it clear that they must learn to deal with all other problems between the two of them in the home as soon as they occur. No resentment, retaliatory action, etc., may be allowed. This will help

eliminate any reoccurrence of such sinful thought-life patterns. They must learn to deal with issues that arise so that the sun is never allowed to set on them (cf. Ephesians 4:26). Probably this is the most important matter to work on in the restoration of this marriage (for help see comments on this sort of problem in my *Insight and Creativity in Christian Counseling*, pages 79f.).

Clearly, repentance and forgiveness must be followed by commitment to work on all problems. The counselor will need to spend time with the daughter as well, regardless of what he discovers about her part in the affair. If Brad is the one who brought the matter to light in helping Shirley to reestablish trust, the counselor may show her how Brad's act is a good sign and should be looked upon by her as the beginning of new ways on his part. He will work for radical amputation wherever necessary (for details see my *More Than Redemption*). He will take care to bring Brad home only under the most carefully worked out conditions. Perhaps the daughter could spend a week or two at a relative's home while Brad and Shirley begin to work out some of their difficulties. But when the daughter moves back in, security and scheduling that prohibits the private accessibility of the one to the other should be assured for some time, until full trust is rebuilt as a part of the radical amputation process, in which prevention must be uppermost in the thinking of all. There should be no objection to this if Brad is sincere in his repentance; indeed, he should welcome it. Clearly Jesus noted the importance of preventive action that sets up barriers to future sin by His frequent references to radical amputation.

Trust will develop as Shirley sees concrete changes across the board made by Brad, especially as she and he successfully work out their differences and develop a proper way to deal in the future with marriage problems that will lead to no more 'incidents.' When Shirley sees that her marriage is intact at last, she will lose her fear; when Brad sees it, he will have no reason to indulge in the sort of fantasy growing out of anger and self-pity that probably led to this affair.

I can say nothing about 'the incident,' of course, except that it will have to be dealt with when unpacked. What is one for the daughter will depend upon whether Brad was not lying about her complicity; it is even possible that Brad had talked himself into thinking that she was tempting him. Do not dismiss immediately his word as a lie.

Obviously many more things might be said about this case, but those that have been will give you direction about how to start, what objectives to lay

out and, in general, how to proceed from start to finish. Give careful thought to this case; these are the sorts of problems that you need to think through in some detail beforehand. While you cannot anticipate exactly what shape any given case may take, you can think through basic principles, you can work out some concrete action, and thus prepare yourself for the eventuality when it occurs.