

Christ Tells Us To Keep Our Promises

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[0 : 00] If there's a modern 20th century creed at all, that creed is get it in writing.

No matter who you talk to, that's what they're going to tell you. Don't take a salesman's word for it when he says this is guaranteed. Get it in writing.

You can't believe what he said. In fact, at least this is fairly true in eastern Canada. I haven't noticed it much yet in D.C.

But more and more couples, just before they get married, are deciding they don't really trust the person they're going to marry.

So they get all the details of the way it's going to be, particularly financially, all lined up in a legal, notarized marriage contract.

[1 : 02] They get it in writing. They have some doubts as to how much they can trust the other person. Well, if you look at what goes on around us, then if you look at gospel reading for tonight, you'll find a different picture.

The part of the gospel reading I want you to look at is on page 5 in the New Testament section. I suspect you'll be happy to hear that we're only going to deal with one paragraph of that long reading.

And it's the paragraph that begins with verse 33, the top left column on page 5. And I'd just like to read it to you again, just to ensure you hear it.

Again you have heard it said to the men of old, You shall not swear falsely, but you shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair, white or black, that what you say is simply yes or no.

[2 : 31] Anything more than this comes from evil. The word stealing, not with immigration owes, they're not dealing with owes in a corn.

He's talking about promises made in personal relationships. Promises made in personal business deals.

Jesus points out, and this is particularly right at the very end, that he points out something that stands really behind everything he says there.

And that is that it's really the power of evil in our world, at work in our world, that creates the need for owes, creates the need in our day for getting it in writing.

See, we want to get it in writing, because even though in many other ways we want to deny it, nevertheless in cold reality, particularly when it hits our self-interest, we have to recognize that we live in a world in which there's a great deal of evil.

[3 : 53] We want to get it in writing because of that. The mark of evil in our world is that we presume that everybody lies, unless it can be proven otherwise.

So, we try to, ask for a written guarantee.

When we ask someone to make any sort of, if you like, formal, legal promise, what we're trying to do is force honesty on those people.

Force honesty because you're not going to get it any other way, and that's it. We're going to call God in on it.

We call God in on it. We call God in on it. We call God in on it. We call God in on it. We call God in on it as a witness, as a third party, if you like, to the agreement, who's going to punish whoever breaks the agreement.

[5 : 28] That's the way we offer it. What Jesus is looking for here, what he's advocating, what he's setting before us as God's standard, is that really what we have to learn to live by in our own lives is not solemn sounding oaths, that iron clad written document.

It's rather simple, honest statement. On the door, no witnesses.

On the door, no iron clad language. Just simple statement. Which, of course, goes against the grain, doesn't it?

It's a lot of simple statements. It doesn't hold. And then Jesus is calling us to be like bath. Those simple statements. Now, maybe it was a product of my era.

But certainly little boys, when I was way back then, old little boy also, had this way of really exacting commitment or exacting truth, thought of someone else.

[6 : 56] And that was, you made them say, cross my heart and hope to die. And there were school playgrounds in those days, at any rate, all sorts of playground lawyers, who would, either if they made the oath or if you made the oath, would listen very carefully.

They would feel bound by it if the oath was said correctly. But if it was omitted or you didn't quite get it right, they felt quite free to break whatever the pact that had been made was.

And I would say, they demonstrated, my friends and all, they demonstrated a sort of double standard of honesty.

And that's why I was saying, I'm not fine to kill me. Some of the things that Jesus is alluding to in this paragraph has to do with that sort of thing.

Only they didn't cross my heart and hope to die. They would swear by this or that or the other thing. God or something connected with God, particularly around the temple. If you got it right, you were bound.

[8 : 22] If you didn't get it right, you could slip on it. Double standard. Double standard that had to do with pure form.

The idea of basically what? At least that they operated on. Listen, if God was a witness to that oath, however you'd worded it to get him in there as a witness.

If God was a witness to that oath, then you had honesty. People were really bad. But if you hadn't somehow bound God into that oath in Christ quite the right way, then there were all sorts of ways to get out of it.

All sorts of ways you could break the pact, the contract, the agreement. But when we have those double stands, put on and feel, keeping up, then what we have is the world corrupted by the power of evil.

And what we have is the world corrupted by the power of evil. Where truth is fragile. Where truth is elusive. You're seeing the power of evil at work.

[9 : 43] Well, given that there's this power of evil at work, Jesus says, forget about all the highly stylized forms.

And recognize one basic principle. That principle is that all promises are to be regarded as sacred. Whether that's a hastily made promise to your spouse or your brothers or your sisters or your roommates or casual passerby, or whether it's a far more formal promise, there's no difference. We're both sacred. We're both sacred. Why? Because God is always perfect.

You don't have to build in some elaborate thing to tie God in to force people to be honored. You can't assume that God is missing unless you somehow mention it.

[11 : 05] God is always there. God hears whatever promises we make. Whether it's the hasty ones that maybe we shouldn't have made, or the considered ones that maybe we shouldn't have made, or later regretted.

God is missing. So that promise, made in the sight of God, is absolutely sacred.

Absolutely sacred. It's hard for a lot of people to think.

But basically, our society is boiled by unkept promises. That's how we work.

We meet someone we haven't seen in a long time, or we're saying goodbye to someone we don't expect to see for a while. And we'll make promises that we're not going to keep.

[12 : 18] Promises maybe to someone who's just moved back to town after being away for a long while, that you're going to have them over for dinner. You never do. The number of people that you make the promise to compared to the number of people who keep the promise to.

There's a vast difference. But our society is oiled by that sort of thing. And it's also oiled by bigger promises that are made and broken.

Promises made from furniture stores, from car dealerships, every day. Promises made in the academic world.

Staff to staff. They're the right thing to say. They're never going to be kept.

Build the days into an awesome form, I guess. Yeah?

[13:28] What Jesus is saying is that even those delight, silly little promises are to be kept.

even those silly little promises are safe. Because the silent presence of God in our lives is far more important than all the high-sounding, solemn phrases.

More important than all the nailed-down, of absolutely airtight legal forms we can divide. We can divide. The silent presence of God.

The silent presence of God. The silent presence of God. The never-absent. The calling us to only make promises and really covenant of obedience.

God's your way. May the life while the Father ■■■an Nietzsche That means the world where for goodness is hard to find.

[14:40] The world where we just don't want to trust anything. What God looks for in each of us.

The life of transparency. A life of goodness where no oath is asked.

There's no oath necessary. A life where plain promise, simple statements, have the same authority as anything you can divine.

That's the way to be the way it is because all promises are saved. Now, it's necessary for Jesus to say these things to us.

He's lost every bit of my Jesus to the people of his own day. Because we have this handy habit of dividing life up into airtight compartments.

[16:02] You have compartment A that may be your relationship and your family. Compartment B which may be a job you have.

And compartment C which may be a course you're taking to school. And so on. If you happen to go to school, you even compartmentalize the part of going to school.

Where chemistry will not meet England. Where philosophy will not meet theology.

We compartmentalize. We compartmentalize so much that we assume. Maybe not assume.

Maybe we desperately hope. God can be kept out of certain areas of our lives. God can be just pushed out.

[17:05] Confined to 7.30 every Sunday night. Or 6.45 till 7 o'clock every morning. Whatever.

Life can't be compartmentalized. We can't keep the creator of life. We can't keep the redeemer of life.

We can't keep the sustainer of life. Out of any part of our lives. Life can't be compartmentalized. Yet.

See when Jesus day. That's what those religious lawyers were trying to do. They were trying to compartmentalize things.

So that you didn't have to keep certain promises. It's the way my school jobs were trying to compartmentalize things in a different way. So they didn't have to keep those schoolyard packs.

[18:11] Life can't be compartmentalized. God's always there. God's always involved. He created you. He talked about the Holy Spirit.

God's always with me. He said you can't use it anymore.

He picks up the way you're running outside of sleep. Grounded See you his life. present in us with all the spiritual breath.

And present in us before that as well. God always praying. Always seeking to draw something to Him.

But also always seeking to draw us to the point where we recognize in all people and all situations.

[19:20] Seeking us, directing us that there's no part of anyone's life free of God. Every once in a while there's a scandal somewhere around it.

A scandal maybe on a job situation. Or a scandal in the academic world. Or a scandal within a family or friendship.

A scandal based on the idea that you can do something. You can present something. In a sense, make an implicit promise about something.

You're the only one that knows. Sometimes, when we're making one of those implicit promises that we think well, we're not going to keep it, but we hope no one else will really hold us to it.

Sometimes we get away with it. So we think. Sometimes we don't. Every once in a while in the academic world there's a PhD that some of us can get three calls.

[20 : 47] If they find out that the supposed research done for that degree was, put it mildly, but every once in a while something happens in the business world where a whole deal collapses and someone said something maybe misrepresentation and it caught up with me.

Well, with our lives we can't do that. We can't go on the basis that only I know what it's really like. Only I know the real situation. And as long as I can hide that from everybody else everything's alright. Because if we really do believe that God exists just that basic premise then there's automatically a second person in on everything we do.

Automatically a second person who knows when we have made a false promise. Automatically a second person who knows when we break the promise is solemnly man.

There's no such thing as a word, as a thought, as an action that God doesn't witness. Life is a seamless fabric.

[22 : 32] In that seamless fabric promises are important. The promises we make we judge and the promises we make we don't.

promises we make to each other sometimes seem more important sometimes less important than the promises we make to God.

Sometimes we say only what we promise God is important. Sometimes we'll try and swing the balance the other way. All of these promises are important because we can't compartmentalize life. Because of the seamless nature of life. therefore if life is that non-compartmentalized seamless fabric we are called to do but one thing that is lead lives of unquestioned honesty.

Lead lives of simple truthfulness that honor God. but also well and truly represent the nature of God in our healing for others.

[23 : 54] Amen. Thank you. Amen. Thank you.