

“A Man of His Word”

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In the Old Testament are laws saying that if you make a promise, you'd better keep it. They tell us that it's better not

to say something than to say it and not do it. In fact, breaking your word is actually breaking the Ninth Commandment, which forbids bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16). When you give your word, failing to follow through makes you a liar.

Our culture today seems so often to be a parade of Pinocchios. Fairly recently Michael Cohen appeared in Congress to say that the president is a con man who encouraged him to lie to Congress. The president called Cohen a liar. An Arizona congressman, Paul Gosar, came to the Cohen hearing with a poster that said, “liar, liar, pants on fire.” Cohen said absurdly, “I have lied but I am not a liar.”

Let's face it. Lying is rampant in our culture and the greater secular world. Sadly, but seemingly inevitably, the greater church has not only acquiesced to this character slide, but seems on some level to have whole heartedly surrendered to the practice. Never mind that lying actually appears on the ‘short list’ of the seven things that God hates! (Prov 6:16-19)

I'll do it,” you say. Then the time comes to do it. What happens? Do you keep your word? When you say you will do something, do people know it's as good as done? Are you a man or woman of your word?

Society today simply does not value the keeping of one's word. And we tend to rationalize it: *Things happen—no big deal*. Most of us thus fail to recognize just what a serious *character issue* ...not to mention a *sin issue*, that breaking our word is.

What does God think? Well, **He** keeps His word (Numbers 23:19). When He says He will do something, He does it. When He gives a promise, He keeps it. We can count on Him ...in fact we DO count on Him, to fulfill His every word—every time. Not one jot or tittle of God's Word will pass away before *all of it* is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18). Jesus is so identified with the keeping of His word, that He literally is known as the living Word. Indeed, such speaks of the written scriptures, and yet is not the scriptures an aggregate of history, character description, assurances and directives that God says you can “take to the bank?” Would any of us argue that our God is “God of His word?” If we are repeatedly told to be as He is, can we say the same? Are we “Men and women of our word?”

Numbers 23:19 tells us that “*God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?*”

Ephesians 5:1 “*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.*”



Jesus Christ said that *“every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36). The word “idle” there means “empty and lazy.” When you say, *I will do it*, you are signing your name to the contract and committing your reputation and your character, and your witness as a Christian. Only a few decades ago, many if not most significant business transactions were sealed with a man’s word and his handshake. No forms. No lawyers. No contracts. The man *saying it was the contract*. But modern society has gotten further and further from lives of honesty, uprightness, integrity, truth and trustworthiness. Now, agreements must be bound by carefully worded, signed, notarized contracts because people can’t be trusted to *keep their word!* If everyone struggled and fought to keep his word, no matter the obstacles, we wouldn’t *need* contracts and lawyers!

There is a word that is rarely used in our modern culture today. It’s “inviolable.” (in-vahy-uh-luh-buhl) It means *“secure from destruction, violence, infringement, or desecration: incapable of being violated; incorruptible; unassailable. It also encompasses the words “sacrosanct, holy, sacred, durable, invincible, stable, unbreakable.”*

Inviolable.

In the oath to become English monarch, King George and Queen Elizabeth appeared before the archbishop and hundreds of British hierarchy and made a very serious and solemn vow. *“Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England? And will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them?”* Of which they attested *“I will.”*

That promise was a serious statement. One that held extreme sanctity. And that was for *country*. Yet we are operating on what is clearly a much higher level than even that. For we, as residents of the Kingdom of God, are dealing with and for God Himself!

Recently in our study of New Testament Acts we learned that this issue was not lost on the pages of the Old Testament. We read of how lying can literally bring the judgment of God. Acts 5:3 records Peter questioning two believers in the early church who had lied about an offering they made: *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?”* Both Ananias and his wife died that day due to their lie.

Colossians tells us that lying is part of the “old self.” The self that was to die at the dawning of our new life. Paul wrote, *“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices”* (Colossians 3:9). Ephesians 4:25 tells us that speaking truth shows love to others, while lying does not. *“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”*

“A man is already of consequence in the world when it is known that we can implicitly rely upon him,” Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton said. *“I have frequently seen in life a person preferred to a long list of applicants for some important charge, which lifts him at once into station and fortune, merely because he has this reputation—that when he says he knows a thing, he knows it, and when he says he will do a thing, he will do it.”*

Heman the Ezrahite...the grandson of Samuel the prophet, wrote in Psalm 89:34 *"I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips."*

Moses, in Numbers 32:23, was warning a couple of the tribes of Israel that they had promised to go into the land and fight, and everyone was depending on them to be true to their word. *"...if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out."* Clearly Moses was giving no wiggle room concerning the people's promise that was made to Him, to their brethren, and to God.

King Solomon warned us in the Book of Ecclesiastes *"Don't trap yourself by making a rash promise to God and only later counting the cost."* (Prov 20:25)

Christian, our words are very powerful. As Christians, if we make promises to someone or to God we are to keep those promises. Scripture tells us that it would have been better for you not to make the promise in the first place, than to break it.

God always keeps His word and He expects us to do the same. God will not be mocked. Nobody likes it when someone else doesn't live up to their word. Certainly we are imperfect people. But we are to be people that are *seeking to* and *growing toward* an emulation of God who does not lie. God is forgiving and patiently gracious. But such grace is not a wink at our sin. If you made a promise to someone or to God and you broke it then repent and learn from your mistake.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 says *"If you make a promise to God, keep your promise. Don't be slow to do what you promised. God is not happy with fools. Give God what you promised to give him. It is better to promise nothing than to promise something and not be able to do it. So don't let your words cause you to sin. Don't say to the priest, 'I didn't mean what I said.' If you do this, God might become angry with your words and destroy everything you have worked for. You should not let your useless dreams and bragging bring you trouble. You should respect God."*

Ezekiel 17:15-21 *"However, this king revolted against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt so they might give him horses and a large army. Will he flourish? Will the one who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still escape? 'As I live'—this is the declaration of the Lord God—'he will die in Babylon, in the land of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke. Pharaoh will not help him with his great army and vast horde in battle, when ramps are built and siege walls constructed to destroy many lives. He despised the oath by breaking the covenant. He did all these things even though he gave his hand in pledge. He will not escape!' Therefore, this is what the Lord God says: 'As I live, I will bring down on his head My oath that he despised and My covenant that he broke. I will spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon and execute judgment on him there for the treachery he committed against Me. All the fugitives among his troops will fall by the sword, and those who survive will be scattered to every direction of the wind. Then you will know that I, Yahweh, have spoken.'"*

When we speak of our promises...of breaking vows, we need to firstly understand how serious it is to make one in the first place. It should NEVER be undertaken without careful consideration, and in many cases a lot of prayer. Jesus Himself warned us about making such promises and vows. Yet we also know that many important people in the Bible did make promises, or "vows." And we know also that God responded positively to many of them: **Hannah**, (1 Sam 1: God gave her a son), **Jacob** (2 vows)(Gen 28:20-22, Gen 31:13, Gen 31:48-54), **David** (Ps 22:25, Ps 56:12, Ps 61:5, Ps 65:1), **Paul** (Acts 18:18, Acts 21:24, Gal 1:20, 2 Cor 1:23), and even **Jesus** (Mt 26:63-64). **God Himself initiated some vows** (i.e. Num 6: a Nazarite vow (See: Q: #193) and a vow to test the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of a wife: Num

5:19-22), **and He always kept them** (Ps 89:34, Jer 33:19-22, Num 23:19). He made covenant vows with such people as: Noah (Gen 9:1-17), Abraham (Gen 15:18-21), David (2 Sam 7:12-16)(Ps 89:3-4), as well as others. If He did not keep His vows, we would have to consider Him a liar, right? But we know God cannot lie (Heb 6:18)(Titus 1:2)(Num 23:19), and therefore we can **TOTALLY** trust Him to do what He has said He will do. How could we have any confidence in the Bible, God's Word and those promises, if God isn't completely trustworthy?

Yet how many Christian brothers and sisters (and even non-Christians) have made a vow to God and not kept it? Do you know that roughly half of all marriages (including Christian ones) end in divorce? I'm not saying that there is not a reason to divorce...that is not what I am saying and not my point. Many marriages end in divorce for the same reasons we break our vows and promises in other matters. We are angry, or bored, or desire something new...often something that Satan is offering up to us.

How many Christians have made promises at salvation, baptism, covenant membership, or some other church relational aspect and then broken them? How many of us have made a vow to God in a time of trouble and then failed to follow through on it? "God, if you will just get me out of this, I will _____." How many casually throw out the words "I swear" to add emphasis to a point that they are trying to make (even when it may not be true)? Do these cover a majority of Christians?

OK you say...So what if someone has made a promise...a vow, and decides to break it? Can he/she be forgiven? First off, I would say that the Bible says that there is **NO** sin that is unforgivable (except for Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit). Therefore, obviously, breaking a promise, a vow, even to God, **CAN** be forgiven. But we must come before Him with true repentance, confessing our sin and God will be "*faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 Jn 1:9).

In our culture today, the phrase "I'm sorry" has become our first response when we sin against each other. The term has nearly wholly replaced biblical forgiveness. Though it may be a good start in relational reconciliation, it can never get the job done when sin is in play. The Bible actually has a lot to say about efforts toward making restoration if I have sinned against another. We have to "repent"...which means to change direction...to actually change what we were doing.

And further, I **MUST** add here though that while the Bible does say God will forgive our sins if we confess **and repent**, it does **NOT** mean that there couldn't be consequences as a result of breaking a vow. For example, in the Bible, David committed adultery with Bathsheba and she became pregnant as a result. He then added to his sin by having her husband killed to cover up what he had done. When confronted with his sin, he was truly repentant and sorry and asked for forgiveness. God forgave David (2 Sam 12:13), but also said, as a result of his sin, his child with Bathsheba would die (2 Sam 12:14) and "the sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Sam 12:10). David had Bathsheba's husband killed by violence, and in turn, 3 of his sons were later killed in the same way Amnon (2 Sam 13:28-29), Absalom (2 Sam 18:14-15), and Adonijah (1 Kin 2:24-25).

So how can you become a person of your word? 1) *Be careful what you promise*. If you're not sure you can deliver, don't commit (James 4:13-14). 2) *When you can't do it, admit it*. Learn to say no. 3) *Once you've said it, do it*. Do whatever you must to remember and then fulfill what you said, without excuse or hesitation. 4) *If you blow it, admit it*. Don't lie or make up an excuse. When you make a mistake, apologize and do what you can to fix it.

Too many times in our culture, our promise is like saying "unless something better comes along." The command of the Lord says we should not break our word, period. We may very well change our mind about something, but we still do not break our word. God actually expects us to fulfill our obligations.

Whether it is vocation, church, marriage, home life, financial obligations, or whatever, we should live up to our word. In most circles today, the breaking of a promise is just standard business practice—but before God, it is simply sin.