

Be Different (Part IV) – Be Honest

1/31/2010

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. In this study we consider relationships with business associates or colleagues. These are people with whom we may have a long-term relationship (co-worker, roommate, vendor), but with whom we do not share any family bonds. How is that similar to and how is that different from a relationship with your spouse, your child, or some other blood relative?

With relatives, you have a special bond that naturally ties us together. That doesn’t mean that everything works smoothly, but it means we know we need to invest in the relationship because it is likely to endure for a long time.

With business relationships, there are fewer shared connections and it is easier to walk away if problem arise. As a result, it is more difficult to build a strong mutual trust that goes deeper than a superficial, formal relationship.

2. Read Psalm 15 and see how it describes the characteristics of a good relationship with other people.

Descriptive words used include: righteousness, integrity, truth, no slander, no reproach, honor, does not take a bribe. Those who display these characteristics are worthy of dwelling with God.

3. Turn now to Matt. 5:33-37 and see how Jesus describes the basis for relationships with others outside our family.

Our relationships should be built on mutual trust, where our credibility is strong enough that there is no need for an extra oath or anything else to back up our promises.

4. Read Ephesians 4:20- 25 to see how we accomplish that.

We are to be like God, speaking the truth at all times because that will make our relationships with each other of the quality that God would desire.

5. Given how clearly and simply truthful relationships are explained in these and other Bible passages, why is honesty so rare?

Honesty does not seem to come naturally for most of us. We try to control a situation by giving it a spin using words that paint the picture we would like the other to see, which may not be the truth.

Pastor Steve gave lots of examples of this: teachers who give their students the answers to standardized tests so they perform better, employees who steal from their companies, and taxpayers who file false income tax returns. In all cases we are trying to get something we want for ourselves using falsehoods.

6. The religious leaders said that believers should not over promise when making agreements and then do what you promised. Jesus gave a different instruction; he said:

Don't swear at all. God is in and behind everything in every agreement, handshake, or invoice. Thus, there is no need to invoke the name of God or anything related to God, because He is already involved.

7. Most Christians would agree that there should be a difference in business conduct with a Christian that with a non-Christian. Describe those differences.

- a) You would expect that you are dealing with someone who will be truthful, who honors their word and keeps their promises. They would be expected to fulfill their agreement and meet any deadlines. When you promise somebody something, you owe them because they loaned your credibility when they entered into the agreement.
- b) There is a kind of integrity that is better than truthfulness. It is called transparency (being sincere). Being truthful may require lots of words to cover all the contingencies. Being transparent requires few words, because there is a lifetime of actions that back up your word. We are poor windows into the Kingdom of God if we aren't transparent.

8. So how do we get there? What are the three steps that Pastor Steve described that will lead to becoming an honest, trusted person?

- a) We need to be more honest with ourselves about our dishonesty. We need to reflect on our own tendencies to pad the truth and spin the situation to make us look better. We need to remember that Jesus had to come to die on the cross because of our sinful nature.
- b) Let other people into our discussions about honesty. If others are involved as we assess possible plagiarism, tax write-offs, or illegal music downloads, we are less likely to do the wrong thing. It will be more difficult to rationalize wrong behavior unless we carefully select people who will tell us what we want to hear.

- c) Pay it back in the form of restitution if we do discover that we made a mistake. This is a powerful witness to those around us, while breaking Satan's hold on us. Repayment represents a commitment to do the right thing. It hurts, so it forces us to reflect on what we did wrong.

9. Why is all of this of any importance? Where is the payoff?

If we are to be the salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16), then we must be the window through which the world sees the Kingdom of God. People are watching us, because we claim to have a special relationship with God. If that makes no observable difference, then there is no motivation for them to seek the same relationship.

If we believe God is involved in every transaction and agreement, then there is no need to invoke the name of God. He's already a part of everything we do. If we are always honest and transparent, there is no need to draw up an oath that suggests for a change we are going to be honest and forthright. We should have a reputation for telling the truth at all times. In that way we are an example of God to those who watch us. There is no stronger witness than living life the way God wants us to live.