

Does Your Walk Match Your Talk?

Ever wonder why some people don't want to do business with Christians? It's because they have become gun-shy: Either they themselves have been victimized by a deal gone sour or they have heard about shaky deals that have affected others. Christians have earned a reputation in the world for being undependable and lacking in character.

We have all heard horror stories of people who hired a Christian contractor to do repairs or remodeling in their homes and who were left in the lurch when the contractor disappeared, down payment in hand, without completing the work. And what about the tales of Christians who break their promises, don't pay their bills and cheat on their taxes? Some believers have become so disillusioned while doing business with Christians that they left their churches or worse still, their faith.

Thankfully, I've never reached that point. But I have been tempted to become embittered when other Christians I was in relationship with failed to "walk their talk." One situation I remember concerned a pastor who approached me to build a church in an African nation. His congregation desired to sow into a foreign mission field, and he asked me to help facilitate their vision.

The pastor agreed to supply funding for the materials, the labor costs and the land if I would use my extensive experience in the nation to make sure his church's donation was used appropriately. He instructed me to go ahead with the project, assuring me that he would be able to raise the funds for the written budget I had sent him.

I was excited because I had worked closely with the African

congregation they chose to support and was aware that they had outgrown the wood and iron shanty in which they were meeting. This rapidly growing congregation had already gone from just 25 to more than 250 members, and I knew it wouldn't be long before the almost 1,000 seats in the new building would be filled.

The first agreed-upon payment from the pastor arrived, and he and I were in regular contact about the progress. My calls were returned promptly, and all was going well.

Then I discovered that the second payment he claimed had been transferred into my account was never deposited. Suddenly, all communication ceased. Through a friend I was told that the pastor was too busy to take my calls, though he oversees a church of only 60 people. The real problem was that he was struggling to raise the money, but rather than being honest and dealing with the issue, he simply avoided it.

Under other circumstances, I would have done what I could to bail him out of trouble, but at that point I had taken financial responsibility for numerous other programs that were already under way. This project was his vision, his idea, and he had initiated it. He had approached me to assist him, but instead of accepting full responsibility he tried to put it all on me.

When I finally reached him by phone, he simply abandoned the project and chose to ignore the outstanding balance owed in Africa. He just walked away, knowing that as a Christian I would continue what he had started and that I could do nothing to hold him accountable. There was no apology, no remorse and no attempt to work through the issue; he just moved on.

This man's lack of character cost me about \$20,000. But worse than the financial loss was the struggle not to become bitter. I eventually came away from the experience better, not bitter—but also much more cautious about engaging in business

transactions with Christians!

This is a sad commentary on the condition of our souls. As Christ's representatives on Earth, we must begin to live what we learn in His Word. All the gifts and anointing in the world won't make up for a lack of character.

What is character? It is perhaps best described as the sum of moral qualities associated with a person, and suggests ethical strength and excellence. Character is about doing what is right, regardless of what is convenient or popular. It comprises the core principles and values of who you really are, both inwardly and outwardly, in your behavior and relationships.

Qualities such as faithfulness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, loyalty, honor, dependability and even good old-fashioned manners are basic to good character. But because so few Christians exhibit these traits, there is a huge credibility gap between society and the church today. Many unbelievers consider us a bunch of hypocrites, and the sad truth is that in many instances, they are right!

We want to win the lost for the Lord, but they won't listen to us because they see the glaring inconsistency between our message and our lifestyle. Some Christians don't get along even with other believers.

The time for change has come. Our walk must begin to match our talk