

## **You Can Count on Me**

*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man? (Proverbs 20:6)*

Grandpa used to say that when there is a difference between what a man says and what he does, he had learned to go with what the man does. Sadly, a gap (sometimes a sizeable one) between commitments made and commitments kept is all too frequent. "You can count on me..."

**You can count on me to love, honor, and cherish.** That is what we vow when we marry. That is what God requires (Ephesians 5:22-23), "until death do us part." The husband commits to a lifetime of self-sacrificing love, care, and provision for his family. The wife commits to a lifetime of love, respect, and submission to her husband. But alas, even among some Christians, "You can count on me" proves an idle boast. Self-centeredness, anger, dishonesty, laziness, and lust come to be the reliable traits. The importance of getting to know a prospective mate well, learning all you can about his/her spirituality and character, cannot be overemphasized.

**You can count on me to do the job.** That is what we say to the company that hires us. We are committing to consistent, quality work, "not with eye service... but with sincerity... heartily, as for the Lord" (Colossians 3:22-24). Yet today's employers say reliable workers are "scarce as hen's teeth." One man told me he often hires a crew of ten, hoping six or seven will show up. This is what we say to those who ask us when we agree to contact a visitor, teach a class, or so some work at the building. They are depending on us. Are we trustworthy?

**You can count on me to pay the bill.** That is what we say every time we make an extended purchase, whether signing a lease, ordering utilities, taking out a loan, or using a credit card. That creditor expects you to keep your word. So does God (Matthew 5:37; Romans 13:8). If you do not have the means to pay, you have no business making the commitment. Bankruptcies and defaults in our society are at an all time high. Do not be deceived into viewing that as anything except what it is -- a shortage of trustworthy people.

**You can count on me to keep the appointment.** That is what we say when we agree to meet another at a given place and time. Not to show up is a personal affront. Tardiness is inexcusable. It is an irksome habit, born of inconsideration and is easily preventable. Some of us are continuously late for the services of the Lord even though they have always been held at the same time. This is not only inconsiderate and disruptive to those who have arrived on time, it is inconsiderate to the Lord.

**You can count on me to live as befits a disciple of Christ.** Isn't that what we say to the Lord when we are baptized into Him, when we are appealing for the forgiveness only He can provide (1 Peter 3:21)? Doing the Father's will is what He requires, not empty claims of devotion (Matthew 7:21-23). That is the standard by which we will be judged. Conduct yourselves in a manner worth of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27). Be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10).

**- by Frank Himmel**

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## **Before We Criticize...**

There are times when mistakes are made and things need to be pointed out. And, unfortunately, we all know that offering criticism can sometimes make a bad situation even worse. Serious thought needs to go into what we will say. Maybe it would help if we would ask the following questions before offering criticism:

### **1. Why am I doing this?**

Do I really want to help this person, or am I just doing this to make myself feel better? Am I trying to improve the situation, or do I just want to say, "I told you so!"? What is my motive? "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Regardless of what the world believes, we don't have the right to let off some steam at the expense of another. Criticism that is only going to make us feel better needs to be kept to ourselves.

### **2. Do I have a right to criticize?**

Was I available when this person could have used some help before? Can I sympathize with what they are going through? Can I offer some positive suggestions to go along with the criticism? Some people like to just sit on the sidelines and criticize the labors of others. Such people really have no right to criticize.

### **3. Have I examined myself?**

It is not right for me to give criticism that I am not willing to take. Jesus says that I must make sure that the log is out of my eye first, then I can offer to help my brother get the speck out of his eye (Matt. 7:3-5). Criticism is respected when it comes from a respectable person, but no one appreciates a hypocrite.

### **4. What will I say, and how will I say it?**

This is very important. I must choose my words very carefully. They have the power to build up or to destroy (Proverbs 12:18, 16:24). As Paul said, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). What we say, and the way we say it, will make all the difference in the world.

### **5. Will it glorify God?**

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Whose glory am I seeking? Am I saying something to help the cause of Christ or just to be heard? If it is just to be seen and heard by men, then truly I have my reward (Matt. 6:1-6).

*- by Heath Rogers*

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## ***Fault Finding***

Did you ever notice how easy it is for us to see faults in others and at the same time excuse the identical errors in our own lives? For instance, if someone else takes a long time to complete a job, I say he is 'slow.' If I take a long time, I see myself as being 'thorough.' If some other person does not do something, I think he is 'lazy.' If I don't do it, it's because I'm 'too busy.' If another does not extend a courtesy, I conclude that he is 'thoughtless' and 'rude.' If I omit the same deed, it is because it was not brought to my attention.

Too often we become professional critics. We can see and point out the slightest flaws in the performance of others while carefully guarding and excusing our own shortcomings. Jesus warned about such hyper-critical judgments in Matthew 7:1-5, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. "

It is important to note that Jesus did not encourage us to ignore the problems that exist in the lives of others. In fact, in John 7:24 he commanded us to "judge righteous judgment". But the obvious point is that we need to correct our own errors before we can be in a position to help others.

Perhaps my brother truly is slow, lazy, or thoughtless. When I'm certain that I have control of these same problems in my own life, then I can help him "in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1). Think!

*- by Greg Gwin*