

Keeping a Business Vow

by Crown Financial Ministries

The reason many Christians are unable to claim God's promises is because they are unwilling to meet His prerequisites.

First John 3:21-22 explains that God will answer our prayers when we do the things that are pleasing in His sight and keep His commandments.

Few scriptural principles are clearer than that of keeping our vows—literally keeping our word both to God and to others. “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5:5).

What is a vow?

A vow can be defined as “an earnest promise or pledge that binds one to perform in a certain manner.”

The term appears many places in the Bible to refer to a promise or a pledge, and the emphasis is that such promises are binding. “You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised” (Deuteronomy 23:23).

That means that when we give our word to do something, we are obligated to do it!

It is clear from the Scripture above that a vow (promise) of any kind is not to be taken lightly. Once someone has given his or her word, it becomes a binding contract.

God's Word also says that everyone will be accountable for his or her words and actions on the Day of Judgment. “I tell you that every careless word [broken promise] that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

So, before agreeing to any terms, it is assumed that those making promises have carefully considered all consequences associated with that commitment.

Vows in our current society

Unfortunately, to this current generation—a society built on the expectation that few people will keep their word—many times a vow is deemed something made under one set of circumstances and broken under another; we keep the vows that are to our advantage and break those that are not.

For example, a vow to pay a creditor is ignored when the purchased product loses its usefulness.

Another example is found when a couple gets married: they exchange vows (or promises) with each other. Today the common attitude is, “If it doesn’t work out, I can always get a divorce,” which, according to statistics, happens in one out of every two new marriages.

The original conditions under which the promises were made may change and one partner may begin to think he or she got a bum deal. The more prevalent this attitude becomes, the more difficult it is to honor the vows.

What our society needs is a good dose of ethics from God’s Word—the kind of ethics that requires us to keep our word no matter what the costs. Situational ethics have so shaped our society that even God’s people have lost the concept of absolutes when it comes to keeping their word.

Vows in past years

In the past, when vows were a commitment of a person’s honor, a handshake could involve millions of dollars. Honorable people would never default, even if the deal cost them material wealth, because their reputations were far more important.

Nolan Ryan, the Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher who holds 53 major league baseball-pitching records, displayed a prime example of honoring a vow—in this case a contract. After pitching his record seventh no-hitter on May 1, 1991, Ryan was asked by a national sports news celebrity how much money he would now ask for in a renegotiated contract, seeing that he likely could ask for any amount that he wanted and receive it.

Without hesitation, Ryan responded that he had made a commitment and had signed a contract to play for a certain amount. So, since he had given his word, he would honor that contract no matter how many records he set or broke.

Vows and Christian businesspersons

The testimony and trustworthiness of business owners who are Christians are directly related to their honesty.

When Christian owners give their word and then go back on it, they have made their “yes” “no” and their “no” “yes,” which in turn erodes the public’s trust in the business. “He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him” (Proverbs 14:2).

Honesty goes beyond not telling an outright lie; it also includes being reliable to fulfill promises made. God’s Word calls that “loyalty.”

Loyalty on a Christian business owner’s part is not so much to the public or to customers as it is to God and His Word. “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?” (Proverbs 20:6). If loyalty to God is sustained, loyalty to customers will be natural.

When Christian businesspeople back down on vows that have been made in good faith, it is usually because of greed. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24).

Unfortunately, when these businesspeople dishonor God by dishonoring agreements (vows or promises) in order to gain better deals, they become the real losers, because the money gained will never replace what’s been lost—integrity.

God’s vows

In today’s society, many Christians—those who say that they are striving to be more Christ-like—believe it’s their right to strike better deals if circumstances change. It is inconceivable to think that our Lord would have made an agreement with someone and then changed His mind and tried to negotiate a better deal.

As Christians, we can be truly thankful that God’s contracts with us are binding and firm and that He is loyal to His promises. Otherwise, He might give us what we deserve.

Consequences of keeping vows

There is little doubt that totally honest Christian businesspeople will experience some losses and will be misused by others, at least in the short run.

However, God will compensate any losses in many ways for those who keep their vows, not the least of which is supernatural peace.

“The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives” (Psalm 37:21) The validity of vows made must be determined by individual relationships with God.

If Christian business owners say they trust God, they must be willing to defend that declaration by honoring their vows—regardless! This includes businesses making whatever sacrifices necessary to repay creditors, regardless of circumstances or how long it takes.

Conclusion

Knowing that a commitment is a vow, Christians should make it a practice not to commit to anything without praying about it first and considering all the problems that could arise. Since as Christians we are bound by the words of our mouths, we need to be careful about what we promise, and we must keep our word.

If Christian businesspeople aren’t willing to perform what they vow, they shouldn’t make promises.

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