

Let your “yes” be yes

We have heard statements like these many times. “I swear to God, if you don’t straighten up, I will clobber you!” Or, this one, “I didn’t do it! I swear on a stack of Bibles!” We all can get creative at times in assuring people about our intentions. Jesus taught His disciples to let their speech be simple and honest, so that they had no need to add-onto their words to get people to believe them. Becoming the kind of people who just routinely speak modestly and frankly is what God is after. In fact, Jesus said that “jazzing up” our speech in order to convince is from the devil!

In Jesus’ day, religious men had a way of making promises (swearing) based on certain holy things, so as to make sure they would be believed. People would swear by Jerusalem, for example. Or they would swear by heaven. But what they would not do was swear by God, because then they would be completely bound by their oath. So they practiced a curious combination of wanting to be taken seriously, but at the same time giving themselves some “wobble room” to get out of an obligation, if they felt they really needed to get out of it. Jesus upended that entire practice by simply saying, “I say to you, do not swear at all... but let your speech be ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no.’ Anything more than that is from the evil one.” (Mt 5:37)

Why do we “swear” if it is not to get our way? Do we not hype-up our conversation to convince others that now, we really, really, really do mean it, so they should believe us and do what we want them to do? Whether what we are after is to get others to elect us as President? Or to buy our new miracle cleaning solution? Or to no longer be mad at us?

Life in the kingdom of God is such that we can simply ask for things and leave the results to God.

Manipulation can fall away from a disciple of Jesus like old leaves fall from a tree. We have come to believe that God is our source of supply. If others don’t give us what we want, God will—



*Scott
Hilborn*

*Guest
Columnist*

or, He will give us the grace to do without. Trusting God, we can then let go of the sales pitch. Even if that sales pitch is to get someone to give his life to Jesus! Consider how Jesus spoke with people. He invited, then let those He invited make up their own mind.

There is something apparently very precious from God’s point of view about the sovereign freedom of the human mind. He refuses to force us or seduce us. Certainly, He makes His ways become attractive to our mind, in what the Methodists call “prevenient grace.” He does, after all, want our company. But in the same way in which we would never truly be satisfied with someone’s love if it was forced (love potions included!), so too God’s heart derives pleasure from our freely given love.

There is nothing wrong with simple statements announcing rewards or consequences. Every parent, every teacher, and every coach knows full well how important it is to be clear with young people about the good things they will receive upon obedience, and the consequences of disobedience. God does the same. But still, He leaves the choice of obedience to us.

The Holy Spirit will gradually soften our hearts so that we too become the kind of people who are winsome, but not threatening or seductive. We appeal to others in the power of truth and of the Holy Spirit and we leave the results up to God. We find that we no longer have to convince people of our truthfulness. Instead, we develop a track record of just being a really honest person in all the

little things of our life. Jesus said that anyone who is trustworthy with little will be trustworthy in much. (Lk 16:10) Others will come to believe that about us as well.

Becoming a person of our word is everything. Do people wonder if you are telling the truth? When you say you will do something, do they wince inside, secretly wondering if they really can count on you? We become known by what we do, not by what we say. One misstep can wreak havoc in a relationship that has been built on trust. Yet, no one is perfect, save Jesus. All of us must practice giving and receiving forgiveness for our failures and those of others. There is now, though, surrounding our bodies, a broad, shining life of integrity in the kingdom of God. Divine power is poised to help us to “say what we mean and mean what we say.” Having given up all our rights to Jesus, especially our time (!), we begin keeping our word even when it hurts. By faith, by grace, and through suffering, we become the kind of person others count on and frankly, that God also counts on.

Which is also why we can count on God. Our God is a God who never lies. “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind.” (1 Sa 15:29) When the Bible gives us promises from God, we can believe them and take them to heart. Our God does not lie. He is trustworthy. He does what He says. His “yes” means yes—His “no” means no. The safest and most sane place we can be is to abide in His presence, trusting and obeying Him.

*Scott Hilborn is the pastor of the
Banks Presbyterian Church in Marvin.*