

mistake like this is made in his favor, it's obvious that nothing but a lack of opportunity prevents him from taking any advantage whatever.

6. Cheating the government is in the same class. Some seem to think there's no dishonesty in cheating the government out of a little money. People commonly don't declare taxable income and overstate deductions, all directly contrary to law, defrauding the government. The man that will do that is not honest. What *wouldn't* he do if he had the same chance of getting away in other frauds?

7. Smuggling is another common form of dishonesty. How many people will smuggle little articles in their suitcases when they come home from other countries, knowing they ought to pay duty? They don't think much of it because the amount is so small—but the smaller the amount, the more clearly the principle is developed. *Because* the temptation is so small, it shows how weak the person's principle of honesty is, that it can be overcome by such a little thing. The one that would do this, if he had the same opportunity, would smuggle a truckload. If for so little he would lose sight of his integrity and do something dishonest, he isn't too good to rob the treasury.

8. Wasting time on the job cheats an employer. Suppose you're working for someone, and you don't mind being idle at times when your employer is gone. Or you slow down when your employer isn't watching. Or you're negligent in your work when it won't be noticed. The one who will do this is totally dishonest, and can not be trusted in anything, and would very likely take money from his employer's cash register if it weren't for fear of detection or some other equally selfish motive. Such a person shouldn't be trusted at all.

CONCLUSION

1. The real state of a person's heart is often seen more clearly in smaller things than in greater things.

People often deceive themselves and think that being honest in big things will prove their honesty of heart, although they act dishonestly in smaller things. So they're on their guard in the bigger things, while they're careless in little things—and so act out their true character.

They overlook the fact that all their honesty in larger things comes from a wrong desire to *appear* honest, and not from a determination to *be* honest. They overlook their own petty frauds and guard their more public actions, and then take it for granted that they *are* honest, while they're nothing but rotten at heart. The one who'll take advantage in little things where he isn't watched is *not* motivated by principle. If you want to know your *real* character, watch your heart, and see how your principles guide you in little things.

2. The person who will indulge in any one sin doesn't abstain from any sin because it is sin. If he hated sin and was opposed to it because it hurt the God he loves, he would no more indulge in one sin than another. If a person picks and chooses among sins, avoiding some and practicing others, it's certain that it's not because he respects the authority of God, or hates sin, that he abstains from any sin whatever.

3. The person who would sell liquor [or drugs] to his neighbor for profit, therefore helping to ruin him soul and body, would sell his neighbor into *slavery* for money, if he could.

And if such a person doesn't rob and murder his neighbor for money, it certainly wouldn't be because his love for God or man restrained him.

5. The person who will enslave his fellow men for his own selfish interests, would enslave others, any or all, if he had the same opportunity. If he will empty someone else's life of all that is desirable just to gratify his own pride or desires, he does not love either God or man.

If a person will take away the rights of one, he would take away the rights of *all* people, if he could do it without punishment. The individual who will deprive a black man of his freedom would not hesitate to enslave a white man if circumstances were equally favorable.

[*Editor's note:* In light of today's injustice of abortion, we are sure Finney would also have added that the individual who will deprive the unborn of his freedom would



not hesitate to deprive those already born, if circumstances were equally favorable.]

6. The person that won't practice self-denial in little things to serve God, wouldn't endure persecution to serve God. Those who won't deny their fleeting desires for the Gospel, wouldn't endure the whip and the stake for the Gospel.

You may say these are little things, but because they're little, they show the character so clearly. It is *so* important for you to keep a watch over these things, to see what you are and to know your character as it appears in the sight of God.

Oh, how much would be gained if Christians would demonstrate entire purity and honesty on *all* occasions and to *all* people, to be an example of Jesus Christ to the ungodly! It's too often that non-Christians see consistent small violations of "Christians." They look with amazement at such things in people who claim to know God. The unsaved have cause enough to see that such people don't have any principle of honesty, and that the religion they have is good for nothing and not worth having.

It's important for you to cultivate the strictest integrity, the kind that will carry itself out in the little things as well as in the large. There is something beautiful about seeing someone act with the same careful and conscientious heart in the little things of life as in the greater things that are more easily seen by others.

"Purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord."
—Isaiah 52:11

Paraphrased and updated by Martin Bennett.

Get Four Gift Issues!

"Dishonesty In Little Things" was reprinted from an article in *The Last Days Magazine*, a colorfully illustrated publication filled with challenging articles, ministry opportunities, and more! If you would like to receive a gift of four issues, send your request to: Last Days Ministries, Box 40, Lindale, TX 75771-0040.

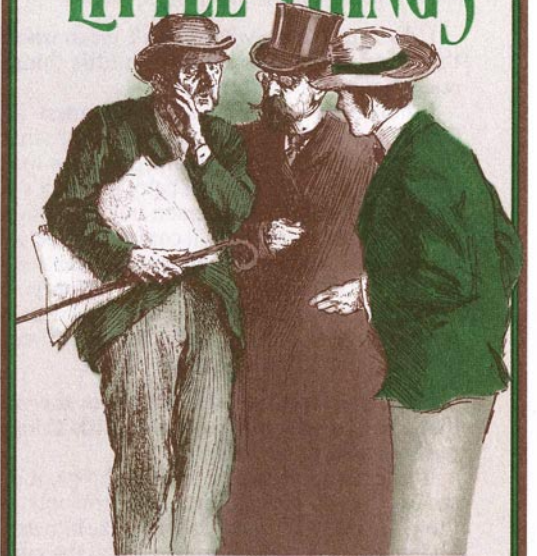
For additional copies of this article order LD#76. For a listing of all our tracts, audio and video teachings, pro-life materials, and the music of Keith Green and Bob Ayala — all at whatever you can afford — request our *free* Ministry Materials Catalogue.

Are You Searching?

If you want to know more about what it means to be a Christian, we have some information we'd like to send you. There is no charge or obligation and we won't give your address to anyone else. Just write to Last Days Ministries and ask for the free packet, "Walking With Jesus."

Pretty Good Printing 11-90
©1985 Last Days Ministries, All Rights Reserved

DISHONESTY IN LITTLE THINGS



by Charles G. Finney

Although Charles Finney addressed this subject in the 1830s, the truth continues to shine forth in all its brightness. Please notice the parallels of slavery in Finney's day to abortion in ours. This article was originally published in "Lectures to Professing Christians."

"He who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much."

—Luke 16:10b

These words are a part of the parable of the unrighteous steward. The **principle** laid down by Jesus in the verse above is this:
A person who is dishonest in little things isn't really honest in anything.

I will explain this in the following order:

I. I will show what I *don't* mean by this principle.

II. I will show what I *do* mean by it.

III. Prove the principle, that anyone who is dishonest in little things isn't really honest at all.

IV. Show why some people appear to be honest, and even religious, in bigger things, while they're dishonest in little things.

V. Mention several examples where people often show a lack of principle in little things.

I. Let me explain what I *don't* mean when I say that a person who is dishonest in little things isn't really honest in anything.

I don't mean if someone is dishonest in little things and will take small advantages of others, it's certain he won't deal openly and truthfully in greater things. Or if he will commit petty thefts, it's certain he'll rob a bank. Or if a person indulges in unclean thoughts, it's certain he will commit adultery. Or if a person defrauds the government in little things like taxes, it's certain he will rob the treasury. Or if a person would enslave a fellow man and deprive him of all the rights of a human being, he will certainly commit other crimes of equal offense.

II. Let me explain what I *do* mean by the principle that a person who is dishonest in little things isn't really honest in anything.

If a person is dishonest in little things, it demonstrates that he isn't governed by principle in anything. He has other motives that make him *appear* to act honestly in greater things, while at the same time he's dishonest in little things.

III. Let me prove this principle.

1. If a person is motivated by his respect for the authority of God and His perfect law, his integrity will show itself in small matters as well as large. In fact, where the temptation is small, he is *more* certain to act conscientiously than in greater things, because there is less to tempt him to act otherwise.

What is honesty? When a man's only motive for acting honestly is *mere selfishness*, then he is no more honest than the devil who is honest with his fellow demons as long as it's to his benefit. Is that honesty? Certainly not.

So if a man's honesty isn't from higher motives than this, he isn't honest at all. And if he *appears* to be honest in certain important matters, he has motives other than a regard for the honor of God.

2. If a person is dishonest in little things, it's certain that he isn't motivated by a love for the Lord. If he's motivated by love for God, he knows that dishonesty in little things is just as real a violation of the law of God as it is in greater things.

3. It's also certain that a person like this isn't motivated by real love for his neighbor. If he loved his neighbor as himself, he wouldn't defraud him in small things any more than in great. On the contrary, he might do it in great things where the temptation to compromise was stronger. But where the temptation is small, the one who truly loves his neighbor would never act dishonestly towards him.

IV. Now let me show some of the motives of people who are dishonest in little things, while they may appear to be honest in bigger things.

Some people *seem* to be honest in some things yet dishonest in others, but the Lord Jesus Christ has laid down the principle that if a man is dishonest in little things, he's not honest at all. Let me explain *why* people act this way.

1. They may act honestly in greater things because they're afraid of being publicly embarrassed.

They may know that certain small things aren't likely to be mentioned in public, so they continue to do them. Only the *fear of disgrace* keeps them from doing the same things in a bigger way. This is one form of selfishness overbalancing another—not honesty.

2. They may fear it could hurt their business if they're guilty of dishonesty—so they deal honestly in important matters, while in little things they're ready to take any advantage they can, as long as it won't hurt their business.

For instance, a manager will take advantage of a seamstress, paying her less than he knows she's worth, while he wouldn't think of cheating when buying a bale of cotton because it could hurt his business. In dealing with a poor and desperate worker, he can squeeze out a few cents in wage cuts without fear of public disgrace, while he wouldn't for any reason do something which would be publicly spoken of as corrupt.

3. Fear of human law may influence a man to act honestly in things that are likely to be enforced, while in little things that the law might not notice, he'll easily break the law.

4. The love of praise influences many to act honestly and honorably, and even piously, in things that are likely to be noticed. Many will cheat a poor person out of a few cents in wages, and then, on some great public occasion, appear to act with great generosity. When a severe winter comes, they may send out cart loads of clothing to the poor, or give large sums of money to committees—but it's for the love of praise from men, and not for the love of God and man.

5. The fear of God's judgment. They may be afraid of God's anger if they're dishonest in important matters, while they think He will overlook their dishonesty in little things.

6. They may restrain their dishonest desires from self-righteousness, and act honestly in bigger things to keep up their own good opinion of themselves, while in smaller things they cheat and lie. Their apparently upright and honest conduct shines forth whenever their reputation and interest are at stake.

As I said earlier, if someone will commit petty thefts, it isn't certain that he will rob a bank. He might have many reasons for abstaining, without being a bit too honest to rob a bank, or to cut

a purse off of your arm in a crowd. He may not have enough courage, or enough skill or nerve, or he may be afraid of the law, or afraid of disgrace, or other reasons.

Someone may continuously indulge in lustful thoughts, yet never actually commit adultery. He may be restrained by fear or lack of opportunity, and not by principle. If he *indulges* in immoral thoughts, he would certainly act immorally if he could "get away with it."

So an individual who will defraud the United States Treasury of eighteen cents in taxes has none too much principle to rob the treasury if he had the same prospect of not getting caught. The same standards that allowed him to do the one would allow him to do the other. And the same motive that led him to do the one, could lead him to do the other if he had an opportunity.

A person may be guilty of little misrepresentations, who wouldn't *dare* tell a downright *lie*. Yet if he is guilty of coloring the truth and misrepresenting facts, purposely misleading, he is really lying—and the person who will do this would tell mountains of lies under the right circumstances.

V. Now let me mention some examples where people are dishonest in little things, while they appear to act honestly and even piously in regard to more important things.



1. We often see people disregard the payment of small debts while they're extremely careful in the payment of notes to the bank, and in all their business.

For instance, a man subscribes to the newspaper. The price is small and the publisher can't send a collector to every person, so this man lets his subscription run for years, perhaps never paying it.

If it had been a note at the bank, the same man would have paid on time and would have done everything possible to not be delinquent. Why? Because if he doesn't make his bank payment his credit will be damaged... but the little debt of five dollars won't be protested, and he knows it.

So he lets it go by, and the publisher has to go through the trouble and expense to send for it, or go without his money. It's obvious that this man doesn't make his payments to the bank from honesty of principle, but purely from a regard to his own credit.

2. A person may look like a good businessman while cheating his own employees. Earlier I referred to the case of seamstresses. Suppose an individual employs women to sew for him, and for the sake of underselling others in the same trade, he beats down these women below the fair price of their work. It's clear that the employer isn't honest in anything. If he's fair and prompt in his public business, it's not because he's honest in his heart, but because it's in his interest to *look* honest.

3. Some show their lack of principle by committing little petty thefts. If they live at a boarding house, they will commit little thefts—perhaps for their fireplace. A person who won't buy a little charcoal for himself to kindle his fire in the morning gets along by stealing from others, a handful at time, and shows himself to be rotten at heart.

4. People show their great dishonesty when they find things that have been lost, especially things of little value. A person might find a pocketknife, perhaps, or a silver pen, and never try to find the owner, even among people he might think were the losers. Now, the person that would find a silver pen and keep it without looking for the owner where there was a chance of finding him—as far as principle is concerned—would keep a pocketbook full of money if he found it and had an equal chance of getting away with it.

And yet this same person, if he found a pocketbook with five thousand dollars in it, would advertise it in the newspapers and make a great noise about it. But what is the motive? He knows that the missing five thousand dollars will be investigated, and if he is discovered he will be ruined. Fine honesty this is!

5. Many people conceal little mistakes that are made in their favor, like in giving change. If a person keeps still, says nothing, and lets it pass when a