

It wasn't long after my son and I hired a non-local contractor to do some work for us that we were reminded of one of the great facts of life. That fact is: "sometimes words mean very little." As we contemplated entrusting quite a bit of money with this contractor, his use of two words helped us make the decision.

The first word the contractor used just happened to be the first word in his company name. The word was "quality." He assured us he could handle our job with no problem, that he knew what he was doing and we would be pleased with his quality work. We were expecting the job he did to be one that reflected the true meaning of the word.

If you choose to look up the word "quality" in the dictionary you would find the word defined as; "basic nature; attribute; excellence; superiority." On the basis of that definition, did we ever find a gem to work for us. A contractor who had quality as a basic nature, quality as one of his attributes, one whose name meant excellence, and whose work was distinguished as that of superiority.

We have to admit, we were genuinely surprised when we learned we had been taken. Our first clue was when the work didn't begin when promised. The second clue was when the initial bill we were given was highly inflated. The third clue was when one of his own workers told us that we were being charged for time that was actually being spent on other jobs. The fourth clue was, when instead of paying for materials with a check we had given him for that express purpose, both he and his partner went on vacation. I have to admit, being a person who is quite trusting of others, it sometimes takes me a while to get the point. But when my son showed me that we had already paid more for the job than the written estimate and the job was far from being completed, stark reality began to creep in.

Perhaps the contractor didn't have a complete understanding of the word quality. Perhaps he had just "oversold" himself. Perhaps he wanted to do quality work but just didn't have the expertise. Perhaps the contractor only wanted people to think of him as one who did quality work when in reality he had no intention of backing up the claim. Perhaps, as my attorney suggested, the contractor was simply dishonest. Whatever his original intention, the contractor showed by his work that quality, to him, was just a word with very little meaning.

The second word the contractor used to describe himself was the word, "Christian." He told us he was a Christian and implied because Christianity was his way of life we would be completely pleased with his integrity, his honesty, and the quality of his work. In other words, he put his "Christianity" on the line every time he accepted a job. And, he

was right.

The dictionary defines a Christian as: "A decent, respectable person; having the qualities demonstrated and taught by Jesus Christ, as love, kindness, humility, etc.; representing Christians or Christianity."

The Bible teaches a Christian is someone who is trying to follow the teachings of Jesus, one who does what he says he will do, one who is honest, one who will not take unfair advantage of another, one who actually treats others as he himself would like to be treated.

When one takes the dictionary definition of a Christian and adds to it what the Bible says, it seems quite easy to show that sometimes words mean very little. What we say we are and claim to be should be reflected by our lives. Actually, what we say and who we really are IS reflected by our lives. The words "quality" and "Christian" are just meaningless words if there is little or no effort to give them meaning in everyday living.

But before we're tempted to get a little too pious or self-righteous ourselves, we need to take that long hard look in our own mirrors. No doubt it's easier to find character flaws in others, while being blinded to our own. Just imagine how our lives, as well as those around us, would change if we decided each morning to live by the words from Matthew 5:16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Quality and Christian are just words unless your light is shining.

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