

Where's Good Old American Honesty?

A handlettered sign posted at a north Oklahoma City intersection reads: "Baby-sitting \$25 per week in advance."

That says a lot about what has happened to good old American honesty. We deduce that the baby sitter had not been paid her wages after she had done her work. If parents will cheat a baby sitter out of her pay, they aren't likely to teach their youngsters basic elements of honesty.

Where may children learn about honesty, if not in their homes?

Schools might teach something about honesty but instructors must avoid moral instruction related to religion and most religions have doctrines related to morality.

If parents don't take children to church to learn honesty, they might never be exposed to teaching of any system of moral values.

It is almost inevitable that they will be exposed to intense pressures of many kinds in our permissive society, including dishonesty and extending into other areas of immorality leading to degeneration.

This situation has prevailed since World War II. It was emphasized by student and race riots of the 1960s. It has been accentuated by political interests whereby any individual or group who advocates honesty, morality and right over wrong may be ridiculed.

A magazine story about a man who sells snacks from a counter tray by the honor system says that "One out of every five people will steal a candy bar if there is nobody around to collect the money."

Uncle Sam has been lending money to students to acquire an education but many of them don't learn to be honest. The U.S. Education Department reports that 820,000 borrowers owe the government about \$1.1 billion in defaulted student loans.

Merchants complain that shoplifting is costing them over \$24 billion a year. Thieves range from children just starting to school to elderly people.

Business people aren't without fault. It might not be stealing but it isn't honest for one to replace a 98

cent price tag on an item of merchandise with one reading: "Reduced to \$1.09."

The number of people who write bad checks, take bankruptcy to escape their obligations and cheat on taxes are additional reflections on our present attitudes concerning ethical behavior.

"To be honest, a society must believe in honesty," says Ivan Hill in a booklet titled "Common Sense & Everyday Ethics" published by the Ethics Resource Center. "To be free, it must believe in freedom."

This is a project of American Viewpoint, Inc., founded in 1922 to provide educational programs in citizenship for immigrants. It has been moved from Chapel Hill, N.C., to Washington, D.C., where it is concentrating on good citizenship for people who already live here.

"Without honesty, freedom is unsafe. Without freedom, it is unsafe to be honest," the writer warns.

Dishonesty leads to distrust. Lack of confidence undermines business dealings and reflects erosion of our national character.