

Weaving the Word

God as My Witness

Part 26 – March 8, 2015

Welcome to where we're learning to open our eyes to see, and our ears to hear.

Many believers have a distorted perspective of the disciples.

They were mostly marginalized teenagers, not reputable elders.



They were fishermen and tax collectors, not religious leaders. In fact, when it comes to religious matters, **they consistently proved to be ignorant, inexperienced, and naive.**

And *this* was Jesus' *chosen* team. And, we really need to correct our perception.

In ancient Jewish tradition, a young man began following a Rabbi between 12 and 30, and *usually less* than 20, and *most commonly* at the age of 15. (Pirkei Avot 5:22) 18 was the *recommended age* of marriage for men (Pirkei Avot 5:22) yet, only *Peter* is mentioned having a wife. (Mat 8:14-15)



Jesus has Peter retrieve a coin from a fish's mouth to pay the temple tax (Mat 17:24-27) required of all Jewish men 20 years and older. (Ex 30:13-14) And, even though the other disciples are present, Jesus has Peter only retrieve enough for the two of them.

And, Jesus, in his early 30s, refers to His disciples, not only as His children, (John 13:33) but little children. (Mat 11:25; Luke 10:21) And this echoes Isaiah's prophesy:

Here am I, and the **children** the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion. – Isaiah 8:18 NIV

Why would Jesus purposely select ignorance and inexperience?

For what *He* needed, they were miles ahead of the rest.

Know why?

They had so much less to *unlearn*. And *that's* what their first apprenticeship training as appointed Apostles, on the hillside, is mostly all about: *unlearning*.



“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ **[or: in the name of the Lord]** But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” – Matthew 5:33-37 NIV



Anything beyond simple integrity is simply of the devil.

So, don’t minimize it! **Deception is so often so much easier than integrity ... *in the short-term.***

So resist it. Resist *him*. It’s a trap.

You see, ***your word affects your witness of the Word.***

So, only say “yes” when you mean absolutely nothing less; and “no” when you know, that you know, that you know, you *mean no.*

Otherwise, we *profane* the One who’s Word we represent.

Jesus is combining a couple of Old Testament verses here.

Do not **swear falsely by my name** and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. – Leviticus 19:12 NIV

This isn’t swearing-swearing (like nasty words); it’s using *God’s* good name to persuade others that *your word* is trustworthy.

You hear people flippantly say, “**I swear to God,**” or “**God as my witness**”.

Swearing is buying trust on God’s credit.

Therefore, **if we violate that trust it costs God His good name.**

And, as you can imagine, *He doesn’t cotton to that so well.*

The second verse Jesus quotes is in Deuteronomy.

If you **make a vow to the Lord your God**, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. – Deuteronomy 23:21 NIV

This is talking about a pledge or promise made in God’s name.

You *don't* have to say "yes".

And, you *don't* have to say "no".

But, if you do say "yes", then *do it*; and if no, then *don't*.

No excuses. No hesitation. No loopholes. Simple integrity.

Otherwise, we *profane* the One who's Word we represent.



The Pharisees were big into loopholes.

They taught that, *because scripture was so specific and so clear* that vows in God's name must be kept, it stood to reason that vows *not-in-His-name didn't* have to be!

They even had a bizarre way of determining what constituted a vow "in His name".

"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?" – Matthew 23:16-19 NIV

Does it bother you when someone flippantly says: *"I swear to God!"*

It was bothering Jesus to hear His followers flippantly say, "I swear by heaven!" "I swear by earth!" "I swear by Jerusalem!" "I swear by my head!"

This isn't an exhaustive list. It's a type.

We swear on our life, our children, and our mother's grave. They swore by their head, we cross our heart and hope to die and stick a needle in our eye!

When Jesus says *"Do not swear at all ..."* does He mean *"Do not swear at all"*?



Well, He *doesn't mean* we can't swear under oath in a courtroom ... *know how I know?*

Jesus swore under oath in a courtroom.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you **under oath by the living God**: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." **Yes**, it is as you say," Jesus replied. – Matthew 26:63-64a NIV

And, it's not even *always wrong* to call on God as *our* witness. Know how I know?

Paul uses God's witness to support the authenticity of his love.

For **God is my witness**, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. –
Philippians 1:8 NAS

It would seem there are two exemptions – two matters in which God will *gladly serve as our witness*: truth and love.

It's the same thing of which He asks *us* to serve as *His* witness. Truth and love.

And it's the very thing that's diluted and defiled every time we allow our "yes" to be anything less, and our "no" to be not so. Truth and love.

Jesus *doesn't just say*, "Do not swear **AT ALL**." He says, "Do not swear at all with the 'heaven oath' and the 'earth oath' and the 'Jerusalem oath' and the 'head oath' type oaths".

He's helping them to see it as more than a bad habit. It's evil. Self-serving. Dishonest. Deadly.

There's no way to swear *without* involving God. Just as, **there's no way to sidestep integrity.**

He doesn't say to let their "yes" be yes as a way of steering clear of God's wrath, but as a way of increasing their awareness that we're all accountable for every promise that we make.

His children don't look for loopholes and easy outs.

They see *their word* as *His Word*. Because, their eyes are *open*.

And, they can see that integrity is required in two situations:

- 1. When it's really easy.**
- 2. When it's really worship.**

The more effort our obedience requires, the more love it reveals.

As long as it's motivated by a heart of gratitude.

We all face situations in which we're tempted to weasel.

Those are the situations in which we're invited to worship.

Let your word and God's Word become One and the same Word.

Let your yes be yes, and find a peace that passes understanding.

Let your no be no, and glorify God!