

Twisted Truth

Guarding God's Good Name

February 27, 2022

Today we're making our word and God's Word one and the same word!

And that means we've got a lot of unlearnin' to do; so answer me this: **do you ever feel too ignorant and inexperienced to be used by God?**



Well, on that seaside hillside, Jesus chooses and begins training His twelve young apprentices, by “rightly dividing” and harmonizing the Scriptures their teachers were sinfully stitching together (*Frankensteining*, if you will), and failing to declare their deepest meanings *even* when *rightly* dividing. So, Jesus is shining a light on the human heart and revealing how **we tend to twist the truth to paint a picture to fit our agenda**. And it's often so subtle that it goes unnoticed, like it likely is when most believers picture the twelve ... *teenagers*.

I frequently refer to them as Jesus' *boys*, to help us *unlearn* the distorted picture, which changes the whole context, that's been painted for us. Literally. That's “The Incredulity of Saint Thomas” by Caravaggio. How old *are* those guys?! He's a painter, not a theologian. But shame on the teachers of his day, because they knew, or *should've* known, that **Jesus was just out of His twenties, and He called those old boys, not only His children**, (Jn 13:33) **but His “little children”**. (Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21)

The *actual* twelve would've looked a lot less like *that*, and a lot *more* like *this*. And we can know this by doing the very thing Jesus is teaching His boys: rightly dividing and applying His Word. If we let Scripture paint the picture, without any *un*-helping hands, *here's* the picture:

[Every male shall give] half a shekel [or, in Jesus' day, two drachmas] according to the shekel of the sanctuary ... from twenty years old and above, – Exodus 30:13-14 NKJ

[And yet] After Jesus *and* His *disciples* arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the [annual] two-drachma [Temple] tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn't your *Teacher* pay the temple tax?” [for Himself and His boys] “Yes, He does,” he replied. When Peter came into the house ... [even though He's there with the Twelve] [Jesus said] “Go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for *My* tax and *yours*.” – Matthew 17:24-27 NIV

So, if the rest are exempt, they're not even 20. So, two-and-a-half years earlier, on that seaside hillside, they're not even 18. And Scripture says they were at Jesus' baptism, (Acts 1:21-22) **which makes 'em 16 at most when they first began following**. And according to ancient tradition, (Pirkei Avot 5:22) 15 was the most *common* age to follow a Rabbi. That changes the entire story!

They weren't reputable elders, but sidelined youngsters; disregarded young fishermen, like "[James] and his brother John ... [who] left their father Zebedee in the boat ... and followed Him" (Mk 1:19-20) (whose mom asks Jesus for a favor for her sons); (Mt 20:21) and a despised young tax collector named "Matthew [the] son of Alphaeus [who was] sitting at the [old man's] tax collector's booth ... [and] got up and followed Him". (Mk 2:14) Would a teen have his own tax booth? These weren't religious leaders or theologians. In fact, in Scriptural matters, **they reliably proved to be ignorant, naïve, and exasperating.** For instance, when Jesus took them to Jerusalem for His *crucifixion* ...

Jesus took the Twelve aside [We're rightly dividing and harmonizing all the details here] and *told* them *what was going to happen* to Him. "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is *written* by the *prophets* about the Son of Man will be *fulfilled*. The Son of Man will be *betrayed* [by Judas] to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will *condemn* Him to *death* and He will be handed over to the *Gentiles* to be *mocked* and *flogged* and *crucified*. They will *mock* Him, *insult* Him, *spit* on Him, *flog* Him and *kill* Him. Three days later, *On the third day* He will *rise again*. He will be *raised to life!* [But] The disciples did *not* understand *any* of this. Its *meaning* was *hidden* from them, and they did not know *what* He was talking about. – Mt 20:19; Mk 10:33-34; Lk 18:31-34 NIV



How often is that *us?! He clearly speaks through Scripture, but we often hide the meaning from ourselves*, by refusing to know 'em, so we can't hear Him, so we can't don't know what He's talking about. Even though the Lord says to ...



Receive into *your* heart all *My* Words ... and hear with *your* ears. – Ezekiel 3:10 NKJ



But **take heart, this was Jesus' chosen team.** And, we need to allow the Word to correct our hearing, because the devil is in the details ... *literally!* Jesus said to the boys:

Have *I* not *chosen* you, the *Twelve*? Yet one of *you* is a *devil!* – John 6:70 NIV

My youth director, whose last name, ironically, was Goudzwaard (God's Word), was an role model for me, shaping my faith *and* my sense of humor. He had a great way of wrongly dividing God's Word when one of us was pushing his buttons. He'd quote two passages: "Judas went out an hung himself," "Go and do likewise." And when we were trying to talk him into doing something he *wanted* to do, but knew he *shouldn't*, he'd say: "Get behind me, Satan ... and *push!*"

The picture of Jesus' boys echoes the picture of the disciples of the prophet Isaiah, who said:

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

So, **why would the Lord purposely select ignorance and inexperience?** Well, there's something to be *said* for ignorance and inexperience; know why? For what *He* needed, they were miles ahead of the rest; know why? **They had far less to unlearn.**



The religious rulers had been twisting Scripture to paint a *pleasing* picture for so long, it had become the traditional way of thinking. In other words: they created a *monster*. And **it's hard to kill a monster, and to unlearn traditional or self-delusional thinking**. Because harmonizing and Frankensteining both use Scripture to interpret Scripture. So what's the difference?

Harmonizing happens when **Scripture is clarified or completed by joining a complementary Scripture**. Whereas, Frankensteining happens when **Scripture is compromised or corrupted by joining an out-of-context Scripture**. And if we don't know God's Word, we won't know when anyone's doing either one. Jesus' "you've heard ... but I tell you" regarding rightly dividing, is core to our faith; which is why His first apprenticeship training focuses so much on *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

This is what's at the heart of the matter. **Be it God's Word or our word, it be all about integrity.**

And we're never too young, or too old, for integrity. **No excuses. No hesitation. No loopholes.**



The Pharisees were big into loopholes. They thought and taught that, since *scripture is so specific* about vows in *God's name* being kept, vows *not* in *God's name* didn't matter! Twisted. Right? That's why everyone was demanding specific words with a promise or a pledge! So they came up with a truly twisted way to determine what constituted a vow "in His name".

"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!" – Matthew 23:16-17 NIV

Honest to goodness seeking is the only path to harmonizing; so **if you're using Scripture to validate an agenda, you're most likely Frankensteining**. And when you call *your monster* by *His name*: "Jerusalem, we have a problem!" Because He commands us to *guard His good name*.

Do *not* swear falsely by *My name* and so *profane* the name of *your God*. – Lev. 19:12 NIV

He's not talking about swear-word swearing; but *pledging* or *promise-swearing*. Does it bother you when someone flippantly says: "I swear to God!" Well it was bothering *Jesus* to hear *His people* saying, **"I swear by heaven!" "I swear by earth!" "I swear by Jerusalem!" "I swear by my head!"**

It's not an exhaustive list. It's a *type*. We swear on our *life*, on our *children*, and on our mother's *grave*. They swore by their *head*, we *cross our heart* and *hope to die*, stick a needle in our *eye*!



And we don't settle for swearing on just *one* Bible; we gotta swear on a *stack* of 'em! And **if we violate that trust, it costs God His good name**. Even if we don't use His name directly – if we claim to be His follower, it's *implied*.



FYI: this doesn't isn't referring to things like officially swearing to the *truth* in a courtroom. Know how we know? (By now you should just yell out "The Bible!") Because *Jesus* did.

The high priest said to [Jesus], "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 26:63-64 NIV

He's talking about self-serving or self-deceiving swearing. Because there's no way to say yes or no *without* involving God. Because, as a believer, **there's no way to sidestep integrity**. Which is why it's not even wrong, under the right circumstances, to call on God as *our* witness. Know how we *know*? (The Bible!) Because *Paul* did it – more than once.

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

Seems to be two exceptions in which the Lord will *gladly* serve as *our* witness: **truth** and **love**.

Same things we're called to serve as *His* witness: truth and love. The very things diluted and defiled each time we allow our yes to be anything less, or our no to be not so. Truth and love.

Whenever anyone uses His good name to shore up their less-than perfect reputation of reliability for being trustworthy, **they're not-so-subtly buying trust on God's credit**. Rather than glorifying *God's Word* as totally trustworthy, we often use it to persuade others that *our word is*. But **our word affects our 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. His children don't look for loopholes and easy outs. **They see their word as His Word**. Especially since, as His *faithful*, we're well aware of Jesus' *warning*.

A *good* man brings *good* things out of the *good* stored up *in* him, and an *evil* man brings *evil* things out of the *evil* stored up *in* him. But I *tell* [as in, *warn*] you that *everyone* [good and bad alike] will have to give account on the day of judgment for *every empty word* they have spoken. For by *your* words you will be acquitted, and by *your* words you will be condemned." – Matthew 12:35-37 NIV

Let's face it, we all face situations where we're tempted to weasel, whether with *His* Word or our *own*. But those are the situations when we're invited to offer a living sacrifice of the truest form of *worship*; no matter how young or how old we happen to be.

So **don't let ignorance or inexperience hold you back**. Open *your* ears to *His* voice and **let your word and God's Word steadily become One and the same Word**.