

Weaving the Word

Lowering God's Standards

Part 96, December 16, 2018

Welcome to where we're learning to count the cost to follow the One who paid the price!

Do you tend to bend *your* will to *His* or *His* will to *yours*?



In our storyline, it's almost Passover (one year before the cross) and the markets are wall-to-wall people preparing for the big holiday feast.



Jesus' twelve teenage apprentices are paired up and still out on their own in the towns of Judea, preaching, healing, and raising the dead.



Two days before, Jesus had finished an extensive ministry tour in Galilee, and was told that Herod killed His cousin John and now wants *Him dead*.



Earlier today Jesus snuck into town, *literally*, as a wanted man, and went to the Pool of Bethesda to anonymously heal a whining, excuse-making, 38-year invalid, later revealing himself and warning (if not threatening) the man to stop sinning. But the man immediately informs the rulers. (Jn 5:1-15)



Meanwhile, Jesus draws a crowd as He publically reunites with His 72 junior disciples who had prepared the towns of Galilee to receive Him. With the crowd's attention, He condemns three cities in Galilee whose religious rulers had seen His miracles and rejected Him. (Lk 10:17-20; Mt 11:20-24)



Then He rejoices in the Spirit, and answers the Spirit's question posed through Isaiah (28:9-10) regarding teaching His "children" line-upon-line, thought-upon-thought, and here-a-little there-a-little. (Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-22)



And, since the Spirit-through-Isaiah proclaims that *this* is how God's promised rest will come, (28:11-12) Jesus calls the crowd to come and learn from Him, so He can give them this rest for their souls. (Mt 11:28-30)

And when they come and sit at His feet, He tells them that *their* eyes and ears are blessed because of what *He's* showing and telling. (Lk 10:23-24)

Just then an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. – Lk 10:25a ISV

This *Baal Torah* as they were known (Lord/Master of the Torah: the first five books of the Bible), appears to be sincere, and stands to question and test, *but not to trap*, Rabbi Jesus.

He wants to understand what he's unwilling to accept.

“Teacher,” he asked, “what must I **do** to inherit eternal life?” **“What is written in the Law?”** he replied. [Jesus-the-teacher turns the tables] “How do **you** read it?” [You’re the expert; you’ve heard what I’ve said, so ... *you tell Me*. Suddenly it’s the Baal Torah being tested] He answered: [surprisingly weaving a-little-here from Deuteronomy 6:4-5] **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”**; [with a-little-there from Leviticus 19:18] and, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** [Thus boiling it all down to whole-hearted love for God and others] “You have answered **correctly**,” Jesus replied. [Well woven!] **“Do this** and you **will** live.” – Lk 10:25b-28 NIV

God’s Word must be obeyed as a way of giving and showing love.

Otherwise, **we can follow it without ever fulfilling it.**

Now, **knowing-the-truth and doing-the-truth are very different.**

“Do this and you will live.” **But** [he didn’t want to *do this*, instead] **he wanted to justify himself**, so he asked Jesus, “And [um, exactly] **who is my neighbor?**” – Luke 10:29 NIV

And *that’s* what it all comes down to, *right there!* **We’ll either choose to do what we know to be true, or we’ll redefine and reduce it down to something more “doable”.**

We pray: Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. *But, is it?* We tend to give lesser rulers greater authority, and inferior powers higher priority, and we often exchange eternal, infinite, *glorification* for temporal, immediate, *gratification*.

Well, **we can bow our head or bend His Word; but we can’t do both.**

Two opposing kingdoms cannot coexist. *Something’s* got’a give.



[Two years earlier, at the Sermon on the Mount] Jesus said to [the Pharisees], “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of **men**, but God knows your hearts.” – Luke 16:15a NIV

This Baal Torah is *testing Jesus* to *prove to himself* that he’s good enough, he’s smart enough, and doggone it, people like him.

God goes for things like humility and honesty and sincerity.

So, face it, you can’t justify *yourself*, no matter how hard you try. You can fool all of the people some of the time; and some of the people all of the time; but you can’t fool God.

So, what’s a Baal Torah to do?

He wants to reduce the scope of the rule to a size he can religiously manage. He’s not seeking to *know* God, but to *define* God, because he knows he can’t measure up to God’s standards.

There is *no one righteous*, not even *one* ... – Romans 3:10 NIV

Whenever someone realizes that they're a hypocrite, they feel the need to change either their behavior or their beliefs.

Most change their beliefs. It seems far easier ... *at first*; because, even though it *increases* our *hypocrisy*, it allows our heart to deceive us into thinking we're satisfying the "rules".

But, **our only way around simple truth is to complicate it.**

Whereas, this guy's answer had everything the law needed.

... for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and *whatever other commandment there may be*, are summed up in this *one rule*: "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
– Romans 13:8b-10 NIV

But, when Jesus tells him to take his own advice, he *panics!* "Who *is* my *neighbor*? I mean, if I'm gonna actually put this into action, and be held accountable before God for my behavior, where can my beliefs *give* a little?"

I can see where he's coming from. "There is no one righteous." It's *impossible*.

So, he thinks the only way to meet God's demands is to redefine and reduce them.

But now a *righteousness* from God, **apart from law** [so, there's no way to earn it], **has been made known** [by Jesus], **to which the Law and the Prophets testify** [Line upon line; here-a-little there-a-little]. This *righteousness* from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ **to all who believe** [all who know it *and* live it] ... for *all* have *sinned* and *fall short* of the *glory* of God, and are **justified freely** by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:21-24 NIV

As you know this Christmas season, **a gift is only free to the receiver; the giver has to pay in some way or it has no value. We are justified freely, but not cheaply.**



This Gift we've been given is *priceless!* So, **why do you suppose a Gift so costly is offered so freely?**

Well, **our Father is far too rich to sell.** And, **His children are way too poor to buy.**

And, **Jesus is far and away the most costly gift ever conceived.**

Frankly, it would be beneath His grace.

So, you may receive Him for free, or not at all.

It's called *trustification* (it's actually not; I made that up).

This Baal Torah thinks he needs to lower God's standards so he can earn His approval ... while he's standing in front of *Jesus!* **What He really needs is to get his act together and face the truth, embrace the Truth, and get grace from the Truth.**

And stop this fool's errand of trying to engineer a workaround.



Remember Chariots of Fire?

One runner says, "I've got 10 seconds to justify my existence," whereas his competitor says "God made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure."

The first was worn out before he even began.

But, most people believe that's how we relate to God.

Thinking, the better I follow His rules, the more He accepts me.

But the Gospel is diametrically opposed to this!



I'm fully accepted.

So I can gratefully follow.

Because I truly desire to fulfill His Will, His Word, and my purpose.

Question is: do *you* have the desire for a Savior who uses such broad strokes to paint a whole life of such great love? Or, do you feel the need to narrow it down, list it out, and button it up, so *you* can feel good about *you* when *you* comply?

We think we've got to measure up.

Yet, we're asked to bow down and look up. And cry out.

And admit the truth of our situation, our self, and our sin.

And receive, and rejoice in, and follow Him.

Without excuses or rationalizations or workarounds.

Just humility and honesty and sincerity.

And a determination to stop treating this free Gift as if it was cheap!