



Are My Promises Reliable?

Ephesians 4:29: (NASB) *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*



If we make promises, we should keep them. This statement seems simple enough and yet when we look around, how much confidence do we have in it? Do we see an unequivocal keeping of promises in our political leadership? Do we see it in the business world? The world of advertising or education? Do we even see it in our family and social interactions? In our last episode, we spoke extensively about the fact that God is absolutely a God of promise - what He says He always does. We, as Christians, are bound to His promise-keeping standards of excellence as the model for our own words and actions. How do we go about raising the bar with our own commitments? What instructions can we find in God's word that will focus us on keeping our word?



Merriam Webster Online Dictionary:

Promise: (noun)

- 1: a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified
- 2: a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act

In our previous Episode 1287, we brought out how the New Testament defines the word "promise" and the keeping of God's promises to us.

Let's take a look at our own promises and our own word.

There are three closely-related Greek New Testament words for promise.

First is the root word:

Promise: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1861 *epaggello*;
VERB; to announce upon (reflexively), i.e. (by implication) to engage
to do something, to assert something respecting oneself

This word gives us a sense of a focused intention before we take deliberate action. In other words, stating your intent. "I am going to... (do whatever)." These are not idle words; they are serious and intentional.

Promise: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1862 *epaggelma*; from 1861
NOUN; a self-committal (by assurance of conferring some good)

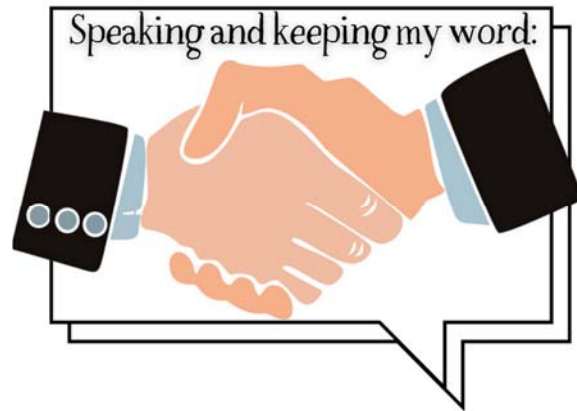
This word shows us unequivocal commitment to future actions. It is unique and only used twice in the New Testament - both times referring to God's personal commitment.

Promise: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1860 *epaggelia*; from 1861; an announcement (for information, assent or pledge; especially a divine assurance of good): message, promise

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) announcement 2) promise 2a) the act of promising, a promise given or to be given 2b) a promised good or blessing

This word focuses on the proclamation of a promise as a basis for a sure and binding expectation.

In all, these words are used 70 times in the New Testament. 65 of those 70 uses refer to God and His promises. The other five refer to human commitments, and a heads up, they mostly describe negative circumstances.



As Christians, we are to first and foremost realize that the Bible is overwhelmingly full of God's plans, purposes and promises.

This should be the first and highest motivation for us as mere human beings to strive for godliness in every part of our lives!

When we look at the idea of promises, that is what our heavenly Father is made of. "Promises made, promises kept" is the theme for us keeping our word. We will look at the five times these words translated as *promise* are used in relation to humanity.

Let's look at two of the five uses of "promise" in the New Testament that apply to humanity:

1 Timothy 2:9-10: (NASB) ⁹Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women **making a claim <1861>** to godliness.

Making a claim here is that "promise" word, *epaggello*, meaning to announce, to state your intent.

Interestingly, this is the most positive use of "promise" in the New Testament relating to humanity.

We do not want to take these scriptures from the Apostle Paul out of context. His audience was newly-converted wealthy Christian women of the first century. They and their husbands had just come out of Paganism. Many of these new Christian women were apparently constructing elaborate hair designs using wire frames. They wore flashy clothes and expensive gold jewelry in an attempt to outdo the other women.

The principle is to hold godliness as our highest objective. We should dress to honor God, NOT to impress ourselves or others.

When people look at me, do they see a reflection of Jesus in my behavior, or do they get distracted with "look at me!" kind of clothing and jewelry? We can quickly cross a line of what is appropriate, causing us and others to act sinfully.



When a man or woman promises godliness, we need to deliver. How we look spiritually is more important than how we look physically. Be careful of vanity!



Making a claim to godliness is making the announcement, "I'm godly. Look at me!" We want to understand how to keep it in its appropriate context.

To claim godliness is to claim reverence for and submission to the God of all things. The sense of that reverence needs to be first and foremost:

1 Peter 3:3-4: (NASB) ³Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

The Apostle Peter gives a similar message as Paul. They are not forbidding women for all eternity from wearing jewelry or braids. Instead, they were instructing women to concentrate on good works and a right attitude rather than trying to impress others with an immodest, inappropriate or gaudy appearance.

1 Corinthians 10:31: (NASB)
...whatever you do, do it
all to the glory of God.

Overall, is our appearance to please God or to please ourselves and the world? There is always a mirror in front of us, not so we look good, but so we think clearly and reflect back on what is in our mind.

The lesson in these texts is not just for women, but for all of us. The lasting quality of a gentle and quiet spirit is a fundamental basis for our words and actions to be nothing less than honest and trustworthy. This is all about who we are before God and how we reflect this to others in our standing before Him.

The next use of the word "promise" in the New Testament relates to a disturbing event in the Apostle Paul's life. He was at Jerusalem and was being accused and threatened by the Jewish leaders to the point of their planning his murder.



The context of Acts 23:

In Acts 21, a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem attacked Paul, accusing him of teaching against the Jewish laws and defiling the Temple by bringing in a Gentile. A riot broke out as they tried to kill Paul, but a commander in the Roman regiment gathered troops and took Paul to a fortress, into what we would call today "protective custody." Paul had certain rights as a Roman-born citizen. The mob grew so violent that the soldiers had to carry Paul on their shoulders to protect him.

The next day, Paul was brought before the Jewish high counsel of Pharisees and Sadducees to sort out what happened, but the counsel was divided and fought bitterly. Each side was literally pulling on Paul and the commander again feared for Paul's life and ordered him back to the fortress.

The next morning, over 40 Jewish men took an oath to not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They told the priests and leaders to have Paul brought back to review his case, and the men would kill him on the way. But Paul's nephew heard of the plan and told Paul and the commander about the secret plot.

Incidentally, this is the only record we have of Paul's family. His nephew saved his life:

Acts 23:16-21: (NASB) ¹⁶But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him. ¹⁸So he took him and led him to the commander and said, Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you. ¹⁹The commander took him (Paul's nephew) by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, what is it that you have to report to me? ²⁰And he said, The Jews **have agreed <4934>** to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him.

Agreed: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4934 *suntithemai*; to place jointly, i.e. (figuratively) to consent (bargain, stipulate), concur

have agreed - they came together and consented to make the decision. They contractually bound themselves with an oath, like a promise.

²¹So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the **promise <1860>** (the announcement) from you.

Do you think they followed through and all died of starvation since the Romans kept Paul safe? Highly unlikely.

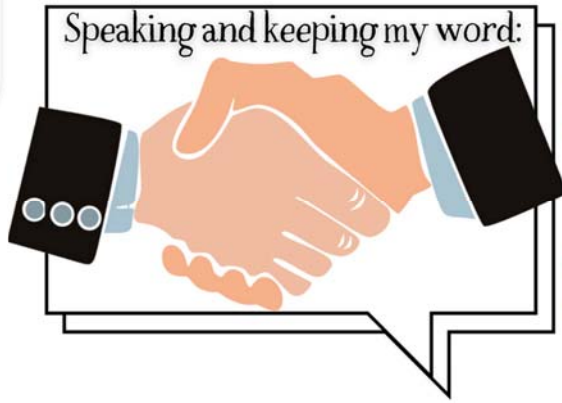
In contrast, this Roman commander seems to have been a man of his word as the Jews under false pretenses were waiting for him to deliver Paul as he was agreeing. Upon finding the truth of the matter, he stood for the highest principles of honesty and integrity and delivered Paul to the governor in Acts 23:22-30.

In the end, Paul was sent to the Roman headquarters of Caesarea under the protection of 200 centurion soldiers, 200 spearmen and 70 horsemen along the way. He witnessed to Governor Felix, King Agrippa and the next governor, Festus. We see in Acts 27:24 that Jesus assured him he would even stand before Caesar, although the Bible does not provide that account. But look at the protection they gave Paul as a Roman citizen to make sure he was not killed by the mob.



This shows the integrity of the commander - this Roman citizen will not be murdered on my watch! He stood for what he believed to be higher principles. From this unbelieving Roman soldier (as far as we know), we can learn a lot about NOT saying something we are not going to do. By standing for something higher, he protected an innocent life.

We see before the Roman commander made the commitment, he understood what was right and followed through, regardless of the consequence. Being a person of your word is critical. Being a person of your word based upon godly truth is a profound step beyond.



Speaking and keeping my word:

The words we speak should be based upon our best knowledge of truth in whatever situation we are in.

If we find that what we are supporting and committed to is wrong, we are obligated to reestablish our stand on the foundation of truth.

**Keeping our word based upon truth is critical!
What did Jesus teach us about making and keeping promises?**

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, Jesus in his ministry did not say anything about keeping promises. However, he did talk about being firm and truthful. He lived the life of one who keeps his promises on a higher level than any human being ever did. There is much to learn from what Jesus did and did not say. He said to *love one another as I have loved you. Take up your cross and follow me.* If Jesus did not directly teach us to keep our promises, what teaching did he put in its place? His principles.

Jesus taught us the principle of being trustworthy:

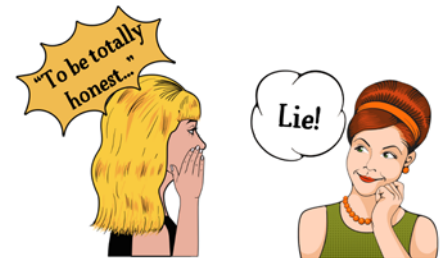
Matthew 5:33-37: (NASB) ³³Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, *You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.* ³⁴But I say to you, *make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. ³⁶Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no; anything beyond these is of evil.*

Yes is a strong affirmation. It is definitive. It is not, "Eh, if I feel like it," which could change tomorrow. There is a powerful clarity in this simple, straightforward statement.

(Source: Bible Commentary by J. Vernon McGee) When a man says to me, "I'd swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high," that is the fellow I do not believe because I think the lie he's telling is a mile high.

We want to be sure we do not go to great lengths to make ourselves heard and be believable.

When people start a sentence with, "To be honest," or "To be totally honest," it implies everything they said previously is a lie!



(Source: Bible Commentary by David Guzik) The scribes and Pharisees had twisted the Law, *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain* (Exodus 20:7) to permit taking virtually every other name in a false oath. Jesus reminds us that God is part of every oath anyway; if you swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even your head, you swear by God - and your oath must be honored. Having to swear or make oaths betrays the weakness of your word. It demonstrates that there is not enough weight in your own character to confirm your words. How much better it is to let your "Yes" be "Yes" and "No" be "No."



Apparently, this was a common way Jewish leaders would speak. Today we might say something like, "I swear on a stack of Bibles," "Cross my heart," or "As God is my witness..." These all are unnecessary, and in the case of invoking God's name, it is offensive.

Let our statements be a clear yes no no. If someone needs more clarification, we can say, "Yes, that is what I said," or "No, I will not do that."



The point of Jesus' teaching here is loud and sound. Be the person who keeps his or her word. When we have this integrity, people can count on us.

The next use of "promise" in the New Testament relating to humanity is NOT positive. As a matter of fact, the final three humanity-related uses of "promise" are ALL negative. The lesson for us in these words is to be bound by Jesus' principle instead of all the actions many people go through to enhance their credibility.

There are three accounts in the gospels of one event that unfold a larger picture. These accounts use the words for "promise" in the New Testament.

There is a significant lesson for us in all of these:

Mark 14:10-11: (NASB) ¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹They were glad when they heard this, and **promised <1861>** to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray him at an opportune time.

They...promised to give him money - they announced it; they made the proclamation, "We will pay you to identify Jesus so we can get rid of him."

The chief priests committed to put a price on the head of Jesus. Each of the other gospels that report this event shed brighter light on what that meant:

Matthew 26:14-16: (NASB) ¹⁴Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, What are you willing to give me to betray him to you? And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. ¹⁶From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

They physically showed Judas the money. They weighed it out - probably one coin at a time to really whet his appetite for money.

One...two...fifteen...thirty...their devious and sinful commitment was on display, to be delivered when the deed was done! They backed up their promise with an enticing physical action.

What are you willing to give me to betray him to you? Matthew supplies this extra level of detail between Judas and the chief priests.

Luke adds how wholeheartedly this "promise" was given and received:

Luke 22:3-6: (NASB) ³And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. ⁴And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵They were glad and **agreed <4934>** (the same "coming together" as the 40 men who wanted to kill Paul. This word is never used in the Bible in a positive sense) to give him money. ⁶So he consented (acknowledged openly), and began seeking a good opportunity to betray him to them apart from the crowd.





Luke adds more depth to this promise. It is more devious. The equivalent today would be, "Do whatever it takes," even if it crosses the lines of integrity. This opens the door for a marginal gray area - even darkness - to be justified as being "light."

Historically, some churches compromised and incorporated Pagan rituals into Christianity for the sake of attracting people. Darkness was justified as light.

Today, some churches water down truth and make it more of a social event in order to try to make the message more attractive. Whatever it takes to bring them in. How sad.



This word for "announce" *consented <1843>* has much negativity attached to it. It implies deviousness, evil and darkness. There is no integrity - nothing of value. Jesus taught us the simple, quiet principle of being a person who keeps his or her word. We do not need to be more than that because this is what Jesus gave us to work with, to work on and to become. The idea of having to make additional promises is beyond what Jesus taught us to do. This is important for us to think about.



The contrast between the principles of righteous commitment that Jesus taught,

"Let your yes be yes and your no be no" and the dark dealing and conniving of Judas and the chief priests could not be greater.

We are clearly taught to have a character that simply stands and speaks for righteousness. No need for dramatics and deals!

There is no need for Christians to make dramatic proclamations of "swearing on a stack of Bibles" or saying, "To be honest with you..." We need to be people of personal integrity from the inside out - to be a person of our word.



A recipe for truthful and godly words, beliefs, discipline and faithfulness:

Ephesians 4:25-27: (NASB)

Truthful and godly words:

²⁵Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR...

Truthful and godly beliefs:

...for we are members of one another.

This belief has to be a driving factor.

Truthful and godly discipline:

²⁶Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,



Truthful and godly faithfulness:

²⁷and do not give the devil an opportunity.

These scriptures reflect the simplicity of what Jesus said, *Yes, yes or No, no*. We need to reflect that simplicity and beauty in our own beliefs, showing by the discipline of our lives that we are abiding by God’s will and using it to drive us. The integrity of our words relies upon the power of our belief. It always comes down to humility. We can be people of our word if we are first humble before God through Christ. How do we get ourselves in that frame of mind?

To speak and keep my word, I must be humble and see my life through God’s greatness:

Psalms 24:1-5: (NASB) *¹The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. ²For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. ³Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?*

Look at how great God is! All He says and does is magnificent. All He has done is confirmation of all He is going to do.

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

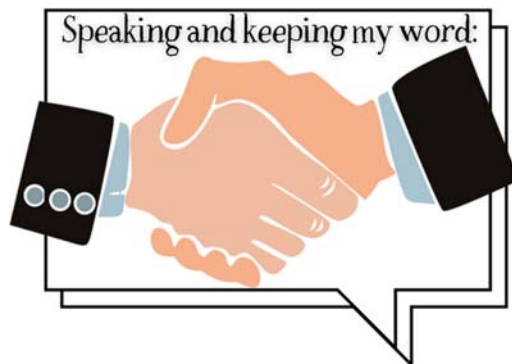
When we look at the greatness of God, how His word is history and facts not yet revealed, we put ourselves in the position of thinking about how we are going to speak and act. We want to follow His pattern.

The next verses become about us:

⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. ⁵He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Having *clean hands and pure heart* means not promising what we cannot deliver. On the flipside, it means not coming together and scheming against others like those who schemed against Paul and Jesus. We do not want to compromise our Christian principles. We should always try to live by a higher standard.

This is often easier said than done, but these are necessary characteristics we must develop that bring blessings. We must not lift up our *soul to falsehood* or swear *deceitfully*. *Let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no*. This is a simple, straightforward command, but we can miss it because we are sometimes insecure about our own capacities.



Humility brings us to genuine appreciation of God through Jesus, which makes us want to be people of integrity. This will bring us blessing and salvation.



The whole idea of keeping our promises is based upon the simplicity of following Jesus and being a person of godly integrity.

**It is easy to see how being a person of your word is so important.
How do we handle it when we do not keep our word?**

As Christians, not keeping our word should be a major concern, for in so doing we not only sully our own reputation, but the reputation of God, Jesus and Christianity. Left unchecked, not keeping our word can and usually will create a domino effect with all that is godly and righteous in our lives as the chief casualties.

For example, it is a challenge not to overexaggerate. It is easy to embellish what we did or are going to do. But exaggeration takes things out of their appropriate context, out of the simplicity of *Yes, yes or No, no*. We should pause before we speak and be as accurate and as truthful as possible.

Exaggeration can be the beginning of the domino effect. By exaggerating, we are taking things out of their appropriate context.

There is a difference between being a chronic promise-breaker and being one who does not live up to our promises. While both do not bring goodness to anyone, we need to understand who we are when it comes to keeping our word.

"My word is my bond," is an idiom meaning you are ethical in that you keep your promises. Its origins include its use of creating binding agreements without the need for written contracts. It has long been the motto of the London Stock Exchange. The phrase itself goes back at least to the year 1500.



Can you imagine buying and selling stock on just a verbal promise? Can you imagine asking a bank for a loan, and the bank says, "Sure! Pay this amount every month for the next ten years. Pleasure doing business with you!" Applying for a house mortgage typically means a month of applications and stacks of documents to sign.

(Source: phrases.org.uk) "My word is my bond" - in this specific form it has for centuries been the motto of the London Stock Exchange, but in various forms (e.g. "a gentleman's/Englishman's word is as good as his bond") it goes back at least to 1500, when a Scottish source has "O kingis word shuld be o kingis bonde."



Jesus gave us the principles of understanding how it is that some keep their word, and some do not:

Matthew 12:33-35: (NASB) ³³*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.* ³⁴*You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.* ³⁵*The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.*

If we have been a “tree” that is not good, we need to transform that tree and make it good! As a separate picture, we are to find *good treasure* that is valuable in the sight of God, not men.

Not keeping our word can be a symptom of a wrong heart motivation or an unrealistic perspective on what we are capable of doing. A wrong heart motivation can be expressed as a desire to just get things over with, or saying something just to get out of trouble to move on.



An unrealistic perspective is when we “overpromise” because we want to accomplish the goal but are not capable of following through, or we do not have serious intent. We might say, “I will call you on Thursday,” but we don’t get around to it. We don’t want to get lazy with our commitments.

In light of the need for transformation, let’s look at another use of “promise” relating to human actions in the New Testament.

This clearly shows a wrong heart motivation:

1 Timothy 6:20-21: (NASB) ²⁰*O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge* ²¹*which some have **professed** <1861> (announced) and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.*

Which some have professed - this is the same Greek word we saw used in **1 Timothy 2:10** for those woman making a claim to godliness. They professed godliness, but it was false, as they were more concerned with their external looks.

It is the same concept here: Through the grace of the spirit, the apostles and those close to them had the ability to properly interpret Scriptures. But others filtered it through their own thinking and corrupted the message, falsely calling it “knowledge.” It might have looked the same on the outside, but on the inside it was not. They proclaimed false truth as “truth.”

(Source: Barnes’ Notes on the Bible) *Which some have professed* - Evidently some who professed to be true Christians were attracted by false philosophy, and soon, as a consequence, were led to deny the doctrines of Christianity. This result has not been uncommon in the world.

1 Corinthians 13:8: (NASB) Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

Some churches today focus on healing and speaking in tongues. The Bible tells us those gifts would cease and only the apostles could directly pass those gifts on to someone. But people in some congregations are being taught error for truth. This does a lot of damage to the name of Christ. We need to be careful.



Which some have professed - though they professed goodness, they were not spiritually sound. We can get into trouble when we follow the wrong things. Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no.

Our personal transformation to Christlikeness is a common thread in the Bible.

Here is the context for our theme scripture:

Ephesians 4:28-29: (NASB) ²⁸*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. ²⁹Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*



Moving up from where we were to where we want to be.

He who steals must steal no longer and let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth - this is about transforming what we were to what we need to be. It is moving up the ladder of living a life of true integrity in both actions and words. This is the complete package of walking in Jesus' footsteps, from where we were to where we want to be.

The apostle adds an interesting dimension here. He is saying, "Clean up your act. If you were stealing, steal no longer. If you were cheating, don't do that anymore." Why? So we can be right with Christ, but also so we can be in a position to help others. It is not just about us personally, but also about the relationships we can create with integrity, honesty, and letting our *Yes be yes and our No, no*. We can be a Christian example of reaching out to others who may be in need.

Personal transformation is not a straight line and begins with recognizing our sins and bringing them before God:

1 John 2:1-2: (NASB) ¹*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

It is okay to make mistakes and fall down on the path, but we need to keep getting up. We can bring our sin before God through Christ as our advocate. This helps us not to be discouraged so that we can keep going. We know Jesus' sacrifice covers us, enabling us to get up and try again and work a little harder. We can refocus and learn from our previous mistakes.

The account of Zaccheus (also spelled "Zacchaeus") is helpful. He was a rich tax collector who climbed a tree so he could get a glimpse of Jesus as he walked by. From him we learn that if we have not kept our word, we need a willingness to mend our ways swiftly and generously.

Let's drop in on what happened:

Luke 19:2-9: (NASB) ²*And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. ³Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see him, for he was about to pass through that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.*





⁶And he hurried and came down and received him gladly. ⁷When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. ⁸Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much. ⁹And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.

Jesus saw the sincerity of Zaccheus' heart and knew he would follow through. He speaks directly to Jesus, ignoring the crowd talking bad about him.

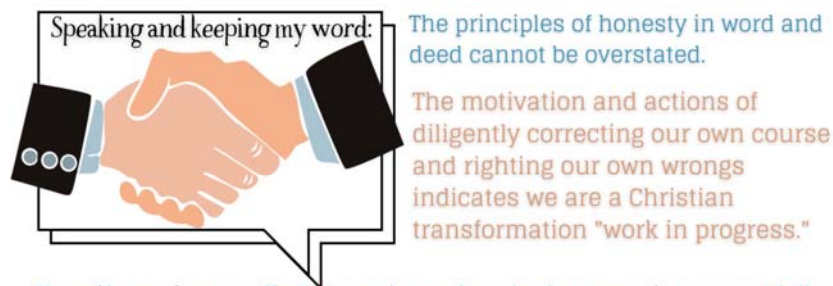
What a contrast. The crowd was grumbling that of all people, Jesus picked a loathsome tax collector! But Zaccheus displayed a deep regret for wrongdoing and voluntarily offered generous restitution based on Zaccheus' change of heart. Not only would he give half his possessions to the poor, but so far as he overcharged, he would make it right by giving back four times as much.

(Source: Albert Barnes' Commentary on the Whole Bible) *Four-fold* - Four times as much as had been unjustly taken. This was the amount that was required in the Jewish law when a sheep had been stolen, and a man was convicted of the theft by trial at law, Exodus 22:1. If he confessed it himself, without being detected and tried, he had only to restore what was stolen, and add to it a fifth part of its value, Numbers 5:6,7. The sincerity of Zaccheus' repentance was manifest by his being willing to make restoration as great as if it had been proved against him, evincing (revealing) his sense of the wrong, and his purpose to make full restitution.

In the face of public ridicule, Zacchaeus did the right thing. He acknowledged his flaws and committed to more than the reparations necessary to mend his past so that his present could be opened to the joy of following Jesus.

This is a great example of the pathway toward letting *your Yes be yes, and your No, no.*

Jesus knew Zacchaeus was sincere because he said, *Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.* This is a wonderful example of mending our ways swiftly and generously, which sends a message to God and to the people around us. It also sends a message to ourselves, that we will stand for something higher by simply letting our *Yes be yes and our No, no.*



Even if our sincere efforts to make up for a broken promise are not fully received, our heartfelt actions are blessed in God's eyes.



What if we haven't been a person of our word in the past? We've gotten sloppy in our relationships and want to change, but no one believes us or takes us seriously. They've been burned by our lack of follow-through in the past. What should we do?



The answer is simple. *Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no.* We need to live up to this whether others recognize it or not, and eventually it makes a statement.



It is accepted by our heavenly Father even if it is not accepted by others. We need to do the right thing whether anyone else likes it or not. This especially applies to keeping our word in a godly way so we may receive a godly blessing.

Promises and commitments we have not kept can devastate others. Our sincere and constant corrective actions are critical.

With all of this concern about mending our broken word, how do we continually strengthen our word moving forward?

Applying a continuous promise-keeping approach to every aspect of our lives really is the absolute bottom line for our whole conversation. Inevitably we will find that being as good as our word at all times and in all places is one of the primary ways we, as Christians, can truly glorify God in our everyday life and activities.

The point is, we send blessings to God when we live in the image of Jesus. Did Jesus ever NOT do what he said he would do? He never needed to say, "I promise, on the holiness of the temple!" No! He just did the things that were before him and his godly character, and his actions and words were looked at as godly.

Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no. God is pleased when we become a person of integrity.

The stark contrast to this attitude is the final example of "promise" in the New Testament relating to human thinking.

The Apostle Peter warned against about false prophets:

2 Peter 2:17-19: (NASB) ¹⁷*These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.* ¹⁸*For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,* ¹⁹*promising <1861> (announcing) them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.*

Here the word *promising* is again used in a negative sense.

These false teachers try to lure followers to corruption (for perhaps the ego or financial benefit of the leader) away from that which is simple, sincere, reverent and godly. This reminds us of the so-called "Prosperity Gospel" leaders.

(Source: David Guzik Bible Commentary) Springs without water - These ungodly false teachers are empty — as useless as wells without water — and like clouds that bring only darkness, and no nourishing rain.



What do we expect from a spring? Pure water. What do we look forward to from a dark cloud? Rain! People have an expectation that is absolutely unfulfilled. False teachers promising freedom is an absolute denial of the peoples' expectation. This is how convoluted the idea of promising, of announcing, ends up being in Scripture.



Whatever we were cannot and should not diminish what we are becoming!

Theme text context:

Ephesians 4:30-31: (NASB) ³⁰*Do not grieve the holy spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

Be the person of your word who stands for godly integrity and truth. Do not hold grudges.

Have the heart that says, "I am going to strive as best as I possibly can to fulfill every detail of what I'm saying." Jesus' parable about building a tower gives us the principles for truly being Christians who keep our word. This is important because it is not just about saying, "I believe in Jesus! I'm saved; everything's great!" There is a process to becoming a true Christian.

Luke 14:27-30: (NASB) ²⁷*Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.* ²⁸*For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?* ²⁹*Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,* ³⁰*saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish.*

This commitment to follow Christ is for our entire life. Before we make this serious commitment, we need to think before we act and speak. Counting the cost is a necessary and responsible approach to true discipleship. Counting the cost of our words, verbal commitments and communications is also an important aspect of our Christian life because it displays spiritual maturity. Count the cost of your words before you speak them. *Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no.*

How do we strengthen the value of our words so they can be counted on? What we say should be a reflection of who we are in Christ, not who our flesh still is.



We have to work on it. It is not something that we are immediately going to be able to transform overnight. There are several building blocks to help this process so we can be like Jesus in putting our words into spiritual perspective.



Remember that our commitment to sacrificial Christianity requires us to speak wisely:

Colossians 4:5-6: (NASB) ⁵*Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.* ⁶*Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.*

Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no. Let your speech always be with grace. There comes a point where that grace controls the words instead of me fitting my words into the grace. It is God's grace that helps us to have the simplicity of our yes or no.

Jesus had the grace of God mastered so his words were always filtered through that grace. It is who he was. We want to think about God's grace as a filter to make sure our words come out right.



Remember that just because in an emotional moment we feel like we can keep our word, it does not by itself make us capable of following through:

Matthew 26:31-35: (NASB) ³¹Then Jesus said to them, You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered. ³²But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee. ³³But Peter said to him, Even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away. ³⁴Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny me three times. ³⁵Peter said to him, Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you. All the disciples said the same thing too.

It's interesting how Peter is almost arguing with Jesus, as in, "No, no, I won't fall away. I won't deny you." It is like he is correcting Jesus: "Don't you understand how much I love you and care for you?" His promise is emphatic, perhaps partly as a gut reaction to the shocking prophecy Jesus had just given, as well as partly because in that moment Peter probably believed he would never deny his Lord because he was so attached and committed to him.

Sometimes we believe what we say at the time but lack the follow-through. Peter is a great example for us of success after failure. If the Apostle Peter failed and succeeded, we know with the Lord's help we can too.

The process for that success after failure is shown by Jesus teaching Peter what was going to happen. Jesus let Peter fall into his own conclusions in order to learn from the experience. He prayed for Peter. He didn't stop the process. He allowed the growth to happen so Peter could grow into: *Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no.* It is a dramatic lesson for us as Christians.



Let us remember to focus our words and actions on that which is reasonable based on our capacity in Christ.

Our word should be based on God's will and word in us, not how we feel:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31: (NASB) ²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹so that, just as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the LORD.

So that no man may boast before God - why is this so important? Because God is bigger and greater than we are. Without God through Christ, we are just dust and ashes. Anything good in us comes from God, and our good is just reflecting Him.

Learning, to *let your Yes be yes, and your No, no* requires our recollection of who we are and where we came from. We have God's grace to lift us up, not our own ego or accomplishments.



Let us remember to focus our words and actions on a loving and clear understanding of God’s truth:

Ephesians 4:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ,

We can *speak the truth* and NOT do it *in love* and it can be as damaging as speaking falsehoods because we are not representing the full truth. We need to be people of our word. *Speaking the truth in love* is a growing up process that helps us to mature. It is not the end result; it is the process of letting our *Yes be yes*.



It is important to teach children to make and keep promises. Why? Because they need to learn the principles of committing yourself to something and following through on it. As the adult, when our kids want this or want that, hopefully we get to a point where they say, “Dad said that’s what we’re going to do.”

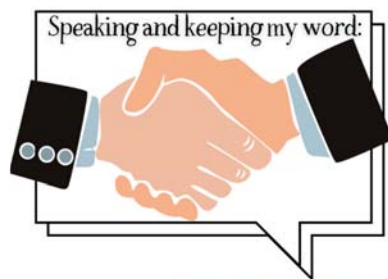
We don’t need to say, “Oh, I promise, I promise.” It should just be, “That’s what Dad said and Dad always does what he says he is going to do.” That is the level of parenting we want to get to, and we want to teach our children to grow with integrity and maturity.



Let us remember to have our word simply and always be a result of dwelling on that which builds us up spiritually:

Philippians 4:8: (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

This verse is so deep that we did a two-part series on it, Episodes 1281 and 1282: “We Are What We Think About, So What Are We Thinking About?” We learned that this is not just a nice scripture to put on our coffee cup. Each one of these phrases is so meaningful that it is important for us to *dwell on these things*.



One of the keys to true spirituality is the ability to speak not only what is true, but also that which is attainable. For Christians, this only happens when we have our hearts and minds working together to attain and maintain Christlikeness in every aspect of our lives.

The value of our word truly represents the value of our character in Christ.

If I am not one who keeps my word and works hard at keeping my word, what does that say about my character in Christ? These are important, difficult and challenging tasks. We need to learn to be a person of our word, like Jesus. We do not need to go to great lengths and dramatics to have people believe us. Simply be the person people will believe because that is a person that CAN be believed. That’s who Jesus was. As his footstep followers, we also want to be the person who can be believed in all things. *Let your Yes be yes, and your No, no.*



*So, are my promises reliable?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



@christianquestionsministries



cqbiblepodcast

Text CQREWIND to 22828

to receive our Weekly Newsletter, Show Notes and Study Questions

Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended Additional Study:

Oaths:

Ep. 1246: Does God Really Require Human Sacrifices? Contradictions Series
Clarifying Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and if we should make oaths or not
<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1246-human-sacrifices/>

Zacchaeus:

Ep. 943: Is Your Heart Looking for Jesus? The Story of Zacchaeus
Unlocking the door to accepting true joy in your life
<https://christianquestions.com/character/943-heart-looking-jesus-story-zaccheus/>

Philippians 4:8:

Ep. 1281 and 1282: We are What We Think About, So What Are We Thinking About?
Unlocking the process of refocusing our thoughts towards godliness
<https://christianquestions.com/character/1281-christian-thinking-i/>

Clarifying the difference between what we notice and what we dwell on
<https://christianquestions.com/program/philippians-4-ii/>



Three basic groups of promises:

First, (New Testament) a self-committal without ceremony:

Promise: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1862 *epaggelma*; a self-committal (by assurance of conferring some good) KJV - promise

2 Peter 1:4: (KJV) *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises <1862>: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Second, (Old Testament) a self-committal or agreement with ceremony:

Covenant: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1285 *beriyth*; a compact (because made by passing between pieces of flesh)

McClintock and Strong's Biblical Cyclopedia: 1. Properly, of a covenant between man and man; i.e., a solemn compact or agreement, either between tribes or nations (1 Samuel 11:1; Joshua 9:6,15), or between individuals (Genesis 21:44), by which each party bound himself to fulfill certain conditions, and was assured of receiving certain advantages. In making such a covenant God was solemnly invoked as witness (Genesis 31:50), whence the expression "a covenant of Jehovah" accordingly a breach of covenant was regarded as a very heinous sin (Ezekiel 17:12-20)

Malachi 2:14: (NASB) *Yet you say, For what reason? Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant <1285>.*

Third, (Old Testament) a self-committal to God:

Vow: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5087 *nadar*; to promise (to do or give something to God)

Deuteronomy 23:21-22: (NKJV) *²¹When you make a vow <5087> to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. ²²But if you abstain from vowing <5087>, it shall not be sin to you.*

Some thoughts on the kinds of things a Christian focuses on as they keep their word:

Do NOT be focused on how things look; rather, focus on what is real:

Matthew 23:27-28: (NRSV) *²⁷Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. ²⁸So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

We should promise our spouse the complete fulfillment of our covenant:

Genesis 2:21-24: (KJV) *²¹And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; ²²And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. ²³And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. ²⁴Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

We should promise our family the care they deserve:

1 Timothy 5:8: (NASB) *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*



We should promise the brotherhood our support:

Galatians 6:2: (NASB) *Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*

We should promise the brotherhood our prayerful devotion:

James 5:13-16: (NASB) ¹³*Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

We should promise all men our respect and love:

Galatians 6:9-10: (NASB) ⁹*Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*

We should promise ourselves a decisive devotion:

Joshua 24:15: (NASB) *...choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

Finally, a very inspiring account of commitment between David and Jonathan:

1 Samuel 20:1-17: (NASB) ¹*Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life? ²He said to him, Far from it, you shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. So why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so! ³Yet David vowed again, saying, Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved. But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death. ⁴Then Jonathan said to David, Whatever you say, I will do for you. ⁵So David said to Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. ⁶If your father misses me at all, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family. ⁷If he says, It is good, your servant will be safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil. ⁸Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; for why then should you bring me to your father? ⁹Jonathan said, Far be it from you! For if I should indeed learn that evil has been decided by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you about it? ¹⁰Then David said to Jonathan, Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly? ¹¹Jonathan said to David, Come, and let us go out into the field. So both of them went out to the field. ¹²Then Jonathan said to David, The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good feeling toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you? ¹³If it please my father to do you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. ¹⁴If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? ¹⁵You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth. ¹⁶So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies. ¹⁷Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.*

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1288: Are My Promises Reliable?

See:  CQRewind
SHOW NOTES

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1288-promises/>

1. Define the three New Testament words for “promise” and explain the differences. To what do most of the uses of these words refer in the New Testament? What conclusion should we realize from this and how should it affect us?
2. What advice do Paul and Peter have for women who are making a claim to godliness? What should be our priority in how we present ourselves to the world? (See 1 Timothy 2:9-10, 1 Peter 3:3-4)
3. When Paul was being threatened and falsely accused in the Acts account, how did the Roman commander’s actions reflect the highest principles of honor and integrity? How can we apply these principles to our own lives? (See Acts 23:16-30)
4. How did Jesus teach us the principle of trustworthiness? Why should it be unnecessary to make additional statements to add to our credibility? (See Matthew 5:33-37)
5. How do the three gospel accounts of the chief priests giving Judas money for betraying Jesus fully build on and develop the idea of a “promise” as used in these verses? (See Mark 14:10-11, Matthew 26:14-16, Luke 22:3-6)
6. How can we show that we are abiding by God’s will? How does humility help us to follow God’s pattern? (See Ephesians 4:25-27, Psalms 24:1-5)
7. What is the difference between a wrong heart motivation and an unrealistic perspective as reasons for not keeping our promises? What advice does the Bible give on helping us to transform our characters to become more Christlike? (See Matthew 12:33-35, 1 Timothy 6:20-21, Ephesians 4:28-29, John 2:1-2)
8. How does the story of Zacchaeus illustrate to us how to correct our course if we have wronged others? (See Luke 19:2-9)
9. What is one of the best ways we can glorify God in our everyday life? How do we count the cost of following Christ? How do we count the cost in our verbal commitments? (See Ephesians 4:30-31, Luke 14:27-30, Colossians 4:5-6)
10. How does Peter’s example of denying Jesus give us hope that we can learn and grow from our own failures? What should be the focus of our words and actions? (See Matthew 26:31-35, Ephesians 4:14-15)