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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Revisiting the Sermon on the Mount - Let Your Yes Be Yes

Matthew 5:33

Prayer: *Father, again this morning I just want to thank you for the gifts that you've given to us. We just want to thank you for the great gift of you, of the Lord Jesus Christ. I just thank you for that gift. I thank you for the other gift, Lord, of your word and your Holy Spirit. And so this morning once again as we are opening up your word, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would be guiding us, directing us and giving us insight that's of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Abraham Kuyper was a renowned statesman who lived in the first part of the 20th century. He was the prime minister of the Netherlands among many other political accomplishments but he was also famous for his theology, his reformed theology. He's also famous for a quote that he made. It's Kuyper who once said this of Jesus. He said: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry Mine!"

See, this planet and everything on it belongs first and foremost to the one who created it. And this morning we're going to be looking at an argument that Jesus makes with the Pharisees that's based on the fact of his ownership of everything in all creation. And it has to do with the practice of oath taking.

The Pharisees, as you probably know by now, they excelled at the art of managing God, or at least they thought so. What they truly excelled at was making up rules that served to reduce a relationship with God down to a series of dos and don'ts. If you did the dos and you didn't do the don'ts, you could be assured, so they taught, that you could effectively manage God.

I've made the case many times that though the Pharisee rules were onerous, they were still the most powerful religious leaders of the day. And that may not make sense to a lot of people but I submit to you that there are whole denominations in this present day that operate basically on the very same principle, and they're also successful. And here's why. You see, every living human being has within them the sense that they are more than just the top of the evolutionary heap. I mean, we all know deep down that we are more than just sophisticated animals. Ecclesiastes tells us that God has put eternity in our hearts. We have this sense that there's more to life than just simple existence. And we also have within

us an inborn conscience telling us the difference between right and wrong. *Romans 2:14* says: *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.*

So God says try as they might, most folks just cannot dismiss God outright. God says they're conflicted. That conflict is addressed in some denominations by an updated version of what the Pharisees were trying to do in Jesus's day. You see, instead of a dynamic personal relationship with the living God, folks were giving a list of things you have to do in order to be right with God. You have to get baptized, go to church, go to confession, get confirmed, go back to confession, go back to church. I know the drill because I lived it for many, many years. During that time I never, ever imagined having a personal relationship with the living God. I just knew that there were certain things that you had to do in order to keep God managed. I mean, I was given a certain set of rote prayers to pray and I was told to repeat them over and over again. I came to see God not as a person but as a force, a force to be reckoned with that could turn ugly if I didn't do it the right way.

Well, that's exactly how the Pharisees attempted to manage God.

Follow the rules, do what you're told and you don't have to worry about a personal relationship with what they seem to say is this very complex, very complicated and very scary God. And today there's whole denominations that seem to foster a relationship not so much with God but with the church itself. And God once again is seen as big and complicated and scary, not so much a person you have a relationship with but a force, something that you have to reckon with.

That's where church and religion steps in and in a manner of speaking suggests that a relationship, this personal idea of a personal relationship with the living God, it's not that necessary. The church will take care of that. I mean, they will be the middleman between you and that scary God. It will be like a lawyer or a real estate agent that's handling a difficult client and you don't even need to think about God. We'll do your thinking for you; just take care to do what we say.

I'm also not saying that every single person in those denominations think that way and that there are not people who find a relationship with the living God there. But more often than not it happens not because of but in spite of the church because God's still going to find a way to connect with his people even when the shepherds refuse to shepherd them.

So our text this morning, it goes back to where these rules for oath taking all got started. And again, it was a classic attempt by the Pharisees to reduce God down to this series of dos and don'ts.

And just like all of the others Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount, the Pharisees, they had managed to twist and torture the meaning of the law into something that looked good externally while managing to cloak and hide all kinds of internal rot. I mean, this teaching of the Pharisees had all the characteristics that made Jesus say in *Matthew 23*: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every impurity."*

You see on the surface, what we're going to be looking at this morning, it appears reasonable. I mean all the Pharisees are really looking for on the surface is that we keep our oaths to the Lord. Well, as we take up Jesus' response we'll see that there's far more to it than simply that.

We look at our text this morning, it starts out by saying -- this is Jesus' words -- He says: *"Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors."* Well, that's Jesus introducing us to the

Pharisees' teaching by identifying teaching everyone had grown familiar with. He says *"Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord."*

Well who's going to argue with something as simple as suggesting you keep your oath to the Lord? And Jesus gives a standard reply to the Pharisees' teaching, suggesting that he has a brand new way of understanding because he then says, *"but I tell you."* And again, that's Jesus' way of distinguishing his teaching from the traditions of old as taught by the Pharisees.

But what he next does is he takes apart that teaching. He says: *"But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne; or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Neither should you swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. But let your word 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one."*

So this morning I want to explain why Jesus said what he said. I can certainly see someone looking at the scripture and conclude that oath taking, it's just forbidden, just stay away. In fact

there are certain denominations that forbid any oath taking whatsoever including being inducted into the armed services or even testifying in a court of law. I think we can prove that that was not Jesus' intent.

And first we need to look at the commandment that forbids oath taking in the first place. It's found in *Exodus 20*. It says this: *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."* That's the third commandment and it forbids taking the name of the Lord in vain but that does not forbid taking an oath.

And what God is forbidding when it comes to oath is swearing falsely or flippantly using his name to cloak your statements with some kind of authority. God does not forbid us from solemnly swearing but the emphasis is on solemnity and truthfulness. After all, God says in *Leviticus 19*: *"You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."* And the emphasis in the commandment is not on the idea of swearing, it's on swearing falsely.

And on numerous occasions in the scripture we even have God stating that the key to taking a vow is not the actual taking of it but the commitment to do what you said you were going to do. Baker's New

Testament Commentary points out that the Old Testament points to numerous instances of vows taken with God's warning not about taking the vow but about doing what you said you were going to do.

Numbers 30 says: If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Deuteronomy 23 says: "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth."

And what Jesus is decrying in this statement in our text this morning, so it's not the actual taking of the vow, it's not the swearing of the oath, it's the flippant, casual way that the Pharisees had evolved that actually turned swearing into a finely honed art form. And just like they had in every other areas, you see, the Pharisees, they studied the law and they studied it from every legal angle they could; and wouldn't you know it, they came up with a very sophisticated system that would allow you all kinds of different oaths for all kinds of different occasions. The way the Pharisees saw it, making a vow before God, well now that meant something that you absolutely had to do. So they submitted that

the law said what our text this morning actually says: *You must not break your oath but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.*

Okay. I mean, that part's well and good. But the Pharisees knew and Jesus knew there's a lot more to this business of oath that meets the eye or ear. They had evolved a whole pantheon of vows suited to whatever circumstance you were in. The idea was you reserve the God stuff only for the stuff that you knew for certain that you were actually going to fulfill, but that didn't mean that you couldn't make vows for a host of other things that you were far less committed to actually doing.

If you were about to undertake something that required a lot of reinforcement, you'd trot out the big gun; you'd trot out God himself. For less trying circumstances you would trot out your everyday garden variety vow. And it became so commonplace that Jesus routinely took the Pharisees to task for it. And again, that's what he's doing this morning.

He says: *"But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne; or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Neither should you swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. But let your word 'yes' be*

'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one."

So what Jesus is doing here, he's arguing from the greater to the lesser where you establish a greater thing and then you apply the same principle to something lesser. I mean, for example, Jesus once told the anxious disciple in *Matthew 6*, he said: *"Look at the birds of the air: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"*

And so what he's saying is, look, my Father feeds every single bird in all of the world. All of them. He can feed the birds; don't you think he's capable of feeding you guys? That's how the argument works. Jesus reasons that if God is the creator, sustainer and owner of all things -- that's the greater -- then why would anyone think they had the right to only claim four of those things -- that's heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even your head -- as something that you can swear by. And again, that's the lesser.

And then Jesus goes ahead to call out those four substitutes for God that the Pharisees allowed. There was heaven, there was earth, Jerusalem and a person's own head, and Jesus says nope to all of them. He says all of these junior varsity vows, they're all based

on a false premise. And the premise is that you can separate and isolate God's glory from his creation.

To be sure now, God and his creation are separate. We're not like the polytheists who insist that creation itself is God. Instead we insist that creation is a manifestation of God's glory. And Jesus says to swear by any other aspect of God's creation as a means of avoiding swearing to God fundamentally misunderstands that all of the glory of God's creation is a reflection of who God is. So Jesus is saying you can't look at God's creation without identifying God as the center and source of all of it.

He says, you want to avoid swearing to God by swearing instead to heaven, well you're swearing at the very throne of God. He says, you think you can swear by the earth, well you're swearing by his footstool. You want to swear by Jerusalem? That's his city that's ruled by his king. You want to shrink your vow down as something as small as your own head? Guess what; even that doesn't belong to you. It belongs to the only one who alone can make your black hair -- which virtually everyone in that area had -- white; and that, too, was God.

So Jesus is taking apart the argument of the Pharisees by arguing from the greater to the lesser. He says, from as high as the

heavens down through the earth, even lower still down to Jerusalem, down to each and every individual, swearing by these objects is still invoking the God who's responsible for them. And to swear by them instead of by the God who created them is to attempt to push God out of his own creation.

Actually Jesus is making two different arguments here. The first one is he's saying when you refuse to acknowledge God in everything, you will begin to honor him in nothing; and this is no small thing. Over against the legitimate claims of Christ over his own creation are the false claims of God's enemy, the devil. His battle plan is to substitute anything and everything as worthy of glory that belongs only to God.

And you only have to look around today to see how cleverly the enemy has co-opted that which belongs only to God. It's incredibly prevalent in our culture today and it's something that God detests today as much as he did during the days of the Pharisees, and that's taking the creation of God and making it in some way equal to God. This is what the Pharisees were doing. They didn't want to call on God as witness something they didn't intend to fulfill, so instead they just lowered God's status to that of his creation. The Pharisees didn't want to cry out to God as a witness; instead they advocated crying out to the heavens, the planets, the

creatures who inhabited the planets. And Jesus saw that precisely for who it was, it was a refusal to give God the glory he was due.

Again God says what he thinks of that in *Romans 1:18*. He says this: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

God is saying here what Jesus is pointing out, he says every single thing in creation points not to itself, it points to God. And to swear by heaven or earth or Jerusalem or by your own head is to in fact swear by God while refusing to even acknowledge him. And God says it gets worse. Verse 21, he says: *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

You see what Jesus is doing in our text this morning, he's

describing this descending order that happens when you start to swear not by God but by his creation. And he starts out going from heaven, heaven to earth, to Jerusalem, to man. And then we get to Romans and it picks up on man and his desire to give homage to anything other than God and all it does is continue the downward spiral. It goes from man to birds to animals to creeping things. And when you take God out of the equation, you may start out giving homage to the heavens but you're going to quickly go into a downward spiral through earth and man and birds and animals and creeping things. We start out worshiping the sun, you're going to end up worshiping snakes and insects.

Like I said, the Pharisees had made an industry out of describing what you can swear by and how. They were a religious compliance company. And once again they succeeded in trying to define how to obey God with their lips while ignoring him with their hearts and minds. And Jesus just would not have it.

Listen to how he takes them apart in *Matthew 23*. He says: "*Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'* You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?" The Pharisees couldn't even get their false oaths right. He goes on to say in

verse 18: *"And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?"*

You got to remember the Pharisees, they were these Old Testament worshipers, they were placing more value on gold and gifts than on the temple or the altar in the temple. They had gone from the greater, which was the altar, to the lesser, which was the gift on the altar. And once again, as soon as you start this process of devaluing God down to the level of his creation, you're not going to stop.

Jesus goes on to say, once again, that you can't separate the glory of God from the creation of God. He says: *"So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it."*

And what he's saying is to swear by anything is to swear by God. It is so serious an undertaking that Jesus is saying in our text this morning it has no place whatsoever in casual conversation. This is what he says. He says: *"But I tell you, don't take an*

oath at all. But let your word 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one."

And yet it was so prevalent in Jesus' day that the Pharisees felt quite comfortable trying to regulate it. And you know, we may think this is something primitive, something unsophisticated, something backwards people do, but we do the exact same thing. We just updated it, modernized it, repackaged it for the 21st century.

You see, I don't think it's an accident at all that every single good thing in nature that God does is not attributed to God but to some mythical goddess who goes by the name of "mother nature" or maybe some manmade god named "evolution." And between those two names lies every good thing that's supposed to be attributed to God. See a glorious sunset with all the colors of the rainbow and instead of thanking God, people now thank what? Mother nature. That's a stunningly insulting form of idolatry; but since virtually everyone does it, it never even raises an eyebrow.

See the glory of a hummingbird's wings which flap -- think about this -- the hummingbird's wings flap eighty times a second but they don't really actually flap, instead they rotate them in a figure eight so that they can hover, go up, down, move sideways, a maneuver that no aircraft could ever hope to duplicate even though

a hummingbird's brain is less than the size of a grain of rice.

And folks look at that hummingbird today and they say, "Isn't evolution wonderful?" I mean, look what random chance and eons and eons of time has produced. Folks only say that because they have, like God says, become futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts are darkened, and claiming to be wise, they become the worst type of fool, the kind that doesn't even know what kind of a fool he is.

And the second argument that Jesus is making has to do with the nature of a person who feels compelled to embellish his speech with add-ons. You know, most people know of add-ons as something that's an app that you download to enhance some other kind of computer program. It's something you tack on to the original to make it look better. And so as human beings we're often tempted to use language as an add-on, something that we use to enhance our own image. It's either to bolster our claims to be telling the truth, or to make us seem bigger, brighter, stronger and smarter than we actually are. Just like the Pharisees, we can become quite comfortable with swearing.

I remember back with our -- the days when I was a youngster, I used to embellish everything by swearing. I mean, I used to remember we

used to a play sandlot football. I used to be accused of not saying enough Mississippis before I went after the quarterback. I would bolster my defense by saying, "I did so, and I swear on the Bible." And if that didn't work, I'd say, "I swear on a stack of Bibles." "I swear on a thousand stacks of Bibles." "I swear on an infinity stack of Bibles." That's the way kids do it. It didn't enhance my truth a bit.

But now we begin to see how incredibly offensive to God that is. And it's amazing how these add-ons become part of our language. Well, Jesus' solution is incredibly simple. He says: *"Let your word 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one."* And for some reason we find that next to impossible to do. As we get older, we just get a little more sophisticated with our add-ons.

When someone says to me, "This is the God's honest truth," I often wonder what was the other stuff that you were saying? If someone says, "I'm not lying," I'm tempted to say, "What were you saying before?" And the old favorite, "To tell you the truth," of course it begs the question what were you telling me before that?

I mean, I don't want to suggest here that simply engaging in the conventions of modern English parlance is some kind of sin. I just

think that misses the bigger picture and without a doubt to swear or take a vow before God without viewing it with the utmost respect is literally to take the name of God in vain, and that's an altogether serious thing. But a vow is something that God allows. 52 years ago I took a vow before God to love, honor and serve my wife. That vow is just as binding today as it was in 1971. I think most of us here understand that already. Where we have a problem though is simply letting our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no."

And here's my second point and really the bottom line of what I'm trying to say this morning. You see, the more secure we are in who we are, the less we have need of add-ons and embellishments, the more content we'll be to simply let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no."

So then the question becomes -- and it's a big one -- who are we? Well, if we're born again believers in the blood of Jesus Christ then regardless how we fit into the socioeconomic scheme of this world, whether we're paupers or presidents, we are children of a king. We are chosen, bought and paid for by God himself. And to the extent that you buy into and own that truth will be the extent of your security in Christ.

Jesus expects his disciples will be people whose character doesn't require add-ons or embellishments because we already acquired the greatest embellishment there is and that's Jesus Christ. That's the gospel that makes that possible. See, the bottom line is the more you understand the God of the gospel, the less you have need of any enhancement whatsoever. The heart of the gospel is that the sovereign creator of the universe, he became one of us. He was born in a manger to peasant parents and lived a life of a humble carpenter's son and he lived that life perfectly so he could offer it up on a cross as payment for our imperfection. And God had a plan to ransom and rescue from every tribe, tongue and nation of all the people who were separated from God by sin, a people who he would call his own. Before the earth had even formed its foundations God had chosen the ones that he would fix his love on. And the bizarre thing for us is that his criterion for choosing remains a mystery to this day. He just said simply in *Romans 9*, he said: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

People say, that's not fair. How unfair of God to choose some and not others? But you also have to understand that God chose from a pool of people who had rejected his rule, denied him the glory he was due, who uniformly hated him and wanted nothing to do with him.

I mean, the very creatures that God made himself vulnerable to by becoming one of us responded to that outpouring of love by stripping God naked and crucifying him. So the question isn't why doesn't God love all of us equally; the question is why is God willing to love any of us at all?

I often say those who object to God choosing some -- what Charles Spurgeon once said, Spurgeon said, "Why do you care if God chooses to give me something that you have no desire to possess?"

I mean, offer this same gospel to your friend, your neighbor, your co-worker and chances are he's going to deeply resent you as holier than thou or simply think you're a nut job for trying. Of course that should never stop us from trying because we never know whom God has prepared ahead of time to hear what we have to say. And that's why what we have to say should be nothing but the truth because it alone has the power to save. God says in *Hebrews 4*:
For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Our "yes" should simply be "yes" and our "no" should simply be "no" because the God who chose us is the same God who will give his

simple truth all the power it needs to save others without any add-ons, without any embellishments. So knowing who we are will determine what we say. And again it begs the question, okay, who are we? Well, this is what God says. He says that -- quote -- *he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

What God is saying here is before the earth was even formed he predestined us to be adopted as his children so that your life and my life could shine to the praise of his glorious grace. So God chose each of us. But before you see that as your own embellishment, as your own accomplishment, understand God's view of his choosing. This is what he said in *1 Corinthians 1*. He said: *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God,*

righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

See, God chose me not because I was worthy to be chosen but because -- quote -- *he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills.* He chose me like he chose the nation of Israel, for reasons known ultimately only to him. All I can say is he loves me because he's chosen to love me. I don't get that.

Author John Fisher once said this, he said: "It's not that God got a good deal here. We are the ones who got the deal. We became valuable at the cross and not a second before. We were not worthy of this death. He made us worthy in his death. He put the value on us when he redeemed us by his blood. He didn't have to do this. No great law of the universe would've held God in court for permanently doing away with his own sinful scarred creation. He was a spotless lamb. We are the guilty sinners and in this incomprehensible transaction at the cross he gave us righteousness and took on our sin. In the cross alone, I am righteous. I am worthy to be called his because of what he did, not because of what I am. His death on the cross bestowed this value on me. The result of this gospel is that we are eternally caught by surprise, out of breath, flabbergasted that this would happen to us."

And the more flabbergasted I am, the more I realize how eternally privileged I am, the less I need to add on or embellish anything I say. I can just let my "yes" be "yes" and my "no" be "no," because I'm loved by the King of the universe who died to set me free from the sin that had enslaved me. My value comes from him. Again listen to what God says in *1 Peter 2*. He says: *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

That's wonderful, but that begs another question. How do I know if I've been chosen by God? And again, let me answer that question like Jesus often did with another question, and that question is: Why are you here today? As I often said, there's a thousand other places that you could be but here. God says in *1 Corinthians 1:18*: *The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

See, the word of God doesn't begin to make sense until God does a work in your heart and those who are chosen by God, they're first called by God. It was Jesus who said, *"For many are called, but few are chosen."* And all of us who are no longer seeing the cross

as foolishness, we're here because we're either curious or committed and being committed always starts out by being curious because even that is a gift of God.

So are you committed to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Well then recognize the privilege that you've been given is greater than those of presidents, princes and kings. In fact you're a future prince and ruler of the universe along with Christ, a people so privileged have no need of embellishments, have no need of add-ons. They can simply let their "yes" be "yes" and their "no" be "no."

And if you've not made a commitment to Jesus Christ and you're here in some way just because you're curious, I say even that curiosity, that's a gift from God. I've said it many, many times, if you're curious, stay; speak to one of us. I'd love to sit down and chat with you. We would love to have the privilege of turning by the grace of God alone your curiosity into a commitment. We'd love to help you with your yeses and your nos, to say yes to the kingdom of God and no to this sin cursed kingdom of man. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your gift, the inexpressible gift of salvation. Lord, I just again, I'm flabbergasted, as John Fisher says, that you chose me, flabbergasted that you placed in me a desire to pursue you, and I thank you for that incredible gift.

And Lord, because we are chosen by the King of kings, Lord of lords, we have no need of add-ons or embellishments. We can simply let our "yesses" be "yes" and our "nos" be "no." Give us the grace, the strength, and the wisdom to do just that, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.