



January 26, 2020

Luke 16:14-18

SCRIPTURE

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵ He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it. ¹⁷ It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

¹⁸ "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

COMMENTARY

16:14. The disciples (v. 1) were not the only people listening to Jesus. Pharisees, constantly on the watch to trap him, eavesdropped. Naturally, they scoffed at such teaching. They were in the upper financial and social echelons of Jewish society and wanted to do everything by the rules. Luke describes them with one phrase: lovers of money. They tried to serve two masters and thought they were doing a fine job of this. They had no intention of being generous with their money except on those public occasions when it raised their esteem in the eyes of the public.

16:15. Their actions had one purpose—to win public approval and to make others think they were God's favorite people. The public may see you as righteous, religious, and wise. God knows otherwise. What people admire, God detests. So take your choice.

Who will be your master—the people or God? In whose eyes do you want justification: people's or God's?

16:16. Jesus addressed experts on God's Word, so he based his discussion on their field of expertise. In so doing he quietly assigned his opponents to an out-of-date, invalid era. The law and the prophets ruled until John the Baptist came. They were God's method of revelation for people up until John. John introduced something, or someone, better than the law and the prophets. John introduced Jesus. Jesus introduced the presence of the kingdom of God. It was not enough anymore to be an expert in explaining and in obeying God's Word found in the law and the prophets. Now one must answer the call to enter God's kingdom. Pharisees, if you want to keep up to date with God, Jesus declared, then listen to the new Word of God—the Word taught and revealed in the life of Jesus.

16:17. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God present in his ministry. This does not mean he discarded the written word of the law and the prophets. The Old Testament remained valid. It would be simpler to have the universe disappear from sight than to do away with the authority of God's Word. The Old Testament is incomplete and cannot be the entire center of life, as it was for the Pharisees, but its teachings are still valid. Their validity, however, must be held in light of the new revelation in Jesus. Jesus showed the spirit, meaning, and purpose of the law in a new and radically different manner than the Pharisees viewed the law. The law was not a source of threat and judgment to hold over people's heads. The law was an opportunity to express love to God through obedience and to express love to other people through seeing the centrality of the law's call to love your neighbor, to help the poor, to care for orphans and widows. The law is not a road to self-justification. It is a road to selfless ministry to God and to others.

Viewed in Jesus' way, the law will never lose its power. Not even the smallest part of one letter can be taken away, for that smallest part of a Hebrew or Aramaic letter could mean the difference between two letters and thus the difference between two words. It would be the same thing as taking the bottom horizontal leg off an E or the angular line at the bottom of an R, suddenly changing these letters to F and P. Christ brings full meaning and understanding and obedience to God's Word. He does not want to replace it.

16:18. This verse appears out of place here. Nothing in the context prepares us for a discussion of divorce and remarriage. It serves as an example of what Jesus had just claimed—the ongoing validity of God's law.

Apparently Jesus took up a rabbinic dispute concerning legitimate and illegitimate divorce. Deuteronomy 22:13-30 and 24:1-5 provided the basis for arguments about marriage and divorce. Malachi 2:13-16 gives the strong prophetic condemnation of divorce: God hates divorce. Jesus combined this with the Old Testament teachings on adultery (Exod. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Deut. 5:18; 22:22). He then took the strongest stand possible, saying divorce is equal to adultery. In so doing he did not say everything that could be said on divorce and remarriage (see "Deeper Discoveries"). He did show that

no one in Judaism had a stronger respect for the family or a stronger determination to fulfill the letter of the law. The Pharisees could hear Jesus say that his coming brought a new era in the history of salvation. They could not condemn him for making light of God's law. He stood as the law's staunchest defender.

MAIN POINT

Believers in Christ must not primarily seek to please people, but seek to honor God and obey His Word.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who is someone in your life that you want to please (i.e. boss, parent, spouse, child, friend, etc.)?

Is it OK to want to please people? Explain.

What are some signs a person's desire to please another person is in conflict with his or her relationship to the Lord?

Of course we want to please the people we love. Sometimes, we even want to please people we aren't close to so that they will appreciate us and our work. The caution for believers, though, is that when our primary aim is to please people, we will undoubtedly fail to hit the ultimate target of pleasing God. The Pharisees in Jesus' day serve as a cautionary tale for us today. Self-justification does not work with God; He is interested that our hearts are committed to Him above all else.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- Ask a volunteer to read Luke 16:14-15.

Why do you think the Pharisees' actions seemed favored in the sight of men, but were actually detestable in the sight of God?

Why did Jesus use such strong language here?

Since God loves us, how can it be that what people esteem is revolting or detestable to God?

By what measure were these religious leaders justifying themselves?

By what measure are we justified before God?

Give an example of how this same problem might play out in the lives of believers today.

What are some signs a person might be attempting to justify himself by the measure of public opinion? (Ex. allowing culture, not God's Word, to direct your steps; keeping secret sins.)

The context of Jesus' words here involved a lesson on wealth and possessions. The Pharisees were wealthy and had no intention of being generous with their money, except in occasions when it raised their esteem in the eyes of the public.

Do you think Jesus wanted the Pharisees to stop giving or was He calling them to something else? Explain.

What about the disciples? They were not wealthy. How did Jesus' teaching here apply to them?

It is critical to remember that God is a loving Father who wants to connect with our hearts. He is not impressed by the same things the world is impressed by. He is the Perfect Father, desiring what is best for us. The reality is, submitting all areas of our hearts and lives to Him is for our best. To do that, we must acknowledge the areas of our lives that fall short of His standard, come to Him seeking forgiveness and transformation, and walk in honest and loving relationship with Him.

- Ask a volunteer to read Luke 16:16-18.

Does verse 16 mean that you don't have to obey God's commands to enter His kingdom? Why not?

How does verse 17 help you understand what Jesus did and did not mean in verse 16?

Jesus' use of "the Law and the Prophets" referred to two key sections of the Old Testament. During His ministry, Jesus was accused of preaching a new religion because His teaching often contradicted the common beliefs of His day. In this passage, Jesus debunked the myth that His teaching contradicted the Old Testament. His goals were to teach them the underlying principles behind God's rules and to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah.

Throughout church history, people have argued that if Jesus fulfilled the Law by keeping it perfectly and paying its penalty on our behalf, then the Law must be pointless for Christians. This argument goes back almost as far as the end of Jesus' sermon. In the days of the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church and the reformers debated the purpose of the Law. The Reformers used the Sermon on the Mount as one of the key Scripture passages to support their belief that the Law was still vitally

important for believers. One of the purposes they stated was that the Law curbed our sinfulness by giving us a standard to live by. Verses 17-18 support this conclusion. Jesus wasn't removing the standard of morality God had set. Rather, He Himself fulfilled the Law and invites all who would believe in Him to enter into His kingdom—not by outward actions but by inward, heart-change.

What does it mean to enter the kingdom of God?

Why is entering God's kingdom an "urgent" invitation?

**Do most people think the condition of their heart before God is an urgent matter, or something that they can deal with eventually?
Looking back at verse 15, how would Jesus respond to that attitude?**

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What practical help would you give someone who says they know their heart isn't right with God?

In what situations or relationships are you tempted to live for the approval of people instead of giving your heart completely to God?

How is God speaking to you about that today?

What about our group? Are we seeking to please people or to honor God and obey His Word?

What steps can we take to fix our hearts on the latter rather than the former?

PRAYER

Thank God that He knows our hearts and still loves us unconditionally. Acknowledge your tendency to seek the approval of people. Invite Him to teach you how to faithfully follow Him with a clean and pure heart.