

POTOMAC HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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June 30, 2002

What Jesus said about the Law “Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke

Luke 16:14-18

OPENING THOUGHTS: *“We’re back to Luke.”*¹

Wow, it seems like I’ve been away for a while, so we need to get back to Luke and the context of what’s been going on so far. We are in one of the major teaching sections of Luke’s Gospel. And day after day Jesus has been teaching in stories and parables. Day after day in the sun, rain, heat, dust, in the streets and by the lakes, He walked and talked, sat and ate with people, moving among them. The ground is still there; the hills are still almost the same. Some of the rocks, if they could speak, might be able to tell what He said. What Dr. Luke recorded did not happen on another planet, but on this earth. The sun looked the same, at sunrise and sunset; as it would today if you visited Palestine, and it’s the same sun and moon you see today. Jesus taught things that were important to people then, and He made it possible for us to learn the same things by having men carefully write them down.

I think it’s strange, that both the ones who heard Jesus’ teaching with their ears and the ones who read His teaching with their eyes, have, through the years, done the same thing ... some have **believed** what He said, and some have **scoffed** at what He said.

People were just as sarcastic and unbelieving when they stood looking into the eyes of Jesus, as they are now when they read His Word.

And the most sarcastic ones were the ones who read the Old Testament but had lost any keen feeling about it, or had lost the sharpness of what it said, because they had covered it up with so many little rules of their own.

These were people who should have known better ... because they had the Law. And they read the Law. And they knew the Law.

But they didn’t know better. They were the teachers of the religious law, the Scribes and the Pharisees.

To pick up the context of Luke 16, the Pharisees were standing around when Jesus told a parable about a manager who worked for a rich man and through fraud and dishonesty had wasted his money and been a poor steward.

And so Jesus had just finished telling this parable and then He made a rather strong statement; Jesus said, verse 13, *“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

¹ The introduction and part of the exposition of the text is adapted from Everybody Can Know by Francis & Edith Schaeffer, pages 257-261.

In other words, you can't serve two men with totally different basic principles and values ... you can't be honest and work for two men who have totally opposite ideas about what's most important.

"You can't serve God and money."

You cannot put God first and money first. You can't have money as your integration point and God as your integration point. Your integration point is that one thing which ties your whole life together. It's the one thing that you put first, that makes everything else worthwhile, that is first in your life, so much so, that you will make changes in **how you live** in order to keep that thing first.

And if God is your integration point, if God comes first, then you think about Him and what He would have you do. You decide to do or not to do something because you want to trust God and love Him, or because it's something that He has clearly said to you in His Word, the Bible. To you, God is the most important person in the world, and following Him matters most.

However, if money is your integration point, then money comes first. If anything interferes with making money, having money, or spending money, you push it aside. Wealth is the center of your life, and your checkbook is in your thinking far more than the Bible is. In fact, quite often, you don't bother to look at what the Bible says at all.

Jesus calls it "serving God or serving money," and He says you can't do both. Now the Pharisees were listening to this very carefully, and we pick up the text in verse 14 ...

Luke 16:14-18, *"The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, naturally scoffed at all this. [15] Then He said to them, "You like to look good in public, but God knows your evil hearts. What this world honors is an abomination in the sight of God.*

[16] "Until John the Baptist began to preach, the laws of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and eager multitudes are forcing their way in. [17] But that doesn't mean that the law has lost its force in even the smallest point. It is stronger and more permanent than heaven and earth.

[18] "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.""

We're going to take this passage verse by verse today and see what Jesus said and did and what lessons we can learn from it.

We'll start with verse 14 ...

v. 14: THE SCOFFING OF THE PHARISEES²

"The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, naturally scoffed at all this."

First thing we are told here is that that Pharisees dearly loved their money, which put them quite at odds with what Jesus has just said. They coveted money and things, and they didn't like hearing what Jesus was saying, and so they 'scoffed' at Him. Some versions say they 'derided' Him, made Him the object of derision and ridicule. They made fun of Him.

People make fun of someone else in order to feel superior to them. And in this case, the

2 Parts of the exposition of the text has been adapted from the sermon, "God's Unchanging Law," found in The Gospel of Luke, Volume 2 by Frank Barker, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL and a few parts are taken from Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible.

Pharisees made fun of Jesus so they could think that they were **better** than Jesus, and then they could forget what He was saying, and not let it bother them. And in response, Jesus would tell them, *“You like to look good in public, but God knows your evil hearts.”* They were trying to justify themselves in front of others by doing this.

Now, when it says they *“scoffed at all this,”* the *“all this”* refers to what Christ had just been saying about stewardship. He had just finished telling them the Parable of the Dishonest Manager and He had emphasized the importance of using our material wealth for spiritual things in order to impact lives for eternity.

Now were the Pharisees ignorant of the Old Testament?

Not at all. They had it and read it and studied it. And there stood Jesus teaching them about money right in line with the Old Testament.

It was as if right before their eyes they had the choice of God – the Word of God and wealth – money.

Now if we put a Bible down right here and a checkbook down over here (now I realize that my checkbook is not much of a temptation, perhaps if we put all of our checkbooks together, this would be really tempting) and then asked the question, *“Which will you serve - God or money?”*

Now this doesn't mean that you can't ever have any money if you choose to serve God. He can call you to make a great deal of money, if that's His plan for you. But the question is, *“Which are you going to put first? Which are you going to have as the central thing in your life?”*

Now the Pharisees were scoffing at this! They made fun of Him! They laughed at Him! Why?

Because they **loved** money!

Not only did they love money, they **lived** for money.

Oh, they were righteous on the outside, leaders in the synagogue, but on the inside they loved their stuff.

And it's still common today for people to make fun of Biblical teaching when they are resolved not to follow it.

Of course, what Jesus said was contrary to the opinions of the day.

And what He said is contrary to the opinions of our day too.

You see, Jesus was pretty radical here.

What He was telling these men was designed to turn them away from a sin that they were resolved to hold on to.

And when people aren't willing to change, they attack. And often, the attack is disguised as mocking, or scoffing, or derision.

But do you really think that Jesus would let them get off that easily? Look at verse 15 ...

v. 15: THE REBUKING OF THE PHARISEES³

“Then He said to them, “You like to look good in public, but God knows your evil hearts. What this world honors is an abomination in the sight of God.”

First they try to, as the NIV says, *“justify yourselves in the eyes of men,”* or, as the Message says, *“You are masters at making yourselves look good in front of other, but God*

³ Part of this section is adapted from Practical Religion by Bishop J. C. Ryle, pages 35-45 and The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke by William Barclay, pages 210-212.

knows what's behind the appearance."

They are basically denying the charges against themselves, claiming that this is the norm, this is proper, we're not doing anything wrong, this is what everyone does!"

But "*God knows what's behind the appearance.*"

God knows the heart. And **Jeremiah 17:9** says, "*The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?*"

God knows. God knows our hidden motives and agendas.

God knows what we're really living for.

The Pharisees tended to connect earthly prosperity with goodness; wealth was a sign that a man was a good man. So the Pharisees put on a parade of goodness and they regarded material prosperity as a reward for that goodness.

It's bad enough for a man to think he's a good man; it's worse when he points to **money** as the proof of his goodness.

But God knew what they were living for. And it was the opposite of what they should have been living for. Even though they tried to make it look good on the outside, it lacked reality, it wasn't real.

They knew religion, but they didn't know God.

Bishop J. C. Ryle, of the Church of England, lived in the early 20th Century and wrote a book entitled, Practical Religion. In it, he has a chapter on "Reality" which is based on **1 John 3:18**, "*Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.*"

He points out that many of Jesus' parables were intended to show a strong contrast between the real believer and the merely religious. I think His miracles do the same thing. They bring out in striking colors the difference between reality and unreality in spiritual things. They all show the uselessness and danger of any Christianity which is not real and true.

The Pharisees are saying, in effect, "I do believe, and you don't."

While the real believer is saying, **Mark 9:24** (NIV), "***I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!***"

So how do you know which camp you belong to.

Well, Bishop Ryle asks, "What is reality in religion? How should we describe it? What do I mean when I use the word real?"

I mean that which is genuine, and sincere, and honest, and thorough. I mean that which is not base, and hollow, and formal, and false, and counterfeit, and sham, and nominal. "Real" religion is not mere show, and pretence, and skin-deep feeling, and temporary profession, and outside work. It is something inward, solid, substantial, intrinsic, living, lasting.

For one thing, if you would know whether your religion is real, try it by the place which it occupies in your inner man. It is not enough that it is in your head. You may know the truth, ... and believe the truth, and yet be wrong in God's sight. It is not enough that it is on your lips. ... You may say "Amen" ... and yet have nothing more than outward religion. It is not enough that it is in your feelings. You may weep under preaching one day, ... and yet be dead to God. Your religion, if it is real, and given by the Holy [Spirit], must be in your heart. It must occupy the citadel. It must hold the reins. It must sway the affections. It must lead the will. It must direct the tastes. It must influence the choices and decisions. It must fill the deepest [place] in your soul.

In the last place, if you would know whether your religion is real, try it by your feelings

and habits about the means of grace. Prove it by the Sunday. Is that day a season of weariness and constraint, or delight and refreshment?

What are your feelings about public prayer and praise, about the preaching of God's Word, and the administration of the Lord's Supper? Are they things to which you give a cold assent, and tolerate them as proper? Or, are they things in which you take pleasure and without which you could not live happy?

Do you find it essential to read the Bible regularly and to speak to God in prayer? Or, do you find these practices irksome, and either slur them over, or neglect them altogether?

These questions deserve your attention. If the means of grace are not as necessary to your soul as meat and drink are to your body, you may well doubt whether your religion is "real."

Those are hard words.

But Jesus spoke hard words. He didn't flinch when the truth made folks uncomfortable. And He didn't stop with a rebuke, but went on to talk about ...

v. 16: **THE CHANGE FOR THE PHARISEES**

"Until John the Baptist began to preach, the laws of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and eager multitudes are forcing their way in."

Jesus is telling the Pharisees, look, you had the Law and the Prophets, which is a way of referring to the Old Testament, but now "*the kingdom of God is preached.*" The Kingdom of God is that realm over which God reigns ... and that realm includes your hearts. God wants to reign over your hearts. It's not just an outside thing any more, now it's an inside thing.

And there are lots of people, "*eager multitudes,*" who weren't very good at the exercise of outward religion, but who are now hungry and thirsty for real bread and living water, who want the real, inward relationship that comes through faith and repentance.

And those who should understand this ... don't get it.

And those who shouldn't ... "*are forcing their way in.*"

Now the Pharisees accusation against Jesus, like the one they made against the Apostle Paul, is ... "so, doesn't the Law matter anymore? Has it become meaningless? Do we no longer have to do what it says?"

Now remember, the Pharisees had added a whole bunch of their own little laws to the Bible. And they referred to all of it as the Law, both the Biblical Law and their additional laws. What Jesus is saying is that **their** laws don't matter a bit.

But that doesn't mean that **the Law** doesn't matter.

'Not at all,' says Jesus.

And He delivers another round of ...

v. 17: **THE TRUTH FOR THE PHARISEES**

"But that doesn't mean that the law has lost its force in even the smallest point. It is stronger and more permanent than heaven and earth."

Jesus says, "I'm not setting aside any of the Law. In fact, I am upholding the Law in every way. It is stronger and more permanent than heaven and earth." Other versions say, "*It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away.*"

The Law serves several purposes. First, it convicts us of sin. It shows us how we fail to measure up. The Apostle Paul, writing in **Romans 7:7-9, 14b**, says, "*Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is evil? Of course not! The law is not sinful, but **it was the law that showed***

*me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "Do not covet." [8] But sin took advantage of this law and aroused all kinds of forbidden desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. [9] I felt fine when I did not understand what the law demanded. **But when I learned the truth, I realized I had broken the law and was a sinner, doomed to die. ... The law is good, then. The trouble is not with the law but with me ...***

Second, the Law drives us to Christ. It points us to our need of a Savior, One who died for our sins.

And third, it teaches us how to live.

An old puritan said that the Law sends us to the Gospel that we may be justified, or made right with God. And then the Gospel sends us back to the Law so we can learn how we are to live now that we're justified.

The Law shows forgiven people how to live.

A man named Lester Roloff had a way of illustrating this that I really like.

He says that he didn't feel good about himself. So he went to Doctor Law and said, "Doctor Law, I've got trouble. I've got trouble with my feet. They keep going to the wrong places."

Dr. Law said, "No son, It's your heart."

Lester said, "No, Doc. I think it might be my hands. They keep doing the wrong things."

And Dr. Law said, "No, It's your heart."

Lester said, "No, Doc. Actually, I believe it's my eyes. They keep looking at the wrong things."

Dr. Law said, "No, It's your heart."

Lester said, "Really, it's probably my tongue. I keep saying the wrong things."

Dr. Law said, "No, It's your heart."

So Lester said, "You know Doc, no matter what I say, you come back with the same diagnosis. I'm not sure you're a very good doctor. I'm going to get a second opinion."

So Lester went to Dr. Religion.

And Dr. Religion said, "What you need is to go to church."

So Lester tried that, but it didn't seem to help.

So he went back to Dr. Religion.

And Dr. Religion said, "Have you been baptized? You need to do that."

So Lester got baptized. But the foot problem, and the hand problem, and the eye problem, and the tongue problem were all still there.

And he got so discouraged that he finally went back to Dr. Law.

And Dr. Law said, "It's your heart."

And Lester said, "So, Doc, what do I have to do?"

And the Doc said, "You have to have heart surgery. You need a new heart."

"Do you do that?"

"Nope, but I'll show you who does."

And so Dr. Law took Lester across the hall to Dr. Grace.

Now Dr. Law was a pretty ugly, old guy. But Dr. Grace was a fine-looking young man.

So Lester asked, "So Dr. Grace, you do heart surgery, huh?"

And Dr. Grace said, "Yes, I do."

"How much is this going to cost?"

“Nothing, it’s absolutely free. A friend already paid for it.”

So Dr. Grace operated, and Lester said, “Dr. Law was right. That was a vile heart that he took out. It was awful. And he put in a brand new one and I feel so much better.”

And Dr. Grace told Lester, “Why don’t you go back to Dr. Law and tell him that yourself.”

So Lester went back to Dr. Law, and the old man looked so much better than he used to. His whole appearance had changed.

You see what Lester has brought before us?

The Law sends us to the Gospel that we may be made right with God. And then the Gospel sends us back to the Law so we can learn how we are to live now that we’re right with God. The great Reformed scholar, John Wesley, once said, “The third use of the Law is to keep us **alive**.”

And to illustrate the power and the permanence of the Law, Jesus gives ...

v. 18: AN ILLUSTRATION FOR THE PHARISEES ⁴

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

The old rule was no divorce. God hates divorce.

But the new rule, the stronger and more permanent understanding of the Law, is that everyone else has to uphold the Law too. If person A breaks the Law, gets divorced, and person B then marries person A, then person B has broken the Law too.

Now Jesus is not giving definitive teaching here on marriage and divorce.

He’s illustrating a principle about the Law and the Pharisees additional laws.

The Rabbinic school of Hillel basically taught that a man could divorce a woman for virtually any reason; from disrespect to poor cooking to looking at another man. A woman couldn’t divorce a man for **any** reason. Divorce was a privilege reserved to men. And people were using the Rabbinic law to get around the Biblical Law. They could say they were following the law, the Rabbinic law, while they were ignoring the real Law, the Biblical Law.

So regardless of Pharisaic attempts to circumvent and evade the Law, the moral Law of God retains its force. And Jesus uses the issue of divorce to uphold the strength of the Biblical Law.

Now, I don’t have time or space to talk about marriage and divorce here, and that’s not the point of this passage. But I have put a footnote in the message outline that addresses this in a small way. ⁵

What Jesus wants the Pharisees to understand is that the Law stands. It is stronger and more permanent than ever before. It speaks to the most difficult issues and it is sufficient to teach us how to live in a right relationship with God.

We don’t have to add to it, as the Pharisees did then, and legalists do now.

Nor are we to take away from it, and pretend it doesn’t matter anymore.

The Law, the real Law, convicts us of sin, in this case, the sin of loving money more than

⁴ Parts of this section are adapted from Barclay and parts from New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke by William Hendriksen, page 774.

⁵ There are Biblical grounds for divorce consisting of abandonment and adultery, and those are dealt with elsewhere in the Bible. I know we have a number of divorced people in this church, and in every church, so if you want to read a lengthy treatment of this topic, the PCA has published a long paper laying out the Biblical position on marriage and divorce. Also Jay Adams has published a book that I’ve found helpful called Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage.

God, it then drives us to Christ for forgiveness, and then it shows us how to live so that we love God first, and we love our neighbor second, and we don't love money at all.

REFLECTIONS: “Both Radical and Conservative”⁶

It is not sufficiently understood that our Lord Jesus Christ was at one and the same time a conservative and a radical although in different spheres.

There is no question that he was conservative in his attitude to Scripture. *“The Scripture cannot be broken”*, He said, and in John 10 and Matthew 5 He said, *“I did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.”* And, *“not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”*

One of Jesus' chief complaints against contemporary Jewish leaders concerned their disrespect for Old Testament Scripture and their lack of a true submission to its divine authority.

But Jesus may also be truly described as a radical. He was a keen, fearless critic of the Jewish Establishment, not only because of their insufficient loyalty to God's Word, but also because of their **exaggerated** loyalty to their own human traditions. Jesus had the audacity to sweep away centuries of inherited traditions ('the traditions of the elders') in order that God's Word might again be seen and obeyed.

He was also very daring in his breaches of social convention.

He insisted on caring for those sections of the community who were normally despised.

He spoke to women in public, which in His day was not done.

He invited children to come to Him, although in Roman society unwanted children were commonly 'exposed' or dumped, and His own disciples took it for granted that He would not want to be bothered with them.

He allowed prostitutes to touch Him (Pharisees recoiled from them in horror) and He actually touched an untouchable leper (Pharisees threw stones at them to make them keep their distance).

In these and other ways Jesus refused to be bound by human custom; His mind and conscience were bound by God's Word alone.

Thus Jesus was a unique combination of the conservative and the radical, conservative towards Scripture and radical in His biblical scrutiny of everything else.

There is no doubt that He put both the will of God and the Word of God first in all things. And in this passage, He's telling us to do the same thing.

Put God first.

And all who agree said, “Amen.”

⁶ Taken from Balanced Christianity, p. 29 and excerpted from Authentic Christianity, p. 41, both by John R. W. Stott. Found in “THE JOHN STOTT DAILY THOUGHT, an email devotional, June 22, 2002.