

## **The Gospel According to Luke**

Luke 16:13-18

Reading: Luke 16:13-18

Sermon #68

February 16, 2020

### **Bending the Truth for Gain**

Some of you may remember a time in school when you did not do as well as you would have hoped on a particular test. You may have given your parents a number of excuses, but for me the bottom line was I had not studied enough. Occasionally, if the class, as a whole, did poorly or their collective scores were not quite up to par, the teacher would add points to bring the overall class average up to where the teacher or the school wanted the scores to be. This is a dreadful practice. Looking back, I liked it while in school but now I see the real issue was not with the exam but with me and my fellow classmates' commitment to study and prepare for the exam. Adjusting the grades is basically saying, there is nothing wrong with the students; it was the test that was too hard; all though this is possible, the truth is; it was usually the students who were not prepared. Grading to allow the majority of students to succeed with lower standards is destructive.

Through these kinds of practices, we can grow up expecting the standard to be adjusted to us rather than us conforming to the standard. This has brought us to today, where our society and much of the world keeps lowering the standard and no longer believes in absolute truth, but lives relative truth, which is not truth. Truth is adjusted to meet the needs of the person, group or society. However, God's Law, found in the Old Testament, is the standard and it is eternal truth. We must be very careful to work with God and conform to His standard rather than adjusting the Laws of God to conform to us. God does not believe in relative truth.

Today, we are shown a group of religious Pharisees who were replacing God's Law with manmade rules in an attempt to lower the standard to cover their

sin. It is wrong thing when someone else lowers the standard to help someone, but the standard is not consistent with God and truth but it gets infinitely worse when one begins to do this in their own life. When this happens, the sky is the limit. There are no longer any boundaries set and you create for yourself a license to sin and you can reason by way of your sin that it is not sin, adjusting the truth and ending up thinking that God approves of your sin.

## **Pray**

**Please stand to hear God’s Word read by Ivan. ... Please be seated.**

God, our Father, this morning we desire for Your unchanging eternal Law to conform us to the image of Christ so our lives will bring You glory. Guide us in through Your Word this morning by giving us Your spiritual wisdom. Amen.

## **Justifying the Love of Sin**

For this first attempt to adjust God’s Law to approve their sin, we need to go back and begin at verse 13, “**No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.**” Moving on to Luke’s observation in verse 14, “**The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.**” These Pharisees heard Jesus teach the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. They heard Him as He taught His disciples about the way in which a follower should be as shrewd toward eternal things as the children of the world are with their material goods. They heard Jesus teach the truth that one cannot serve God and money. At this point, their grumbling at the beginning of chapter 15 turned to mocking and ridicule of Jesus. In ridiculing Jesus, they disassociate themselves from him completely and the Word of God he

has presented. Not only that, but their goal is to discredit Him in front of His would-be followers to turn people away from God's only Son. By putting down Jesus they hoped to elevate themselves and continue with life as it currently was – a life of rationalized sin.

Luke, the logical writer, places a truth obvious before everyone; **“The Pharisees, were lovers of money.”** Based on all Jesus has been teaching, this really speaks volumes – all the parables and teachings from chapter 15 to 16 have fallen on deaf ears. Last week Jesus concluded with the fact that if you treasure money you do not treasure God. Matthew in chapter 6 and Luke in chapter 12 record Jesus' clear words, **“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”** (Luke 12:34) Here in chapter 16, Jesus again echoes this truth, **“You cannot serve God and money.”**

My beloved, we must avoid the trap of the devil that says you can play in both fields; that you can pursue money and God, you can love money and God at the same time. Prosperity Christianity heard on TV, radio and in some churches is a doctrine that the devil uses to make people just like he had made **“The Pharisees were lovers of money.”** Prosperity Christianity is a heresy! Luke's record of the Gospel and Jesus' words makes the point clear here in this verse and throughout the New Testament the Pharisees loved money not God. My beloved what is it you love? Is money an idol or a tool for the kingdom? This is what God wants us to see here. If your heart's affections are fixed on money then the teachings of Christ will seem foolish and absurd to you, just as it did to the Pharisees. We read in Luke 16:13 **“No servant can serve two masters”** and see the truth and logic of Jesus in this verse, but the Pharisees saw it as absurdity and ridiculed Jesus for it. How do you view those hard teachings of Jesus? Do you seek to live by them or do you change their meaning in your mind into something not quite as demanding,

something to justify your sin? Do you attempt to place the teachings of Christ into the lower standards of society to justify sin? Living by the standards of society and man is the practice of one who loves money more than Jesus, who thinks they can serve two masters and has condemned themselves, just as the Pharisees.

### **Justifying Manmade Rules**

Having their true allegiance exposed, Jesus says to the Pharisees, “**You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.**” For these Pharisees worldly things have their affections. They love money and they love man’s praise. They want people to look up to them and admire them for their outward pious religion. Their purpose in life was to secure man’s approval over God’s approval. Luke rightly called them lovers of money, their first overarching characteristic. Jesus gives us their second; they were self-justifiers. Their overarching habitual traits were, they loved money, loved to justify themselves and they sought the praise of men.

To restate what Jesus said more succinctly would be to say, “You are those who justify YOU, but God knows your hearts.” Here is the picture of what was going on with the Pharisees: they had committed a crime, then they removed the true judge from the bench and placed themselves as judge. The true judge would have declared their guilt and sentenced them appropriately. However, in their system, they had removed the Law of God by reducing it to manmade rules, they could manipulate and thereby they could acquit themselves of all charges. Their guilt was manipulating the Law of God by not teaching it correctly and by finding loopholes for their own benefit and in an effort to hide or justify their guilt and

sin. In so doing they had placed themselves over God and His Law and declared themselves sovereign. They did not serve God but their true master, the devil.

Jesus nails it down for us when He very accurately declares that the very things they loved so dearly – namely; money, worldly wealth and fame, and self-justification are the things God absolutely detests. Jesus clearly stated, “**For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.**” The word “**abomination**” – what does that mean? Here is how it is defined: **Repugnant, a detestable act or person. That which is utterly detestable and abhorrent.** The idea of abomination derives from the specific demands God’s holiness makes upon his people. So, if there is a scale or degrees of God’s hatred of sin – what these Pharisees are doing would be right at the top. These religious leaders were opposed to God. What they loved - God hated; namely, idolatry and self-justification and what God loved - they hated; namely, justification by grace through faith. Ligon Duncan, the Chancellor of the Reformed Theological Seminary said, “*These Pharisees were just as wicked in their idolatry as the worshippers of Baal on Mount Carmel.*” Today the problem is many churches try to justify by sin is not sin and this makes them wicked.

What does this mean for us today? One should examine; have they labeled themselves “Christian” by man’s standards or God’s? Does one claim Christianity because they do so to please their father, mother or spouse? As Christians does one live by higher standards of God or the lower standards of man? If these lower standards are reasons to claim Christianity; then what happens when being Christian becomes a problem at work. What happens when work requires bending or breaking God’s law to further one’s career? What happens as our society becomes more and more openly hostile towards Christians? Just as the Pharisees were more concerned about position and power and wealth - some today, use

Christianity for personal gain and not the glory of God. Have you known people like this? I say openly before my God, my heart's desire is by the grace of God, we, you and me, live by a love of God that is far greater than the love of the world.

Here is another tell-tell sign of one who grades themselves by bending God's standards to the lower standards of man; do they believe and praise and live the Gospel of God and His Bible or do they adjust their life to the standards of the world's ambitions? Those who seek man's approval become squeamish concerning the Gospel because to affirm the Gospel means one has to admit they are a sinner and for those seeking self-justification the Gospel gets in the way of their game of being self-righteous before men. This results in one of two things; false religions under the influence of the devil. They are easy to spot – salvation by works, so people have control over their salvation. Secondly, churches who have become false by longer holding fast to the Gospel of Christ because they want to be accepted by society. I pray, my beloved, that we of Canyon Bible Church strive to live the Gospel as God has ordained it with joy for His mercies and with a desire for His Named to be gloried before the lost world and to share His Gospel with grace.

### **Supplanting God's Law**

Let me read the last three verses concerning God's law, and yes, I believe they go together and deal with God's Law. <sup>16</sup> "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. <sup>17</sup> But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. <sup>18</sup> Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

I want to introduce this last point by teaching very briefly on the Law of God. If we are to discover Christ's deep teaching in this section, we must understand that the moral Law of God is as binding on the New Testament Church as it was on Israel. John Calvin in his *Institutes* asks the question, "*What are the Ten Commandments to us?*" (Book 2, Chapter 8) He answers by explaining that the moral Law of God is obvious, binding, and severe. It is God's minimum expectation of His people. Because Adam sinned, no one has been able to completely keep the Law but because God is altogether Holy and Righteous, He cannot lessen any of the Law's demands. God does not grade on a by man's standards. According to Calvin, it is this unforgiving moral Law that shows God's complete holiness and our desperate need of a Mediator, the One, Jesus Christ, who has kept the Law perfectly. With this brief background on the Law we can now proceed.

Now the contrast Luke sets up for us - goes like this; in Chapter 15 Jesus' ministry and teaching is called into question, as the Pharisees grumble, because He receives sinners and eats with them. That prompted our Lord to tell three consecutive parables each showing that what the Pharisees grumble about - causes heaven to rejoice. Now, the Pharisees have moved to the next phase of their attempt to discredit Him, they begin to ridicule Him, His teachings and His ministry. The ground on which they are making these claims has to do with their traditions and manmade rules, not on God's Law.

Now Jesus wants His disciples to see that what He has been teaching is God's Law and those who are not living by God's Law, are in truth, like the Pharisees, those who have their own rules and agenda. Jesus justifies His practices by insisting that, beginning with John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, announced the Gospel of the Kingdom and the One who had come to preach it. It is

not that the moral Law given in the Old Testament is now null and void, but that through Christ we are taught the true Law and it is through Christ that we are set free from the curse of the Law. As Jesus said in verse 17, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.” The Apostle Paul explained what Jesus meant to believers in Galactica, <sup>23</sup> “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Galatians 3:23-26) Christians fulfill the Law of God because of their love for God and that their Savior Jesus has paid the price for our sin.

One might think there is no connection between verses 17 and 18, but Jesus is making a statement of how far the Pharisees had gone in their creative practice of finding loopholes in God’s law. One such practice centered on a husband divorcing his wife. In ancient days, a Hebrew man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever. By the way, this is still true today in Muslim countries who use Shira law. An example is given in ancient writings concerning a Pharisee divorcing his wife for burning his dinner. Another example is where a man felt his wife was not as attractive as she once was - so he divorced her. This was not God’s plan for marriage. Let me take you to Matthew chapter 19, “Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”?’ <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’ <sup>7</sup> They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a



certificate of divorce and to send her away?’<sup>8</sup> He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you (*Jesus did not say, God allowed you*) to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.’<sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’” (Matthew 19:3-9) Jesus says there is one except allowing divorce, but the Pharisees found many exceptions that suited their sinful lives. Now, we understand why Jesus brings divorce and adultery up – following the saying that God’s Law is still in force, he was showing these Pharisees how far they had strayed from God’s true moral Law in order to allow themselves to sin.

Anyone who reads the Bible with a heart seeking God is confronted with God’s moral Law. That is God’s standard for his children. We must never believe that God’s Law is relaxed in any way, it has been and is and will eternally be the standard for all true believers. Jesus teaches us here that there will never be a time when God’s Law becomes void or obsolete. In our Lord’s own eternally true words, he says, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.” Joyce and I are married before our God and this brings me great comfort because no matter much, I frustrate Joyce at times - she is stuck with me and I with her and God continues to grow our love for Him and for each other – what great security marriage is, when blessed by God, as we journey through life in an insecure world.

As long as we are standing on this earth or as long as heaven exists, God’s Law stands as the standard for all believers, for those in the Old Testament who believed in God and the coming Messiah and for all who are part of Jesus Christ’s New Testament Church. However, the Pharisees were always looking for loopholes. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency

**in her**, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,<sup>2</sup> and if she goes and becomes another man's wife,<sup>3</sup> and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife,<sup>4</sup> then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an **abomination** before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance." (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

The Pharisees had interpreted this to mean that a man could write his wife a certificate of divorce over anything – **"because he has found some indecency in her"** – a burnt dinner or she has grown old and she was not as attractive as when she was young. Those who act this way are an abomination before God. The Pharisees had distanced themselves from the very Law they claimed to uphold. They implemented a human standard of exchanging God's Law for manmade rules. They loved their wealth and power more than they loved God. They failed God's law against fornication and adultery as they divorced their wives and taught others to do the same. Both of these are called an abomination before God. Their hearts chased after the things God called an abomination, which is to say, these acts were repugnant or detestable or abhorrent to God. They grumbled as their sin separated them from the God they claimed to serve, but those whose hearts sought God and believed in Jesus as the Christ caused heaven to rejoice. To hide their sin, these Pharisees ridiculed the very Son of God as He called men and women to repentance. They serve the prince of this world, not God. No one can serve two masters!

The great irony of it all is seen in Chapter 18 where Jesus reveals what was in the heart of the Pharisee in the temple, who said, **"God, I thank you that I am not**

like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” (Luke 18:11-12) His heart was far from God and he was a hypocrite and Jesus condemns the Pharisees because they exchanged God’s Law for self-serving manmade rules. God’s Law was designed to drive worshippers to repentance and faith - which is what the tax collectors and sinners were doing. However, the men who searched for loopholes with manmade rules that were the result of sinful hearts of stone in truth worshipped themselves and the fallen world of the evil one instead of God.

As we continue reading through the Bible - pay attention and learn all God requires of us. Strive to uphold every dot of the Law of God and if you should fail at some point - thank God for sending His only Son, Jesus Christ our Great and Perfect Mediator who never failed in keeping all of God’s Law for us. Fall at the feet of Christ repent and receive forgiveness and God’s unlimited agape love.

Now that we have seen what Jesus was teaching and exposing, it would be good to reflect and ask, “Are we ever guilty of looking to man’s ideas or methods or rules or loopholes and equating them with God’s Word? Do we ever think we are really not all that sinful? Do we think that somehow God will allow us to live by the standards of the world? When we sin and we all do sin – do we repent or seek a loophole?”

I pray that we, you and me, see and embrace the Law of God and work towards keeping it. When we fail always remember we have a Perfect Mediator and Savior Jesus Christ and what he asks is simple – repent and fall at the foot of the cross and ask for forgiveness and ask your Savior for the power of God through his Spirit to strengthen you. Amen and amen!