

Sunday, June 2, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

Week 26 | Luke 16:14-18 | "Spiritual Adultery"

Thank you to Michael Eufemia for filling the pulpit this past week and the church for taking up a love offering for him. It speaks well of a church when it is so generous with visiting preachers.

Two weeks ago, we cracked open Luke 16. And the lesson was not only hard to grasp but a hard one to swallow. Jesus told the parable of the unjust steward, a notoriously difficult passage to comprehend. But by God's grace, we got to the heart of the matter: **Whether they have a lot or a little, a just steward uses earthly wit and wealth to store up for themselves heavenly favor and fortune.** As a martyred missionary, Jim Elliot once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." – Jim Elliot.

Today, we'll see how money, divorce, remarriage, and adultery are all connected. Admittedly, the connection between finance and the rest is not *immediately* apparent in our passage. But as we will see, an important principle weaves them all together.

You see, not unlike an affair, those who love money rather than God have broken *a relationship*. And when someone makes such an unwise decision, even *more* bad choices will soon follow.

For example, a young man once sought Jesus out, asking to be saved. He seemed to have it all together. He knew his Bible, was religious, *and* was wealthy. Yet, according to Jesus, the man lacked one thing. The Lord told him to sell everything, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow him. But, given that this would-be-disciple was very rich, he refused (cf. Matt. 19:22). To love God more than money was a price he was unwilling to pay.

Thus, needless to say, the person who heeds the lesson at the heart of today's sermon will find that their adoration for the Lord grows, while, in contrast, the person who ignores it will discover that their heart has grown even colder towards the Lord.

For those who have ears to hear, may you listen and obey.

I want to notice **three** things:

- i. **The Pharisees trivialized Jesus.**

READ: Luke 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were **lovers of money**, heard all these things, and they **ridiculed** him.

As this passage **follows closely on the heels** of the passage before, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that the religious leaders didn't like Jesus' parable of the unjust steward.

The phrase "**these things**," recalls the parable of the unjust steward. While it was a challenge to fully grasp the parable, the lesson was clear: **Whether they have a lot or a little, a just steward uses earthly wit and wealth to store up for themselves heavenly favor and fortune.** In other words, we ought to use as much wealth as we can, for as long as we can, to make friends in this life—i.e., be charitable, give to the poor, support heavenly endeavors, etc.—so that, when we come into the next life, we'll have made friends and a home for ourselves for eternity.

As Luke tells us, the Pharisees were "**lovers of money.**" So, a lesson that persuasively advocates for the giving away one's money will be met with contempt by all those who love money. And anyone who cares more about their pocketbook than God's Kingdom will hate anyone who tells them to be charitable. In fact, the religious leaders hated Jesus' teaching so much that they started to "**ridicule him.**"

ii. **Jesus criticized the Pharisees.**

READ: Luke 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "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.

Jesus said that the Pharisees were the sort "**who justify [themselves] before men;**" they wanted the praise and adoration of their fellow man rather than God. And not unlike today, they did this by accumulating and hoarding wealth.

Religious leaders were known to use their power and privilege to take advantage of those less fortunate than themselves. In Lu. 20:47, Jesus warns his disciples to steer clear of the religious leaders for various reasons. Among those reasons was that they were known to "**devour widows' houses,**" which is to say that rather than take care of the needy, they used the **poor for profit.** The religious leaders would take possession of a widow's estate, usually under some religious pretense, and either incorporate it into their ever-expanding holdings or sell it off and make a profit.

But while they might successfully fool everyone else, heaven cannot be fooled. Jesus says, "**God knows your hearts.**" A person may publicly put on a good face, but the Lord sees behind the

curtain. God sees everything done secretly and will either reward what he sees (cf. Matt. 6:3-4) or punish it (cf. Lu. 8:17).

The Lord says, "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." How timely are these words as we enter the so-called "pride month." But just as sexual perversion is an "abomination in the sight of God" (cf. Lev. 18:22), so too are greedy gains. Meaning the misuse of money is as detestable to God as the misuse of sexuality. Though, to be clear, God finds many things to be abominable (cf. Prov. 6:16-19).

The Son of God points out that while religious leaders may have been applauded in their day, his Father was severely displeased. In fact, the Greek word used for "abomination" is βδέλυγμα (b-de-lygma), which refers to something loathsome precisely because of its *stench*. They were such bad stewards of the resources that they stunk; *their smell made God sick*.

iii. Jesus harmonized the Old and New Testaments.

READ: Luke 16:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. ¹⁸ Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

The phrase "the Law and the Prophets," was a common way of referring to the Old Testament. So when the Lord said that "the Law and the Prophets were until John," he declared that the Baptizer marks the end of the O.T. canon. The old era of divine inspiration spans from Genesis to John.

But just because the O.T. cannon had been *closed* didn't mean God was *finished* with the Bible. No, far from it; God started a *new chapter*, though, not a *new book*. The Lord meant this when he said, "Since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached." The people in Jesus' day lived during N.T. times; except for them, N.T. times may have been just another *Tuesday*. It wouldn't be until later that they would realize they had lived during *unprecedented times*. After all, every day they got up and saw Jesus, it was history in the making.

That the first century was remarkable would've been no surprise to Jesus. He was God, after all. And the Lord is the reason why that era was so unique. However, Jesus wasn't the only one who could sense how important that time was. The Lord says that "everyone forces his way into it." As we learned in Lu. 13:22-30, the door to the Kingdom of God is *narrow*; in other

words, it is about to close (cf. Lu. 13:22-30). And only those who have enough sense to get in while the getting is good are the ones who are getting in. Anyone who doesn't see the importance of the moment in history in which they live will miss a golden opportunity. In other words, while the Pharisees followed dollar signs, everyone else followed Christ. While the religious leaders cared only for their bottom line, the good news was what everyone wanted.

So ever-lasting was the Scriptures (now including the gospel) that the Lord says, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." Of the two, the universe is far more likely to have an expiration date than God's word. The Scriptures will remain as we know them today even when the heavens and the earth are made anew. Not time, destruction, or anything else can make it "void." **The Bible will never expire.**

Then, ***much to our surprise***, the Lord says something that initially doesn't seem to fit with the overall discussion. He says, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Why does the Lord go from talking about money in the parable of the unjust steward to criticizing the religious leader's use of cash to discussing the harmonization of the O.T. and the N.T. to bringing up topics like divorce/remarriage/adultery? The short answer is this: **the Lord picks one O.T. principle about divorce/remarriage and brings it into the N.T. to illustrate that God's word, past, present, and future, will forever be active.** Not *every* divorce is justified in God's eyes; in such cases, those who remarry have committed adultery. This was true from the beginning; it was true in Jesus' day and is still true today.

So, what's the takeaway?

READ: Luke 16:13 (ESV)

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."

If a love for God is nothing less than spiritual **loyalty**, then a love for money is nothing less than spiritual **adultery**.

In the O.T., any time Israel went after other gods, God considered their *idolatrous* actions as being equivalent to **adultery** (cf. Jer. 3:20; Isa. 1:21; 57:8; Ezk. 16:30). **In Christ's day, the Jews weren't bowing down before a golden calf, but they were worshipping gold.** Instead of serving God, they worshipped money.

Why did Jesus suddenly bring up divorce, remarriage, and adultery amid a discussion about money? He wanted to show that to love money, rather than God, isn't just an affair; it's a divorce leading to a remarriage leading to adultery. Technically, to love **anything** instead of God is idolatry and adultery; if that was true back then, how much more today with those who have Christ living inside them? But the Lord applies this principle specifically to greed. Make no mistake, to love money rather than God is like a wife cheating on her loving husband, divorcing him, and then getting married to her new lover.

Money **lovers** are not only God-**haters** but also **adulterers**.

Pastor's Corner | Topic: Divorce & Remarriage

If there's one issue that was as broken in the *first century* as it is *today*, it's divorce. In fact, at this time, there was a debate amongst religious leaders where one side said that a person could get a divorce for *any reason*, and the other said that a person could only get a divorce for *sexual immorality*. We'll talk more about this in a minute, but suffice it to say Jesus agreed with the latter view.

Now, technically, verse 18 isn't really on divorce at all, but *remarriage*. The verse assumes that divorce is, at the very least, *permissible*, and Jesus makes no judgment on the *legality* of divorce itself. In fact, *if this was the only passage we had on divorce/remarriage in the Bible*, you might understandably come to *one* conclusion: *divorce is allowed but not remarriage*. Taken on its own, Jesus' comments on divorce in this *specific* verse assert that remarriage, not divorce, is *always* adultery.

However, if that is our conclusion, we immediately run into a big problem. If one holds that remarriage is *never* allowed and *is always* wrong, one must also explain why Moses gave instructions for remarriage in Deut. 24:1-4 and why Paul explicitly allowed for remarriage in 1 Cor. 7.

Okay. So, *remarriage is allowed*. But what about *divorce*?

As I said, if Lu. 16:18 was the only verse we had; divorce is permissible at the very least. But the natural follow-up question would be, "What is cause for divorce?" Jesus' words in our passage assume that divorce happens, but he does not tell us if the divorce, which occurred before the remarriage, was *justified*.

Given that he says the remarriage after the divorce is adultery, one might assume that, like the remarriage, *the divorce was also wrong*. But, if so, in what way was it sinful? One might even argue that since the Lord considered remarriage, seemingly under *any* circumstance, as adulterous, that likewise divorce, under any circumstance, was wrong.

However, once again, we immediately run into same problem we had before. If one holds that divorce is *never* allowed and consistently wrong, one must also explain why Moses and Paul gave instances where divorce is permitted. Even Jesus himself gave an exception where, according to him, a marriage is allowed to be dissolved. Did the Lord contradict himself? No.

Okay. So, *divorce and remarriage are allowed*.

As you can see, this is a **complicated** issue. To understand what Jesus explicitly says in Luke 16:18, we must collectively understand what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. And the **totality** of Scripture has this to say: **marriage is a *lifelong* commitment, and only a few particular exceptions are given for its termination.**

Okay, so what are the exceptions?

This is a classic case where the **exceptions prove the rule**. As I've already stated, **marriage is a *lifelong* commitment**, meaning the **rule** of marriage is that it is binding until death (cf. Mat. 19:6). So, if a **fatality** is the accepted end of a marriage, freeing a person to remarry, **any exception must be equal to or *greater* than a spouse's physical demise**. And as we'll see, the exceptions given for divorce are just as exceptional as **death**.

In Scripture, **two** exceptions **explicitly** show when divorce is **permissible**. A third exception, while not **expressly** addressed, is, as I'll argue, **implied**.

1. The first **explicit** exception is **sexual immorality**.

READ: Matthew 19:9 (ESV)

"And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

The issue at hand is that, in Matt. 19:3, a religious leader posed Jesus a question: *"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* This question references an age-long Jewish debate about the proper interpretation of Deut. 24:1-4. One school of thought (the Hillelite) said that, according to Deut. 24:1, a man could divorce his wife for **any reason**. This is akin to where, in the modern day, one can seek a "no-fault divorce" due to "irreconcilable differences."

However, there was another school of thought that interpreted Deut. 24:1 differently. The Shammaite espoused that Deut. 24:1 allowed for divorce **only** in the case of **sexual immorality**.¹ So clearly, **Jesus affirms the Shammaite view. Sexual immorality allows for divorce. This means no-fault divorces, or any such divorces, are, scripturally speaking, *wrong***. In other words, "falling out of love" with a spouse is not a biblically justifiable cause for divorce.

2. The second **explicit** exception is **willful separation**.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:15 (ESV)

¹ Turner, David L., *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 460-461.

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved [i.e., set free].

Being abandoned by one's spouse is scriptural grounds for divorce. Such a person is not "enslaved" but is free to remarry. Remarriage is assumed because divorce and remarriage go together.² And if remarriage after a divorce due to an abandonment is assumed, then so is remarriage after a divorce due to adultery.

3. **The third *implicit* exception is domestic violence.**

Using the above two passages—i.e., Matt. 19:9 & 1 Cor. 7:15—I will show that while domestic violence is not explicitly addressed in Scripture as grounds for divorce, it is implied.

First, domestic violence is a form of sexual immorality.

If adultery—i.e., bodily infidelity—is cause for divorce, would not abuse—i.e., physical unfaithfulness—not also be cause for divorce?³

Second, domestic violence is a form of willful separation.

If willful separation—i.e., the total abandonment of a marriage—falls under the category of being a permissible reason for divorce, then abuse—i.e., the total abandonment of the marriage covenant—also falls under the category of being an allowable reason for divorce. In fact, I'd argue that of the two, abuse is far **worse** than abandonment. At least with willful separation, one spouse leaves the other, **a pain that only occurs once**. With domestic violence, the abuser doesn't go away; the abused continues to be hurt, and the **pain continues indefinitely**.

An abusive spouse **destroys** the Christ-like love that ought to be at the heart of marriage. Whenever abuse is allowed to continue, it **fundamentally changes** the relationship between spouses from two people who ought to love each other to an abuser and the abused. In other words, the marriage itself has **dissolved**. Raising one's fist against one's spouse not only breaks them, but it also breaks the marriage. It's a violation akin to sexual immorality and willful separation. As such, abuse is a permissible cause for divorce.

² Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, the Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), p. 290.

³ Wilson, Jared C., "Is Physical Abuse Biblical Grounds for Divorce?" March 21, 2022, *For The Church*, <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/is-physical-abuse-biblical-grounds-for-divorce/>, [accessed, May 31, 2024].

Here are two more additional passages that, I believe, show that it is permissible to get a divorce for domestic violence.

- 1.) If an unrepentant “brother” forfeits their place in the church (Matt. 18:17), the *bride* of Christ, so too does an abusive and unrepentant spouse forfeit their place in a marriage. It is impossible for a husband to “love [their] wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” (Eph. 5:25) while simultaneously beating them. Likewise, it is impossible for a wife to “submit to [their] own husbands, as to the Lord” if they are abusing them (Eph. 5:22).⁴
- 2.) If Christians ought to “flee” a town that’s persecuting them (Mat. 10:23), so too should an abused spouse, especially when the safety of one’s children is involved (cf. Lu. 17:2). To argue otherwise would be to insist that a spouse **must** subject themselves (and possibly their own children) to harm on the grounds of marital fidelity alone.⁵

With all that said, let me close our discussion of divorce/remarriage by providing you with one big **qualifier**.

While one *can* get a divorce, we should not always *assume* that one *should*, **even when it comes to the exceptions**.

While divorce is **permissible** under **specific** circumstances, it is not always **advisable**. In **Mal. 2:16, under the old covenant, we’re told that God hates divorce**. How much more must God hate divorce when we are now under the new covenant? As such, it is always unwise to **endorse** something that the Lord despises (cf. Mal. 2:16). As such, divorce is nowhere in Scripture **mandated**.

Interestingly, in Jer. 3:8, God said that he “gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries,” a reference to the Assyrian invasion (2 Ki. 17:5-7). God himself divorced Israel...for a time. You see, four verses later, God calls Israel to **return**.

In the book of Hosea, the prophet is commanded by God to marry a prostitute named Gomer. And though Gomer would abandon Hosea, returning to prostitution (a justifiable cause for divorce), God told the prophet to find his wife, **repurchase her, and**

⁴ While it is true that 1 in 4 women are abused and, as such, are more likely to be abused, about 1 in 9 men also experience abuse (1 in 9). <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>

⁵ Moore, Russell, “Divorcing an Abusive Spouse Is Not A Sin,” March 24, 2022, *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/march-web-only/russell-moore-divorce-marriage-domestic-violence-abuse.html>, [accessed May 31, 2024].

restore her (cf. Hosea 3). This was supposed to be a picture of God's love for idolatrous Israel.

The point is that, even when divorce may be **justifiable**, **reconciliation** ought to be sought, sometimes even in cases where a divorce has already occurred (cf. 1 Cor. 7:11). In other words, ***every conceivable effort*** should be given before a marriage is totally abandoned.

Video Description:

The Road to Redemption | Week 26 | "Spiritual Adultery" (Luke 16:14-18)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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