

January 4th, 2009 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 28”

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Luke 16:18

18 “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, we discussed the parable of the unjust steward, recorded in **Luke 16:1-13**, who gave discounts to his master’s debtors in order to receive favorable job consideration, as he was losing his job as steward. We also discussed the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, recorded in **Luke 16:19-31**, in which the rich man refused to minister to Lazarus although Lazarus was begging in front of his domicile, and then asked Father Abraham to have Lazarus minister to him and his family after the rich man died and went to hell. Interestingly, between these two parables about the use of money and possessions, stands our text for today, an apparent non-sequitur: **Luke 16:18** says:

18 “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, had the interesting perspective on life that he that dies with the most money wins. After listening to Jesus relate the parable of the unjust steward, in which Jesus made the point that it is better to use your money to make friends and please God so that God will receive you when you leave this life than to maximize revenues, the Pharisees had only ridicule for Jesus’ perspective. **Luke 16:14** tells us: **14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided [Jesus].**

Jesus responded to their ridicule, in **Luke 16:15**:

15 And [Jesus] said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

There is an intrinsic potential problem with religious leadership. Religious leaders are human, meaning that they are susceptible to the temptation to sin, especially as it pertains to their handling of the Word of God. Religious leaders can develop personal agendas that lead them to preach the Word of God inaccurately, especially when they are subjected to peer pressure.

The Word of God is an objective quantity. We have God's pronouncements in the Bible, which is written in specific language with specific meanings. Whether the Word of God agrees with my personal desires or advances the agenda that I wish to advance or not ought not be the requirement that I use to decide that which I should say as a religious teacher. **2Timothy 2:15-16** tells me:

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

The financial agenda of the Jewish religious leaders has caused them to reject the teaching of Jesus Christ, not because Jesus' teaching was not correct, but because Jesus' teaching would cause them to have to change the way that they do business. But Jesus goes on to tell them their corruption of the Word of God is coming to an end. John the Baptist brought in the new order of baptism, one in which biological membership in the Nation of Israel was no longer the determinative factor of relationship with God. **Luke 16:16** records:

16 "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

The Law and the Prophets is the name for the Old Testament dispensation of the Nation of Israel. In the new theological concept of the Kingdom of God, people have the opportunity and responsibility to decide to align themselves with the Word of God, rather than as in the case of the Nation of Israel, being confirmed or condemned by the accident of birth. People enter the Kingdom of God by responding to the preaching of Jesus Christ, and people can respond to the ministry of Jesus Christ regardless of their biological lineage. The pagan Roman Centurion called upon Jesus to heal his servant, and was received as in the same way as was the Jewish synagogue leader Jairus that asked Jesus to heal his daughter. Everyone and anyone can get into the Kingdom of God.

But all that voluntarily enter the Kingdom of God are subject to the Law of God, as Jesus says in **Luke 16:17**:

17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

The new dispensation of the Kingdom of God is not a change in morality, but a change in human leadership. The moral law of God has not changed, but, in the Kingdom of God, the corrupt interpretations of the law given by the leadership of the Nation of Israel have become irrelevant. God found the ceremonies that the Israelites put together to honor him to be repugnant because the Israelites did not treat one another with the love that He commanded. He found all of the Old Testament sacrifices over which the Jewish leaders presided useless and odious, as He told them in **Isaiah 1:11-15**:

11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.

12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?

13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.

14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I

am weary of bearing them.

15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

God was not impressed with the Jew's protestations of love for Him because they did not show their love to one another, as He told them in **Isaiah 1:16-17**:

16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,

17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

God is pleased with us when we treat others as we would want to be treated, especially those who are less fortunate than ourselves. The leadership of Israel consistently refused to treat the less fortunate well, but rather used the ceremonies of God to oppress and enrich themselves at the expense of those over whom they had leadership responsibility.

One great sin that the Israelites chose to practice was to divorce their wives for trivial reasons. They derived their rationale for doing this from **Deuteronomy 24:1**, which says:

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,

While it is true that the phrase "some uncleanness" is rather nebulous and can be interpreted in a number of ways, the true idea of marriage is found in the place in which marriage is instituted, **Genesis 2:24**, which says:

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

That is the nature of marriage. In our own time, we have specific vows that we take and commitments that we make when we marry someone. The wedding vow says this:

I take you to be my wedded spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge you my faith.

I understand the phrase, "till death us do part", but I have yet to find an Old Testament reference that describes exactly that which Moses meant when he used the word translated, "some uncleanness" in **Deuteronomy 24:1**. The definition of the Hebrew word used, according to the Hebrew Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains, is actually: *indecentness, ugliness, repulsiveness, i.e., any action or condition that is not proper or morally repugnant, with a possible focus on bodily functions.*

Understanding the emphasis upon virginity that existed in Biblical society, it would seem to me that the idea of uncleanness would have to do with some type of venereal disfigurement or disease that a man would not find out that his wife had until he actually married her, before which time he would not have seen her naked. When I was coming along, a couple had to undergo a blood test for venereal diseases before they could get married, but those tests were not available during Biblical days.

However, the rabbis that controlled the Jewish laws in the days of Jesus took a much more liberal view of **Deuteronomy 24:1**. Based upon their liberal interpretation of the word "uncleanness", divorce for the most trivial causes was sanctioned by the rabbis, and even such

men who were considered great rabbis, such as Rabbi Hillel, the grandfather of Rabbi Gamaliel of whom tradition speaks as the rabbi whose lectures were listened to by the Boy Jesus, taught that a man might divorce his wife if in the cooking she burnt his dinner or even over-salted his soup. This teaching is an example of not doing that which Paul talked about in **2 Timothy 2:15-16**:

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

So as Jesus announces the coming of the Kingdom of God to the Pharisees, he also rebuilds the most foundational of our institutions by redefining the parameters of divorce and remarriage, in **Luke 16:18**, which says:

18 “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.

So now we know that divorce for trivial reasons is not that which God had in mind, and the debate as to that which Moses meant in **Deuteronomy 24** is settled. Jesus gives the question a more full treatment in **Matthew 19**. In **Matthew 19:1-2**:

1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

2 And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.

The mention of the multitudes and of Jesus’ healing ministry always brings to mind the consternation of the Jewish religious leaders to the popularity of Jesus among the people. One of the reasons that they hated Jesus so much was that Jesus was uncompromisingly holy on the one hand and overwhelmingly popular on the other. John the Baptist could be dismissed by the Jewish leaders as an ascetic prophet living out in the wilderness. If the people wanted to listen to John’s teaching, they had to go to the wilderness where John was, because John wasn’t coming to into the cities to see them. John was revered as a prophet, but not popular as a person because of his lack of interaction with the multitudes once they were baptized. But Jesus was just the opposite. Jesus would show up anywhere, at any time, and He always drew a crowd with His displays of the power of God. The scribes and Pharisees could dismiss John as an annoyance, but they were much more threatened by Jesus because of the much more public nature of his ministry.

However, by this time, John the Baptist was no longer on the scene. He had been killed by Herod. In **Mark 6:17**, the Bible explains:

For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her.

Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great, and the niece of Herod Antipas. On a trip to Rome, Herod had fallen in love with her. In order to marry her he divorced his first wife, the daughter of Aretas IV, the king of Nabatea to the east and south of Perea, and persuaded Herodias to divorce her husband, Herod’s half brother Phillip. John rebuked Herod for divorcing his wife, for marrying a divorced woman, and then for marrying someone who had been married to his half-brother. **Mark 6:18-20** goes on to explain:

18 Because John had said to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”

19 Therefore Herodias held it against [John the Baptist] and wanted to kill him, but she could not;

20 for Herod feared John, knowing that [John] was a just and holy man, and [Herod] protected [John]. And when [Herod] heard [John], [Herod] did many things, and heard [John] gladly.

Herod imprisoned John at a distance from Herodias to avoid having to deal more harshly with John, but Queen Herodias had gone to a great deal of trouble to arrange her marriage with Herod, and she didn't want John or anyone else around to tell her that she should not be doing what she wanted to do. After all, if John could influence Herod more than she, John might be able to convince Herod to put her away as Herod even as he had divorced her predecessor. The episode continues, in **Mark 6:21-29**:

21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.

22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.

27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison,

28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.

29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

Now, maybe you can understand one reason that the Jewish religious leaders were not overly anxious to preach and teach the true dictates of the Bible as they pertained to divorce and remarriage. I've heard good church people reject the teaching of the Bible on this issue when it came to their own personal situation. And, if I decide to divorce my wife to marry someone twenty years younger, I'm not sure that I want you telling me that I can't do it if I want to. If a powerful man and a powerful woman want each other, being a moral figure standing between them may not be the safest place to be.

Understanding that Herod and Herodias were still together, that Herod was still the king and that the Pharisees didn't particularly like Jesus, you can understand why they questioned Jesus in **Matthew 19:3**:

3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

Jesus, what are the chances that someone is going to carry your answer back to Herod, or more to the point, Herodias? You're an itinerant rabbi out teaching the law just like John; maybe we can get Herodias to get rid of you in the same way that she got rid of John. Of course that depends on your answer. What do you say, Jesus? **Matthew 19:4-6** records:

4 And [Jesus] answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’

5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ ?

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

As an answer, Jesus quoted the Scripture, **Genesis 2:24**. That’s not nearly as provocative as John personally telling Herod that his marriage was unlawful. I’m not sure that Herodias will be as interested in a debate on the law as she was on an attack on her personal marriage. So, the Pharisees decide to probe further to see if they can turn this legal discussion into something that they can use. Okay. Jesus since you want to talk about the law, let’s discuss that which Moses said. **Matthew 19:7** records:

7 They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

This speaks squarely to the question of **Deuteronomy 24:1**. Jesus responds, in **Matthew 19:8**:

8 [Jesus] said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

The Old Testament dispensation took the hardness of the hearts of man into account. **Romans 8:6-8** describes our hard-hearted condition:

6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

When Herod and Herodias were confronted with the unlawfulness of their marriage to one another, their response was hard-hearted, which is another way of saying that they were carnally minded, living according to the flesh. They were not subject to the Law of God, because they chose to do that which they wanted in spite of the clear teaching of the Law. They did not and could not please God, because they didn’t want to. They wanted to please themselves, their flesh, their carnality, and the law of God had no impact on them, other than to cause them to imprison and kill the one that told them about it.

But now, the Old Testament dispensation is over. In order to enter the Kingdom of God, you have to agree to be changed; you have to agree to receive the Holy Spirit that will empower you to follow the Law of God. That is the reason for baptism; baptism is the symbol that you are putting to death the carnal man within you, that you have decided to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and have decided to be reborn following the dictates of the Holy Spirit, becoming the new spiritual man that can and has decided to follow the law of God. **Romans 8:12-14** tells us:

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

When Jesus says, in **Matthew 19:8**, “in the beginning it was not so”, Jesus is referring to the original state of marriage, which was instituted before the Fall in the Garden, before man

decided to live according to the flesh and eat the fruit rather than trust the Spirit of God and leave the fruit alone. In the beginning, marriage was designed to be a commitment, just as the vows that we read earlier are a commitment.

Marriage is not designed to produce constant euphoric emotional satisfaction or sexual ecstasy; marriage is designed to be the process by which we purposefully meld two lives into one that mirrors the relationship between the three parts of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 19:6** says:

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

If you come to the altar and make vows and the minister prays over your union and presents you to God, God is involved in the joining together of your lives. God knows that both you and the one that you choose to marry are imperfect, and He expects the two of you to have problems making the adjustments needed to perfect your union. That is why God gives us time to live together and to grow up together. **Ephesians 4:14-16** tells us that as we develop:

14 we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The emotional feeling that causes many marriages is not love. That emotional feeling is about the way that the other person makes me feel, and love is about how I make the other person feel. Love is not about receiving, but about giving. **John 3:16-17** defines it:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Jesus tells us, in **Mark 10:45**

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Love is not being served, but serving, giving our very lives for someone else. When we marry in an immature state, we fall out of love and want to divorce because our immediate trivial emotional needs are not being met. But we don't grow by having our needs met, but rather by developing the larger perspective that allow us to meet the needs of others. And, an interesting transformation occurs when we resolve to meet the needs of others; the Lord sees and He works to make sure that our needs are eventually met.

Love is a condition that we develop in the gymnasium of commitment. We have to go into the gym and work our love out every day in the same way that we would have to go into the gym and work our physical bodies out to be at our peak physical performance every day. Divorce is a simple selfish statement that my commitment is worthless and that in even the most intimate of relationships, I prefer to remain self-centered and not put in the work required to achieve the goal that God has for me.

The Apostle Paul says, in **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**

- 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;**
- 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;**
- 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;**
- 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**
- 8 Love never fails.**

Love never fails because God does not allow it to. The Pharisees thought that they could cause the mission of Jesus Christ to fail, but they could not get him to say something provocative enough for Herodias to condemn Him as she had John the Baptist. So they took the more direct route, and arrested Jesus themselves, and prevailed upon Pilate to crucify Jesus on the Cross of Calvary. And they were successful in their attempt. They stood at the foot of the Cross on Calvary and watched their plan come to fruition. Jesus Christ was crucified, until He hung His head in the locks on His shoulder, and He died. He was buried in Joseph's tomb, and they had the tomb guarded to make sure that no one stole his body from the tomb. But God did not allow Jesus' love to fail, and on the third day, early in the morning, God changed the course of nature and raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

What problem could we have in our marriage that would compare with death on the cross? If God can overcome that obstacle, with what kind of problem could we present Him that He might find too hard to solve? Don't focus on your negative condition, but focus on having the love that Jesus Christ had; love that is self-sacrificial rather than self-serving.

Staying married is maintaining a Christian perspective. Marriage is the practical laboratory in which we grow in the knowledge of God; marriage is the one institution in which we can practice the self-sacrificial nature of Jesus Christ on the most intimate level, and marriage is the one institution in which we can experience a bond akin to the oneness of the Trinity as fully as it can be experienced on this side of Heaven. That is the reason that marriage is the foundational relationship in the Scripture, and the reason that Jesus tells us to maintain our marriage vows until death does us part. Jesus Christ proved that sometimes the true reward does not come until we have finished our commitment to the end.

In **Matthew 19:4-6**:

- 4 And [Jesus] answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'**
- 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' ?**
- 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."**

Romans 8:35-39 says:

- 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**
- 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."**
- 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**
- 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers,**

**nor things present nor things to come,
39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the
love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Keeping our marital commitments is the mandate of God. Let us not be separated from
God, or from one another.

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