

Christ had exposed the greediness of the Pharisees, hitting them where it counted—in the wallet. Instead of repenting and forsaking of their self-indulgence, they “scoffed Him.” Christ had exposed their hypocrisy, and with ravenous growls the crowd of Pharisees lashed back at Christ, justifying themselves and defending themselves by their self-made laws of righteousness and liberal interpretations of the commands of God. They weren’t about ready to let Christ “get the best” of them. Their fury exploded like a tea kettle bursting with readiness. Christ authoritatively unraveled their response with piercing truth and exposing explanation of the wideness of the grace of God to allow law-breakers to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Luke 16: *The Response of the Pharisees NKJV*

- ¹⁴ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.
- ¹⁵ And He 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.
- 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.
- ¹⁷ And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.
- ¹⁸ "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery.

The Pharisees loved money. (v. 14) That’s how they could reason that if you were wealthy you were spiritually prosperous. Theirs was a “prosperity Gospel.” If you were living rightly, you were living luxuriously. If you were in poverty you were in obvious and apparent rebellion toward God—so they believed and taught.

The Pharisees’ defense was their own writings and self-serving interpretations of the commands of God. (v. 15) However, they could twist the law of God to fit into their comfortable lifestyle and to justify their self-indulgence motivation for self-perpetuating self-righteousness. Their estimation of true righteousness was built upon a moving target, whereas God’s true accounting of righteousness is a fixed point—absolute.

The Pharisees couldn’t stand it that Christ had just declared to His disciples that one who is a follower of Christ will live purposefully to obey God, even wisely investigating ways to live joyfully in serving God (as the preceding parable explains). Those who were following Christ were “pressing

into the kingdom.” (v. 16) They were living out of the truths of the Gospel. They were freed from the bonds of sin and the law in a new life of living for God in the freedom of forgiveness and grace. It was upsetting to the Pharisees to hear that anyone other than themselves, especially “sinners and tax-collectors,” could have the opportunity to enter into the kingdom of God. They believed they held the VIP passes.

God cannot be fooled. (v. 15) This is both a terrible truth and a wonderful truth. Because God cannot be fooled, we ought to tremble in knowing that our sinful acts cannot be hidden from His holy sight. Also, because God cannot be fooled, we can know that His grace exposes us to our own need for Him and His help! The Pharisees had covered themselves in layers of law-keeping, just as they were covered in layers of the finest religious fashion, but they desperately needed to understand their need to reconcile that God knew their hypocritical hearts. If only they would give up their pride and recognize that in God’s exposing also comes healing; there’s no need to hide from God’s all-seeing eye.

God does not change His commands. God’s commands are dependant upon *and* an outflow of His character.

- Because God is holy His commands are holy.
- Because God is truth His commands are absolute. God’s commands are not up for debate. They are fixed upon His steadfast character. (And, by the way, so are His promises—Praise Him!)

Idolatry, investing our affections into anything other than God, causes a person to be antagonistic towards God. False religion promises to give something to people that they think they will lose when they come to Christ— independence. False religion, (anything that is added to Biblical Christianity or that contradicts it), either dillutes or deletes the Truth. What the Pharisees had done was make righteousness without the need for a Messiah attainable. Ironically, by adding to the law their thousands of ammendments, they had made rightouesness measurable.

By seeking independence from God and His ways they had actually bound themselves up in a labyrinth of law. They were unwilling to look to God for His mercy and His provision of a Messiah, and instead replaced mercy with judgment. They had set up a system of false religion that made them the judges of themselves rather than God.

The Law of God was established because in the grace of God He wanted to show us our need for His help. The Bible isn't about one half Law (Old Testament) and the other half Grace (New Testament). It's about God in His grace showing us by the law that we need rescuing from the futility of living as if we could ever keep all the law. It's about showing us our need of something more wonderful and more freeing than living in the exhausting cyclical life-style of trying to keep the law, rather than looking by faith to the One, Jesus Christ, Who kept all the law and then imputed (put on our account) His perfect law-keeping record.

Romans 5:19-21

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As an example of the arrogance the Pharisees demonstrated in the modification and amendments to God's laws, Christ brought forward to them the most frequently ignored law among them--Divorce. Divorce was rampant among the Pharisees. In general, a wife was able to be cast off for very light reasons. Divorce was a sort of convenience for the Pharisee men, and was an often used way for them to gratify their own goals and desires. False religion does that. It sets up desires as idols and then creates both difficult and easy ways to accomplish them—but the "desires" are the goal not God.

When these women were handed their divorce papers they were cast off by their husbands to be married by another self-righteous Pharisee. This trading of women back and forth was detestable, and tantamount to a prostitution ring. It was due mostly to no fault of the women, but due in large part to the atmosphere of self-indulgence that cycled through this corrupt way of living. False religion has a way of making one person "untouchable" in their esteem and honor before others, while making others "untouchable" in their defining failures. False religion does not make room for forgiveness through grace and mercy.

Where do you find Truth? Can you accept that God has rightly established the way to live and has also made known the way to be reconciled to Him when you understand you have broken His law? False religion may not have a denominational title on it but it is an unreliable way in which you think you can "measure up" without God's imparted grace to the account of your soul.

Life Application Questions:

1. **Why does self-righteousness cause a person to mock Christ and His record of righteousness?**
 2. **How is self-righteousness like a false religion? Does that religion need a denominational category, or can it be a customized personal system of beliefs?**
 3. **Why is the steadfast character of God so important to the absoluteness of the Law?**
 4. **How is the Law grace?**
 5. **Can anyone keep the law of God? Is there a point to be made about that that Christ is making clear to you today?**
-

