

# From Law to Gospel and Gospel to Law

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<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. (Luke 16:14–18)

### Leftover Night?

- A. Now, last time, you may remember, we went through [vv. 1-13](#) of this chapter and dealt with what many consider to be one of the most difficult texts in all the Bible—the Parable of the Shrewd Manager.
  - 1. We’ll touch on that in a moment here, but let me just say that it doesn’t necessarily get much easier with what we have in front of us this morning.
- B. At first read, it feels like [Luke 16](#) is just going all over the place, seemingly without much order or connection. My guess is you kind of felt that even as we just read it. It seems like a bunch of random ideas thrown together in a paragraph or two.
  - 1. Kind of like leftover night at home, right? Do you guys do this? You have one left over taco, a bit of Chinese food, a slice of pizza, and a can of kidney beans or whatever. You might try to arrange it on a plate all nice or something, but no matter what you do, stuff just isn’t going to blend all that well.
- C. Is that what Luke is doing here? He has a bunch of random teachings and sayings of Christ and he didn’t want to discard them so he just kind of threw them all together here? Is [Luke 16](#) the leftover night of his gospel, the junk drawer? Or is there some sort of order and connection in all of these things?
  - 1. I think there is. I think Luke is actually cooking up for us quite a meal. And I think because of this, these verses that in isolation seem quite confusing, when taken all together, actually start to make sense. Hopefully, you’ll see what I mean as we go along.

### Recalling the Shrewd Manager

- A. But first, let me quickly connect what we just read with the stuff that’s come before, because as I’m saying, I think this is going to help us make sense of what we’re looking at today.

- B. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager is tough to understand, but I think the essence of it is this: this worldly guy gets the basic principle that when a crisis is coming you do whatever you have to do to prepare for it.
  - 1. And Jesus is saying, if this is true for him, how much more should the children of God, in view of the great impending realities like eternity, and judgment, and heaven, and hell, and the like, rearrange their priorities, shift their schedules and their lives, and do whatever they have to do to be ready for it?
- C. And the upshot in particular coming out of that parable was that those who really see that the kingdom is here in Jesus, eternity is for real, this life is a vapor, life and death are on the line in an ultimate sense, they're going to handle their money and possessions in a way that prepares them for that day—in other words, they are going to radically, counter-culturally, even counter-intuitively release these things in love for God and others and for the advance of His purposes in the world.
  - 1. That's the way you get prepared for the next life—you let go of everything for Jesus in this one!
    - a. Now, remember this, because it's going to come into play again as we try to understand our text for this morning.
- D. As we move now into [vv. 14-18](#), I'm going to organize my thoughts under three headings for us: (1) Distorting the Law of God ([vv. 14-15](#)); (2) Tracing the Law of God ([v. 16](#)); and (3) Fulfilling the Law of God ([vv. 17-18](#)).

## (1) Distorting the Law of God (vv. 14-15)

### You Are Those Who Justify Yourselves

- A. Okay, so the Pharisees are listening in to what Jesus is saying about this shrewd manager and His points about serving money or God and the state of a person's heart and things, and, needless to say, they're not pleased. They feel threatened by it, perhaps a bit exposed by it, even a little enraged by it.
- B. Look at [v. 14](#) again: [“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things \[the parable and what not\], and they ridiculed him.”](#)
  - 1. The idea is that there is a sort of combat taking place between these men and Jesus at this point because Jesus has touched a nerve, or more pointedly, Jesus has put His finger on their idol.
- C. Jesus comes back at them in [v. 15](#): [“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.”](#)
- D. Now here's where we come to this idea of Distorting the Law. To [“justify yourself”](#) is to declare yourself righteous, in this case at least, specifically with reference to the Law of God.

1. The Pharisees were, in many ways, experts in the Law of God, they knew it through and through, and they were painfully fastidious in their upholding of it.
  - a. On the surface of it, everyone looking in would conclude, my goodness these men are lovers of God. But God who sees through the show and into the heart says: “Not so fast, truly they are lovers of money. They are playing the religious game in an effort to achieve worldly gain. They’re doing all of this ‘for Me,’ but their hearts are set on something else.”

## An Impulse in All of Us

- A. There is an impulse we see in these men here that we must pause and reflect upon at this point, because we all have it in one way or another—and that is this impulse to justify ourselves.
  1. Interestingly, even people who claim to care not a lick for the things of God still feel the need to do this. Because they’ve been made in God’s image, and His law has been written into the very fabric of their being, they still feel the need to justify themselves, to make the case for why they’re right in the things they do or don’t do.
- B. There’s an evangelistic method I remember using in college where the opening question is: “Do you consider yourself a good person?” Undoubtedly, every time, the answer came back: “Yes.”
  1. And then you’d proceed to use the law of God to show them their self-evaluation might be a little off. “Have you ever told a lie?” “Well, yes of course, hundreds of times.” “Jesus says that to be angry at another person is akin to murder in your heart. Have you ever been angry at another person?” “Of course.” “Jesus says that to look upon someone who’s not your spouse with lust is akin to committing adultery in your heart. Have you ever looked upon another with lust?” “Are you kidding, bro? Every day.”
    - a. “Well, if you were to be judged by God’s standards are you thinking you’re still a good person?”
- C. And then the self-justification begins. “Well, who doesn’t lie from time to time? They were just small little ‘white’ lies nothing big. And anger, are you kidding me? Do you know the people I’ve been angry at—what they’ve done to me? And lust, listen that’s just natural. [Or] I wouldn’t have to lust if my wife would meet my needs. O sure I may have cheated on her but it’s because she refused to put out. It’s not my fault.”
  1. Years ago my uncle told me something just like this. And he was claiming to be a Christian at the time. And now he’s filed for divorce and moved on. But I have no doubt he’s justifying it.
    - a. The bottom line here is that almost nobody comes out and just says, “Yeah, I’m a wretched person and I don’t care.” Everyone’s telling themselves that they are pretty good—they need to feel that they are pretty good.

- D. To give another example, and to show us just how early this self-justification thing starts, parents, I don't know, you tell me: how hard is it to get your kids to say sorry? Have you experienced this?
1. "Say sorry to your sister, Levi." He just kind of looks at me, pursing his lips, clenching his fists, almost acting like he doesn't hear me. "Say sorry to your sister." Still crickets. "Okay man I guess we won't be able to have dessert tonight if we can't show kindness to each other." "Sorry." "O, okay, I see how it is!"
    - a. He heard me all along. He knew what I wanted him to do. He just doesn't want to admit wrong. He's justifying himself in his own mind. He's resisting the humility, or humiliation even, of saying sorry.
- E. It's kind of funny when we talk about kids, but then think about yourself. Have you been in an argument with your spouse or someone at work and, while you see that they've done wrong, you certainly know you've played a part, and yet, man, trying to come out with an "I'm sorry" just feels like you're fighting against gravity—and you are, the gravity of the sinful nature. It will wiggle and squirm and kick and scream before it will make the first move in humility and just say sorry. We're always waiting for them. "I'll say something when they come to me."
1. Now what in the world is that?! It's [v. 14-15](#) at work in us. And it's what God calls in [v. 15](#) "an abomination."

## (2) Tracing the Law of God (v. 16)

### The Old Testament Is Incomplete and Insufficient

- A. As we come to [v. 16](#) now, we see that the law of God was never meant to be something by which a man could justify himself. It was meant, instead, to lead us to Jesus and the gospel of the grace of God. It was meant to lead us to the justification before God that is found only in and through Him.
1. Jesus goes on to say to the Pharisees: "[The Law and the Prophets were until John](#) [the Baptist]; [since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached . . .](#)"
- B. "[The Law and the Prophets](#)" here is shorthand for the OT Scriptures, and even the whole of the OT era.
1. If you read your OTs carefully what you begin to notice is that it's not complete in itself. The Law and the Prophets are always pointing beyond themselves, anticipating something yet to come off in the future.
    - a. There's a sort of dissonance on every page that only finds resolution with the arrival of Jesus and the kingdom of God.
- C. Consequently, it was never to be assumed that the OT revelation of things was sufficient for man's salvation. And it certainly should never have been assumed that man could justify himself by simply muscling up and following what's found therein.

1. In fact, the whole of the OT in many ways is actually about the complete and utter inability of man to ever do so. If all we have is Genesis to Malachi, then the whole plan of God seems like a complete and total failure.

## The Pharisees Should Have Known Better

- A. The Pharisees above all, being so well-versed in the Scriptures, should have gotten this. It's on every page! But let me give you just one example from both the Law and the Prophets.
- B. With regard to the Law, think about what went down when the Law first came in—I'm thinking here in particular of the Ten Commandments. Right from the start, we get all the clues we need that this isn't going to be enough, that man isn't going to be able to justify himself and get right with God by this.
  1. God, through Moses, had just freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and he leads them to Sinai where, like a good King, He's going to give them what should be the law of the land, so to speak—a royal decree.
  2. The Ten Commandments are given, the first of which is: ["You shall have no other gods before me" \(Exo 20:3\)](#).
  3. Moses comes down from the mountain, recounts these things to the people of Israel, and they all say with vain self-confidence: ["All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do" \(24:3b\)](#).
  4. God calls Moses back up the mountain and, within days, the people have already broken it. They melt down their gold and make gods like the Egyptians.
  5. And God's going to destroy the people because of it, but Moses throws himself in between as it were and intercedes.
    - a. Implications: our hearts are stubborn and rebellious, we deserve God's judgment, we need a mediator to get us back in the right with Him.
- C. With regard to the prophets, there are countless places where God decries the people of Israel for their empty religion and the ways they use the law to justify themselves, just like these Pharisees are doing in our text. They never seem to get the point of it all.
  1. Perhaps one of the places we see this most succinctly is [Amos 5:21-24](#): [" <sup>21</sup> I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. <sup>22</sup> Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. <sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. <sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."](#)
    - a. In other words: "You have made a mess of the Law. The goal of it all is love for me and love for others and you have reduced it into a bunch of rules whereby you can justify yourselves and get all smug up in your pride. Something needs to change!"
- D. The Law and the Prophets come in, but they can't change human hearts. They can simply prepare us for and point us towards the only One who truly can.

## From Law to Gospel

- A. As we come to the NT, the Apostle Paul sums up the whole sweep of redemptive history for us in similar ways in both Galatians and Romans, and I wanted to take a moment to read each of these to you now (though I'm certain I won't do justice to them).
- B. In Gal 3:21-24, we read this: “<sup>21</sup> Is the law . . . contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <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.”
1. Here we see that that Law of God was intended to be our “guardian” (Gk. paidagōgos = leader, guide, teacher, instructor). It is not the fullness of what we need but it is intended to lead us towards it. It gives us a sense of who God is. It gives a sense of our sin. We grow aware that we deserve judgment. We get that we need mercy. We see that our situation is desperate.
    - a. We are primed through the Law to see and receive Christ.
- C. This, again, is precisely the sort of thing Paul takes up in Rom 3:19-25: “<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”
1. Listen to me. Paul is saying here that the Law was never intended to be a mountain up which you must climb in your own strength to get back to God.
    - a. No! The Law of God was not intended to be a mountain, but a muzzle—“so that every mouth may be stopped” (v. 19)—and you learn to stop playing the religious game, trusting in your own goodness and righteousness, and you come to hurl yourself headlong onto the mercy of God as revealed in Jesus and the gospel.
- D. Jesus lives the life I should've lived but then never could. Jesus dies the death I should've died but now never will. And when He rises from the dead, it is an indication that God has received the payment for my sins and I can be counted righteous in the heavenly courtroom, justified, in Him!

## A Neon Sign on a Desert Highway!

- A. I could sum up what we've been saying here with an image: Reading the OT is, in many ways I think, kind of like driving a desert highway for miles on end—the kind of highway I would take traveling

home to Phoenix from San Luis Obispo. I'd hit a stretch in the middle there where it was just desert and dust for hours.

1. But you imagine you're on this road and you don't know where exactly its headed or what you're going to find. Let's say it's before the days of Google Map and Yelp. So you're just on your own. And there's nothing. For miles and miles. Nothing. And you're starting to worry. Am I going to run out of gas? Is there going to be somewhere to spend the night? What about food and water? Am I going to die out here?
  - a. And, then, just when you thought all was lost, there's a neon light off on the horizon! It's a hotel and there's vacancy. There's a gas station right next to it and a restaurant around the back. You're relieved, you're overjoyed!
- B. In the OT, it's like driving through a desert. You keep thinking this is it, we've arrived, but then it never fully pans out.
  1. Moses seems awesome but then he dies outside the land.
  2. David has the making of a messianic king, but then he has that faltering with Bathsheba.
  3. Solomon starts off strong but then gives way to all manner of idolatry.
  4. Canaan seems great but God's people can't stay faithful.
  5. The first temple calls for celebration, but then Nebuchadnezzar destroys it.
  6. The second temple seems hopeful but then Rome shows up.
- C. And then, finally, after a long stretch of desert highway road, in comes John the Baptist. ["The Law and the Prophets were until John"](#) (v. 16).
  1. He is the transitional figure—from the age of anticipation and promise to the age of fulfillment. He's the one who gets to announce the arrival of the Christ.
    - a. So out there in the Israeli wilderness, with dust and darkness all around, he switches on that neon sign: ["Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"](#) (Matt 3:2). Or, perhaps better, as he would later say: ["Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"](#) (John 1:29).
- D. In other words: "The One who can actually deal with our junk and make things right . . . is finally here! And His name is Jesus."

## And Everyone Forces His Way into It?!

- A. Now, we come to that difficult phrase at the end of v. 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."](#)
- B. I don't have time to talk about the various ways scholars have interpreted this, so I'll just tell you how I interpret it.
  1. I think, given the immediate context of the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (vv. 1-13) and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (which we'll come to next week in vv. 19-31), the

point here is this: when you get the crisis you are in, when you get that you are a sinner and judgment is coming, when you see that the arrival of the kingdom is here and the solution to it all is present in Jesus, anyone with any sense at all is going to do whatever it takes to get in. Like the shrewd manager, you're going to reorder your stuff to make sure you're ready.

C. Here is where we recall texts like:

1. Luke 9:23-24: “<sup>23</sup> If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”
2. Luke 13:24: “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”
3. Matt 13:44: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

D. Here is where we remember that Paul himself made the dramatic move from self-justifying, self-righteous Pharisee to broken-hearted, face-to-the-ground, palms-to-the-sky, Christ-follower.

1. In Phil 3, he says: “Listen, I had all the righteousness one could hope for according to the Law of Moses, and then I saw Christ, and I said forget my righteousness, it's crap (Gk. skubalon), just get me into Jesus. I just want to ‘be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith’ (v. 9).”

- a. Paul gets it. He sees the urgency of the situation—the crisis he is in before God, the fullness of the provision in Christ—and he's ready to force his way in, whatever it takes. Let it all go! Just give me Jesus!

E. And the whole issue back in our text is that the Pharisees don't see it. They don't get it. They're satisfied with their own righteousness. They feel justified in themselves. And, ironically, it's for this very reason that they actually stand condemned.

F. But what about you? Are you still puffing out your chest, trying to make it? Or are you on the floor with Paul?

### (3) Fulfilling the Law of God (vv. 17-18)

#### From Gospel to Law

- A. Now, clearly we don't have much time to deal with vv. 17-18 and this idea of Fulfilling the Law. But let me at least say a few things.
- B. First, Jesus is concerned that, once we see justification is not by the Law, we will just discard the Law altogether as something old news, outdated, irrelevant. But that would be to make a grave error.
  1. So He goes on in v. 17 to clear things up: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”

- C. Grace does not render the Law of God pointless for us, it renders the Law of God possible! Did you catch that? The point of grace is not to nullify the Law, but to help us fulfill it
  - 1. If you like grace because you think it means that you can stay safely in your sin while on your way to heaven, then you have missed the point of grace, and I would say you've probably never truly encountered it.
    - a. The gospel's goal isn't just to get us into heaven but to get more of heaven into us—to get us looking more like our heavenly Father, acting more like our heavenly Father, holy like Him, loving like Him.
- D. And the moral Law is just a transcription of His character. So of course you don't discard the Law. I want to look like that. I want to be holy as He is holy. I want to stop lying and lusting and cheating and being all self-centered and spiritually sick.
  - 1. Sin is not a pleasure to be coddled, it's a cancer to be cut out. And therefore, grace would not be grace if it did not immediately put us at odds with sin and help us grow in godliness, in conformity with the Law of God.

## Illustrating the Point

- A. And [v. 18](#), with this discussion of marriage and divorce, as random as it seems here, is actually just an illustration of this very point.
  - 1. Some of the rabbis in Jesus' day permitted divorce for all manner of ridiculous reasons. Even the Law of Moses permitted divorce on some occasions ([Deut 24:1-4](#)).
    - a. But Jesus, in another exchange with the Pharisees would say this was only an accommodation from God due to the hardness of their heart—but it was never what God intended as a lasting ordinance ([Matt 19:3-9](#)).
- B. But in the gospel, and here is the most important point, our hearts are changed! The law is written there by the Spirit of God. Therefore, not only do we find ourselves fulfilling the law, in some sense we actually start to go beyond it to what it's really been about all along.
  - 1. We're not just looking to conform to the mere letter, we are looking to love as we have been loved!
- C. So with regard to your marriage, you're not looking for ways to get out of it when it gets hard. You're not looking for loopholes in the Law—"How can I get out of this and still be justified?"
  - 1. You're saying: "My goodness, I've read [Eph 5](#). Christ has so loved His bride that He gave His life for her."
    - a. What is Christ doing on that cross, as they're spitting, and railing, and beating on Him? He is pursuing His bride, though she clearly wants nothing to do with Him! He

is pursuing you and me, though we deserve the spitting, we deserve the railing, we deserve the beating, we deserve the wrath of God. He takes it all for us.

- D. Let me just tell you, if you come to Jesus and let Him love you like this, it's going to shift things around in your heart. You're not going to be able to just bail on your marriage when it gets hard, because He never bailed on you.

## Conclusion

- A. The cross of Christ creates this safe space where we can both own up to our mess and find acceptance and love and hope for change. That's what makes the gospel so amazing. You can come out of hiding with your snot and your tears and your sin. And you find not only forgiveness and acceptance and justification before God Himself through Christ—you also find the power to truly change!