

The Problem With Self-Justification

Luke 16:14-18

Outline/Summary

Seems odd-- like a handful of misc sayings, are sandwiched between two money passages, even seeming to break the flow:

- Money stuff in v1-13 (last week)
- Rich Man and Lazarus in v19ff (next week).

Between two big sections on money, we have these themes:

- V 14 - money
- V 15 - appearances, justification,
- V 16 - the Law, the kingdom, the gospel, preaching
- V 17 - back to the Law
- V 18 - divorce/remarriage

The keys to piecing these themes together and seeing some continuity (about...)

- 1) Pharisees (14)
- 2) their problem of self-justification (15)
- 3) the hypocrisy of it all

This is the nature of our rebellion against God in wrestling with our guilt.

We want justify ourselves; we want others to justify us; we want to be accepted; we want to feel as though everything is okay and we've done what's right.

- One way of doing is like the Pharisees -- by working very, very hard
- Another way is like Stuart Smalley and just telling ourselves "**there, there. That's good enough.**" And just saying it over and over and over again.

1. Justifying Self with Accumulation of Wealth

v 14 - "Pharisees, ...lovers of money...were scoffing"

2. Justifying Self with Acceptance of Others

v 15 - "you...justify yourselves in the sight of men"

3. Justifying Self by being Selective with the Law (v 17-18)

- Not one dot or stroke of a letter in the Law is optional (17) יהרהי
- One of the clearest examples of Pharisees hypocrisy was their frequent divorce and remarriage (18) - that's why Jesus brings up divorce in this context.

Yod (yode) / KJV jot

4. Justifying Self by Ignoring the Kingdom

v 16 - [literally should read] "the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is strongly urged to enter in."

Study Helps and Application

Introduction: Faithfulness to the full council of God's Word requires that we teach even the heavy stuff. Until we know how bad the bad news is, we cannot begin to grasp how amazing the good news really is. Though the bad news is worse than you thought, the good news is better than you could possibly imagine. George Whitfield said:

"Before you can be at peace with God, you must be brought out of your self-righteousness; it is the last idol taken out of our heart. The pride of our heart will not let us submit to the righteousness of Jesus Christ."

Being conformed to the image of Christ, sanctification, isn't a comfortable process. Think of it as "character root canal."

Leaders: Make sure to leave time for wrap up and bring this back around on a victorious note. The Spurgeon quote that Ryan wrapped up with is at the end of these notes and may serve well for that.

Discussion 1: Justifying self in accumulation of wealth/living a double life. The Pharisees were good shrewd businessmen.

"These were men who lived a double life. For them the sacred and the secular were watertight compartments. In the religious compartment, they were Pharisees, with certain beliefs and practices by which they were assured of a good standing before God. The secular compartment was quite separate; in that, they could afford to be 'lovers of money,' for their attitudes in such matters had no bearing on their religious status. That was why they ridiculed the idea that getting to heaven might be in some way connected with ordinary life." --Michael Wilcock

How does your money and stuff relate to your sense of justification and peace?

- *Maybe there's a sense in which you feel somewhat "justified" by your business success?*
- *Maybe there's a sense in which you feel somewhat "justified" by your business morality?*
- *Maybe you think you'll be justified as long as God never looks at your business practice?*

Discussion 2: Selective with God's Law. How easy we find it to create standards of righteousness by which we measure others. We tend to pick and choose those sins that we struggle least with (and *we* find repulsive)... then we set the standard just below ourselves. Discuss some common examples of this in pop-church today.

**use discernment as to whether this is appropriate for your group*

- **Homosexuality vs. "regular lust" --Do you really think God is less offended by "regular lust"? **Expose the hypocrisy.** (not too deep here in mixed company)*

Break out--*men/women separately

****Have you considered... having men and women meet separately occasionally, or taking time to break out to address issues inappropriate for mixed company (or children)? This is not a question for use with women or children present.***

Break Out 1: Given that there is a huge pornography problem in the church, no doubt many men or women in our groups are struggling with this sin.

Context: Self-justification and picking/choosing what to obey...

- *Do you see the hypocrisy in pursuing purity in one area of life and not another?*
- *... of being repulsed by the sexual sin of another (not your "flavor") while you indulge?*

This is not a call to give up the fight, but to renew your resolve and call you to repent not only of the lust, ***but also of the self-justifying hypocrisy***

General help with sexual lust:

- *Temptation is **not** sin. Gal 5:16 does not say you will not **have** the desires...*
- *We are to **flee** from it (1 Cor. 6:18). Pray not only for strength to resist, but more intentionally for speed! Be like the antelope and use both distance and speed...*
- *Get **accountability**... now. It is easier to resist when you know you will be asked.*

Optional Material--Divorce

If you have members dealing with divorce: Here are the questions Ryan brought up. This is a time for bearing one another's burdens.

Optional: We saw that the mention of divorce in this context was not random, but a glaring example of Pharisaic hypocrisy. We need to examine our hearts as we deal with the complicated issues around divorce. One sermon/one home group discussion is not enough to deal with this difficult area, but ***here are some fundamental questions you must ask yourselves:***

- *Are you **justifying yourself** to keep doing what you are doing?*
- *Are you **pursuing about a divorce without** even asking yourself if you had **biblical grounds**? Or did you make something up like "I know God would never want me so unhappy, so..."*
- *Are you **contemplating divorce** with little thought about what the Bible says? Are you more **transfixed on your own hurts and wants** that you won't even let your mind meditate on **Mal 2:16** that God hates divorce. Have you come let yourself believe that God hates your spouse more than he hates divorce?*
- *Ask yourself if the complications have **so deceived you** into thinking that this is an **area of your life** where there's **no self-justification going on, no self-righteousness, no hypocrisy?***

- Loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do you find it easy to look down your nose at those who are imbalanced in a different area from you? (draw out those who may think they are perfectly balanced with questions)
 - *Sound doctrine folks (**mind**) vs. those who are "just trying to live like Jesus" (**strength**)*
 - *Those more emotional in their devotion (**heart**) vs. those devoted to worshipping in truth (**mind**)*

Are we not called to love God in all of these ways? Yes, they are imbalanced, possibly in a more unhealthy way than you. Spend some time discerning and confessing the "log in your own eye."

^{ESV} **Luke 6:42** How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Discussion 3: Ignoring the Kingdom. The Pharisees sought to enter into God's Kingdom by observance of the Law before men. Now the good news is preached (proclaimed/told) of the Kingdom of God and through it, the Kingdom is being built.

^{ESV} **Luke 17:20** Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed,²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, **the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.**"

- What is the difference does it make if the Kingdom is something we are waiting for vs. something we are seeing be built in our very midst? (*passive observer vs. tool in the Master's hands...*)
- Our calling is discernable by our gifting. Take some time and encourage one another in the gifts you see in others. (*encouragement, organizational skills, teaching, mercy, passionate/consistent prayer warrior, helpful, ... **add more***)
- "*The Church **knows** it is full of hypocrites*" In our (postmodern) culture, hypocrisy is one of the only remaining sins. How might sharing this with unbelievers be a bridge to proclaiming the gospel? (*common ground: hypocrisy is bad and present in the Church ... the gospel gives a remedy...*)

As time permits/If you didn't cover it last week

Discussion 4: Self justification through acceptance of others/God's knowledge of our hearts. We commonly hear people say "God knows my/your heart." This is true.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 17:10** "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

- Is this *good* news? (*no, this is what makes the good news... so good!*)
 - ^{ESV} **Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
 - ^{ESV} **Matthew 15:19** For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.
 - ^{ESV} **Mark 7:21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.
- The Pharisees sought to justify themselves before men through external religious piety. Talk about ways in which we try to appear, to the world and one another, more righteous than we really are.
 - We know God is not impressed with these outward appearances--what motivates us to keep doing it? (*Hint: Where do pride and fear of man fit in?*)

Wrap-Up: Rejoice in God's Amazing Grace

Discussion 5: Remind yourselves and discuss how wonderful the good news really is.

Ryan quoted **Charles Spurgeon**:

*"It will always give a Christian the greatest calm, quiet, ease, and peace, to think of the perfect righteousness of Christ. How often are the saints of God downcast and sad! I do not think they ought to be. I do not think they would if they could always see their perfection in Christ.... There are some who are always talking about corruption, and the depravity of the heart, and the innate evil of the soul. This is quite true, but why not go a little further, and **remember that we are perfect in Christ Jesus**. It is no wonder that those who are dwelling upon their own corruption should wear such downcast looks; but **surely if we call to mind that Christ is made unto us righteousness, we shall be of good cheer**. What though distresses afflict me, though Satan assault me, though there may be many things to be experienced before I get to heaven, those are done for me in the covenant of divine grace; there is nothing wanting in my Lord, Christ hath done it all."*

Memory Verses

^{ESV} **Matthew 6:1** "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

^{ESV} **Romans 8:33b** It is God who justifies.

Resources for Further Study

- Matthew 6:1-16
- *A multitude of counselors!*

Next Week's Text

Luke 16:19-31