

Title: Every dot matters  
Text: Luke 16.18  
Theme: Gospel fruit fulfills God's moral law  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmtnt: Citizens of the Kingdom of God love to live under God's authority (laws).

Read Text:

V.18 is cut and dry. No caveats. No exceptions. But as many of you know, this is not the only thing that Jesus said about divorce and remarriage. In Matthew 5.32 and Matthew 19.9, Jesus said that divorce was permitted in cases of sexual immorality. Why does Jesus give exceptions there but not here? Why doesn't Jesus go into more detail and explanation? Here is the bottom line up front. Jesus is not giving a seminar on divorce and remarriage. In fact, divorce and remarriage is not the main point of this text. Jesus is using divorce and remarriage as an example of a very important point that he is pressing home on to the Pharisees and to anyone who tries to twist the Scriptures into saying what they want it to say instead of submitting to what it does. Genuine followers of Christ are drawn to God's Word. They love it. They trust it. And they seek to align themselves with it, not as a chore to be done, or a burden to bear, but as a delight for the soul. Everyone else either reject it, ignore it, or like the Pharisees, distort it. False interpretations of the Bible are not God's Word. God's Word is the words of God rightly interpreted. The sermon has 4 points. The first point is more like introduction so you understand a little more history and background. Points 2 and 3 are a sentence with point 4 being the application or the "so what." To those who try to twist God's Word, God's Word and Kingdom are forever. Therefore, you need to align yourself with God's Word. You need to place yourself under its authority and live in happy submission to it because your good God has given you his Word for your good. Let's dig in.

#### 1. **First some background on "The Law and Prophets" (18)**

(v.18) The Law and the Prophets refers to the Old Testament (Covenant) which were the Scriptures given by God for multiple purposes such as: 1) Hearing from God 2) Knowing who God is 3) Knowing what God wants from us 4) Knowing God's plan for this world 5) Knowing what is right and wrong 6) Knowing that we are sinners who need to be forgiven 7) Learning that forgiveness from God comes from a sacrifice offered in our place 8) we need a perfect prophet, priest and king 9) God is going to send us the Messiah and so much more. For example, there were specific laws given by God that taught our need for forgiveness and the means of forgiveness through a substitutionary sacrifice. This truth was enforced by the command for Israel to observe the Day of Atonement, every year. There were also stories that reinforced this such as how the seed of the woman would crush the serpent, even as the serpent-crusher is bruised in the process (Genesis 3.15). Abraham is commanded to offer Isaac, but Isaac is spared and a ram dies in the place of Isaac (Genesis 22.13). In the original Passover, an unblemished lamb is offered up in death in the place of the firstborn male and the blood of that lamb is placed on the doorposts of the home. In Exodus 32, Moses offers to give his life as

an offering in place of rebelling Israel. In Isaiah 53 the Servant of God gives his life in death in order to make the many righteous.

The law was given to reveal how much we need to be saved from our sin and that we cannot save ourselves. Sadly, Israel concluded that since God gave them the law, that must mean that they are better than the other nations. They also concluded that since they had the Tabernacle, and then the Temple, built by Solomon, that they were bullet-proof. They were invincible. Well, that was blown-up. They were not better than the other nations, and in some ways, they turned out to be worse. Not only that, but the Northern Kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrian empire and never came back. The Southern Kingdom was defeated by the Babylonians and taken into exile for 70 years before they came back to the land. Guess what Israel? You're not all that! Guess what world? Neither are you. No one can save themselves. This is what God teaches us. His Word is given to us to humble us, however, people do not like that message and so, they, like the Pharisees distort it and misinterpret it for their own purposes.

## 2. To Those who try to twist God's Word (14-15)

However, instead of embracing the purpose of the law and being humbled by it, Israel and the Pharisees used the fact that since they had been given the law, they must be fundamentally better than anyone else. Gentiles are dogs, scum, low-life pagans. It was rather inconvenient, and you would think humbling, to be conquered by and controlled by the Roman Empire. But there was something else going on. Jesus pointed out (Luke 16.15) that the Pharisees were *"those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts."* They were in competition with one another. They were out to prove who was the best. They tried to out-do one another in keeping the code. Within the system of the Pharisees, there were different schools of interpretation and these schools tended to compete with one another. The followers of these schools of thought, often named after a prominent Rabbi, were known to intensely study the law, but for the wrong reason. In so many cases, they were trying to find loopholes in order to justify their sinful and selfish decisions.

Case in point, in Mark 7, Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees had come up with a loophole they called Corban. If they had aged parents who could no longer work and needed care and financial support for food, they were commanded by God to honor father and mother. This is one of the 10 commandments. However, the Pharisees came up with a tradition, a practice, a loophole that allowed them to declare that their resources were "Corban" that is dedicated to God and therefore, they could not use them for their parents. This meant that either their parents were on their own, or, had to depend on the other siblings and their resources. Their traditions and grammatical gymnastics were their attempts to justify themselves and justify their plain disobedience of God's Word. Being holy became an excuse for being sinful. In our text, Jesus is exposing the Pharisees again. They were lovers of money and were ridiculing the teaching of Jesus, who is the Word of God. They were twisting the Scriptures, so Jesus points out that the Word of God is not going anywhere. It is forever, which means that the King and his kingdom is forever and they will be held to account for how they respond to the Scriptures and now, how they respond to how the Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ!

### 3. God's Word and kingdom is forever. (16-17)

God's Word will never fail and will never be proven wrong. The Law and the Prophets were until John. But now, something epic has happened. Hebrews 1.1 says, *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."* The "last days" of Hebrews 1.2 is the same as the "since then" of Luke 16.16. In these last days, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached. In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son who not only preached the good news of the kingdom, but he is the King who is inheriting all of creation as his kingdom because, after all, he was the agent of creation. He was the voice of creation who caused it to come into existence.

The voice of God is so powerful it creates. It causes things to be that were not. God's Word tells us the story of God making a kingdom, where he will live with, enjoy, delight in, and rule over his people who are made up of people from every tribe, language and nation. I was visiting a member in the hospital recently who was in considerable discomfort. I told her that in the beginning of God's Word there is no sickness and pain and, in the end, there is no sickness and pain. Sickness and pain are temporary. They are real. They come from deep grief and cause deep grief, but will not last. Every day of pain is one day less of it and one day closer to home.

Now, look at the end of v.16. The ESV says, *"and everyone forces his way into it."* The verb in this phrase can be translated in the middle voice or in the passive voice. The ESV translators chose the middle voice, but put the passive voice translation in the margin. It could be either. I think that the passive voice, is the better way to understand this. If you have an ESV, the optional translation in the footnote says, *"everyone is forcefully urged into it."* I think this makes more sense since Jesus would be highlighting the importance of the kingdom of God and he is urgently pressing on his hearers to be in it.

Let's freeze-frame this scene. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the centerpiece of God's revelation. Jesus is the perfect expression and communication of God because he is God. Jesus makes God known to us. Jesus is not only God, he is man. He shows us how we should view and treat God's Word. Jesus believes God's Word. Jesus preaches God's Word. Jesus depends on God's Word. Jesus fulfills God's Word. Jesus obeys and keeps God's Word. Jesus appealed to God's Word in order to settle arguments and correct people. Jesus used the Bible to define himself, explain himself and explain his ministry. Jesus called the Bible the word of God. Jesus held the Scriptures in high esteem. Jesus called God's Word, "truth!" Jesus is the final word, not a different word. The NT explains the OT. Our God is the true and living God who speaks and has given to us his eternal Word. Therefore, the way you treat God's Word is how you treat God. The way the Pharisees treated Jesus was how they were treating God. The way we treat God's Word is how we treat Jesus. When you trust in God's Word, you are trusting in God. When you obey God's Word, you are obeying God. When you dismiss or seek to diminish God's Word you are dismissing and seeking to diminish God.

To those (Pharisees and others) who think they can tinker with, ignore, twist or find loopholes in God's Word, know this: It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. In other words, it is not going to happen. This "dot" that Jesus mentions refers to a tiny stroke of the pen that distinguishes Hebrew letters like a "d" and an "r" from each other. Even the tiniest of details of God's Word will never be void. Do not play fast and loose with God's Word and you do not look for an interpretation that suits you. No, be honest with the text. Then Jesus says.... (read v.18)

Did Jesus just drop that in there out of the blue? No! The self-righteous Pharisees were notorious for arguing about their own interpretations and loopholes. They not only made a mockery out of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment (Honor your father and mother), but they had figured out a way to make a mockery out of the 7<sup>th</sup> one as well (You shall not commit adultery). Jesus is addressing the Pharisees and he is addressing the fact that they had made a mockery out of marriage by coming up with an interpretation of the OT law that allowed them to divorce their wives for any reason they wanted and Jesus is telling them that they are committing adultery when they do that. God's Word which speaks highly of the sanctity of marriage is not to be trifled with. ...

#### 4. **Therefore, align yourself accordingly.** (18)

What is the point of v.18? Submit yourself to the authority of God's Word. Jesus addresses the issue of divorce more thoroughly in Matthew 19. (turn to Matthew 19) In that text we get a little more background on how this was viewed and practiced by the Pharisees. Look at v. 3. *"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* How is the question even phrased? How do these men view wives? It's pretty clear. The woman is always wrong. The reason it sounds like that is because it was, for the most just like that. Let me explain.

Different Jewish rabbis had different opinions on what constituted legitimate grounds for a divorce. There were basically two main views based on the teachings of two rabbis; Shammai and Hillel. Each rabbi had his followers. Shammai and Hillel differed on the meaning of "some indecency" – Deut 24.1. *"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce..."* (Moses goes on to warn that she cannot be re-married to the man who divorced her, if she becomes the wife of someone else). The law of Moses concerning divorce was given to protect the woman from being treated like a piece of property to be bought and sold at will. God gave details to OT Israel about divorce, NOT because God thought divorce was fine as long as the paperwork was in order, but because the reality of sin blew up marriages and this was a means of protection for the woman. The rabbi Shammai seemed to have understood this and taught that the only grounds by which a man could divorce his wife were if she were found to be immoral. Shammai therefore, interpreted "some indecency" as referring to sexual purity. The rabbi Hillel took a more lenient view. He interpreted "some indecency" as being just about anything you wanted. If you did not like her cooking or if you found a prettier woman, then your wife was "indecent." Something that other Rabbi's picked up on and promoted. Shammai's view had initially been the prevailing view but by the time of Christ, Hillel's view had

become more popular and, as a result, women were treated like property to be bought and sold at the whim of the man. The woman was constantly vulnerable to being accused of “some indecency” and sent packing. Once again, the very thing the law was intended to prevent is what the Pharisees were now promoting.

God’s Word elevates marriage and God’s design for marriage is one man, one woman until death. That is the design. Now, because we live in a sin-cursed world, there are things that happen in marriage that can rupture the covenant of marriage. When that happens, then God gave through Moses a process to follow that protected the woman. If you were going to divorce your wife she had to have a certificate of divorce. This was a protection for the women, particularly since the issue of dowry’s was so significant. This permission to divorce, was turned into, by some of the Pharisees, a command to divorce. As long as they filed the paperwork, they could do their own wife-swapping. Moses never commanded anyone to get a divorce. To say that Moses commanded people to get a divorce is being dishonest with the Law. And what does Jesus say about the Law? *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.*

God knows their hearts. God knows that these guys were treating marriage as if it were a fast-food wrapper. Use it for what you want then throw it away when you are done. For them, the important issue was whether you had filed the paperwork correctly and followed the proper legal steps. Jesus looks at it differently. The Pharisees had their own interpretations, but their interpretations were wrong and Jesus was calling them out on it. Do not hide behind the excuse of “well, there are a lot of different views about that” as opportunities to do whatever you want because you will not be able to use that when you give an account to God for your decisions. Just because there are different views does not mean that they are right views. Jesus is re-affirming God’s high view of the law which has a high view of marriage because his point was to point out that these guys were playing with fire by playing games with God’s Word. Their attitude toward marriage and divorce was a clear example and Jesus exposes their wife-swapping habits for what they are. You guys are committing adultery. You are law-breakers.

How do you respond when your guilt is exposed? Why does God expose our sin? He does it, so we can confess it, repent of it, be forgiven and restored! Take for example, God’s word on marriage. God is good and he tells us what is good and right. Marriage is a gift from God for our good. Jesus describes marriage as being a bond (hold fast) between two people that is so tight that you cannot tell where one ends and the other begins and anything that would seek to break this bond or weaken this bond would be like taking a knife and cutting off your arm or leg. Cutting up a marriage is like an amputation. God’s plan from the beginning was for people to be wrapped securely, intimately, purely, lovingly, joyfully, exclusively in a one woman-one-man-one-flesh relationship. This is not done to put people into bondage, but to provide freedom, warmth, and acceptance. Marriage is a gift from God so you can get a taste of heaven where you know perfectly and are known perfectly. Therefore God warns about protecting your marriage from anything that would harm it. In the Matthew 19 passage Jesus said, *“What therefore God has joined together let not man separate.”* This separation has the idea of mutilation, tearing, shredding, ripping, dismembering or amputating. Endangering a marriage is

a violent act. Anything that you do to contribute to the weakening of your marriage is an act of violence against that which God has joined. Marriage affects us so deeply because the stakes are so high. They are high because God is the one who not only created it, defines and describes it, but he is involved in it. God is not a passive spectator in your marriage. He cares deeply about how you treat your wife. He cares deeply about what you are doing to either strengthen your marriage or weaken your marriage. When you live in isolation from one another, when you threaten one another, when you humiliate one another, when you hide from one another, when you take what is to be only for your spouse and you share that with someone else you are ripping the flesh of your marriage; your own body. Sinning against your marriage is an act of violence against your own being. Therefore, divorce is serious.

The Pharisees had to be stunned, and rightfully so, when Jesus says, if you divorce your wife for any reason, other than sexual immorality and you marry someone else, you have committed adultery. Or here in our text where he repeats the same thing without the exception clause. Divorce is very serious. But Jesus says that sexual immorality can break up a marriage. The word translated sexual immorality is the word porneia from which we get our English word, pornography. Porneia is a general word for all sorts of sexual misconduct and is not limited to adultery. That means that sexual immorality is so toxic, so dangerous, and so destructive that it can rip apart what God has put together. Guard your heart. Guard your eyes. Guard your mind. Guard what you read, what you think about, and what you view. Guard what you say to people to whom you are not married. Are you in danger of crossing over that line of fascination, intrigue, and flirting to giving away that which is not yours to someone else. When you indulge yourself in fantasy and search for another relationship, you are playing with a fire that will not warm you, it will scorch you and burn you deeply. While these words of Jesus are strong with warning, the warning has been dipped in love. Listen to the one who died for you. When you get in too deep, your heart will deceive you and you will rationalize almost everything that you once held dear. Do not rationalize your sin. Do not give sin excuses. Damn those idols, for they want to damn you. And place yourself under the authority of God's Word and live in happy submission to it because your good God has given you his Word for your good.