

"GOD KNOWS YOUR HEART"

I. Introduction

- A. In recent years, I have noticed that when famous people are caught red-handed saying or doing something that is inexcusable, they often respond by saying something like this: 'While I regret my error in judgment, I want to make it clear that this does not represent who I am in my heart.'
- B. The assumption is that in spite of what he has said or done, his heart is still pure.
- C. If we could only look into his heart, then we would see that he is really a good person after all.
- D. Well, that is not what the Bible has to say about the heart of fallen man.
- E. The Bible says this: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? '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.'" (Jer 17:9-10 ESV)
- F. The condition of our fallen hearts is not good but evil.
- G. And God knows everything there is to know about our evil hearts.
- H. As we study these verses from Luke this morning, we will consider two things that they teach us about God's knowledge of the heart.
- I. First, God sees through our efforts at self-justification.
- J. And second, God sees through our efforts to set aside his law.

II. God Sees Through Efforts at Self-Justification

- A. Our passage begins by describing the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus's teaching in the previous section about how we should handle money.
1. In those verses, Jesus warned that it is impossible to serve God and money, and he said that we should use our resources in a manner that reflects our beliefs about eternity.
 2. Luke tells us that when the Pharisees heard Jesus say these things, they ridiculed him.
 3. Can you imagine ridiculing Jesus?
 4. Those of us who have been granted faith to believe in Jesus cannot imagine doing something like that.
 5. Yet here we see Israel's religious leaders mocking our Lord and declaring him to be a fool.
 6. People do the same thing today.
 7. Those who ignore Jesus are certainly not showing him any respect.
 8. Neither are those who imagine him to be someone other than the Jesus who is set forth in the Scriptures.
 9. We should not be surprised by the fact that those who are still in their sins ridicule Jesus Christ.
 10. Fallen man ridicules Christ because Christ confronts fallen man in his sin.
- B. Luke calls our attention to this by noting that the Pharisees were lovers of money.
1. Unlike the Sadducees, most of the Pharisees were not born into wealth.
 2. But they were social climbers.

3. They were proud of the wealth that they accumulated for themselves, and they looked upon it as as a sign of God's blessing.
 4. When they looked at Jesus in his poverty, they saw it as proof that he was not under God's blessing.
 5. People today still have a tendency to look at wealth, power, and status as indicators of blessing.
 6. And the reason why they do this is the same reason why the Pharisees did it: they are lovers of money.
- C. Jesus responded to the Pharisees' ridicule by pointing out the futility of their efforts at self-justification.
1. As we are told elsewhere in the New Testament, the Pharisees were famous for calling attention to their pious acts.
 2. They made their prayers into a public spectacle.
 3. They made announcements to point out that they were distributing alms to the poor.
 4. They made sure that everyone knew about their misery when they were fasting.
 5. In doing these things, the Pharisees were seeking the approval of men.
 6. They wanted people to look at them and hold them in high esteem
 7. They wanted people to deem them righteous.
- D. Human nature has not changed over the past 2,000 years.
1. People still justify themselves before men today.
 2. Even secular people do it.

3. One of the ways we see this in our culture is when white people practice a sort of self-flagellation for being born white and possessing what has come to be referred to as “white privilege.”
 4. Here is how Columbia University professor John McWhorter (who is black) describes this phenomenon: “White privilege is the secular white person’s Original Sin, present at birth and ultimately ineradicable. One does one’s penance by endlessly attesting to this privilege in hope of some kind of forgiveness.”
 5. Listen to what McWhorter has to say in his assessment of this phenomenon: “I suppose if I had to choose between this performativity and the utter contempt most whites had for any discussion of discrimination 50 years ago and before, I’d choose our current moment. But goodness, it piles high and deep, this—well, I’ll call it fakeness... This new cult of atonement is less about black people than white people. Fifty years ago, a white person learning about the race problem came away asking ‘How can I help?’ Today the same person too often comes away asking, ‘How can I show that I’m a moral person?’”
 6. I do not get the sense that John McWhorter is a Christian, but he certainly makes an astute observation.
 7. It does seem that many of the cries for social justice in our land have more to do with self-justification than with a desire to do anything about actual injustice.
- E. In our text, Jesus explains that the reason why the Pharisees’ efforts at self-justification do not work is because God knows their hearts.
1. While they may have been honored by men, they were not honored by God.
 2. There are all sorts of ways that we can put up a facade in hopes of impressing others and getting them to hold us in high esteem.

3. But the thing that we are so quick to forget is that no matter what other people think of us, God sees our hearts.
4. We may be able to fool other people, but we cannot fool God.
5. When he looks at the heart of any person who is outside of Christ, he sees an abomination.
6. He sees something that is utterly disgraceful and obscene in his sight.
7. And remember, Jesus said this about the Pharisees, who were viewed by their fellow Jews as the most righteous men in all the land.
8. Consider what this tells you about how God views your attempts to justify yourself before men.
9. There is nothing that you and I can do to justify ourselves in God's sight.
10. That is why it is so crucial for us to renounce all of our supposed righteousness and cling to the righteousness from God that comes through faith in Christ.

III. God Sees Through Efforts to Set Aside His Law

- A. As we come to verse 16, we see Jesus shifting his focus to the law.
 1. He begins by saying to the Pharisees, "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached".
 2. Jesus is saying that John the Baptist serves as the turning point in redemptive history.
 3. John was the last of the old covenant prophets, the one who announced the dawning of the new covenant.

4. Everything in the old covenant was leading up to the proclamation of the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.
 5. The announcement of this good news by Jesus was such a momentous thing that the people who had ears to hear were responding to Jesus's urgent call to repent and believe in him by striving to enter through the narrow door.
 6. This is the basic meaning of the second half of verse 16, even though it can be translated in two different ways.
 7. It can be rendered as it is in the ESV text, which says, "everyone forces his way into it."
 8. Or it can be rendered as it is in the ESV footnote, which says, "everyone is forcefully urged into it."
 9. Either way, the point is that the climactic arrival of Jesus had flung the doors to the kingdom open wide and that people are entering in.
- B. Having set the good news of the kingdom in contrast to the Law and the Prophets, Jesus also makes it clear that this does not mean that the law is no longer in effect.
1. While Israel's ceremonial and civil laws passed away with the coming of Christ, God's moral law is always in effect.
 2. The law reveals God's righteous character, and it is still valid.
 3. We cannot be saved by the law, but it is of immense value to us.
 4. In the words of J.C. Ryle, "Let us settle it in our minds that 'the law is good if man uses it lawfully.' (1 Tim. 1:8.) It is intended to show us God's holiness and our sinfulness--to convince us of sin and to lead us to Christ--to show us how to live after we have come to Christ, and to teach us what to follow and what to avoid. He that so

uses the law will find it a true friend to his soul. ”

- C. It might seem strange that Jesus would find it necessary to speak to the Pharisees about the law not being able to be set aside.
1. After all, the Pharisees made much of the law.
 2. It might not seem to us that there was any danger of the Pharisees trying to make any part of the law void.
 3. But Jesus knew the Pharisees better than we do.
 4. A survey of the rabbinic literature of that period shows that there were ways in which men like the Pharisees did try to set aside certain parts of the law.
 5. Jesus points out one of these areas in verse 18, where he speaks of divorce.
 6. The question of divorce was debated among the rabbis of Jesus’s day.
 7. The point of contention was over what Deuteronomy 24 means when it refers to a husband who divorces his wife because he finds some “indecent” in her.
 8. What is the nature of this “indecent”?
 9. While a minority of the rabbis believed that the only indecent that made divorce permissible was adultery, most of the rabbis expanded this to include any number of things that might make a husband unhappy with his wife.
 10. We find instances in the rabbinic writings where a husband is permitted to obtain a divorce simply because there was something about his wife’s behavior that annoyed or embarrassed him.

11. One rabbi said that a husband could divorce his wife if she cooked a bad meal.
 12. Another said that divorce was permitted if a husband found someone prettier than his wife.
- D. In teaching these things, the Pharisees were trying to set aside God's law and make it void.
1. God never intended for marriage to be an institution that men and women could back out of for any reason.
 2. It is true that other New Testament passages clarify that divorce is permitted in cases of adultery (Mt. 5:32; 19:9) or willful desertion by an unbelieving partner. (1 Cor. 7:10-11)
 3. But the Pharisees went far beyond that in their teaching.
 4. There are many today who do the same thing.
 5. Both inside and outside the church, people get divorced for all sorts of reasons that are clearly outside the biblical criteria.
 6. Whenever people do that, they are violating God's law.
 7. There is no getting around that.
 8. It is the clear teaching of Scripture.
 9. Of course, it is important to remember that getting divorced without biblical grounds is not an unforgivable sin.
 10. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is the persistent refusal to respond to the good news in faith and repentance.
- E. We all try to set aside God's law in a variety of ways.

1. Whenever God's law gets in the way of something we want, we look for ways to make the law void.
2. We are experts at coming up with rationalizations and excuses.
3. We may be able to make ourselves and others feel okay about what we are doing, but we cannot fool God.
4. As Paul makes clear in Romans 3, while it is true that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law, it is also true that we do not overthrow the law by this faith.
5. The good news of the kingdom is not about setting aside God's law.
6. It is about upholding the law.
7. In Christ, God has provided a way for lawbreakers to be counted as righteous and welcomed into his kingdom.
8. But God's purpose in doing this is to bring glory to his name by redeeming us from all lawlessness and purifying for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (see Titus 2:14)

IV. Conclusion

- A. Never let yourself think that you can hide from God.
- B. As it says in the letter to the Hebrews, "no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Heb. 4:13)
- C. So whenever you catch yourself playing the self-justification game, remember that God knows the truth about you, all the way down to the depths of your heart.
- D. Humble yourself before him and cherish anew the glorious truth that God counts you as righteous through faith in Christ.

- E. And whenever you see yourself trying to do what you want by setting aside God's law, remember that while you are no longer under the law as a works-covenant, God's law is still in effect.
- F. You have no right to make it void.
- G. Repent of your lawlessness, and remember that the law is the precious rule of life that you have received from the hand of your gracious Lord and Savior.