

The Law's Place in the Kingdom of God

Lk 16:14-18

19 May 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

When it comes to the Law of God, people have many views!

Some people are legalistic, in the sense that they add stricter rules than God's Word has given – e.g. rules that say you're not allowed to ride your bike or swim or skate on Sunday; yes, rules which people, in a legalistic way have added to God's Sabbath Law!

Of course, people can also be legalistic if they think they can by their strict law-keeping earn their own salvation!

Well, then, especially in our day, there are in some Christian circles the inclination to be antinomian, i.e. anti/against the Law of God – as if the Law of God belonged only to the OT period! Yes, these are people who misinterpret Paul's words in Rm 6:14 where Paul says “...***you are not under law but under grace.***”

I love what RC Sproul says about such anti-law (antinomian) people. He says their theme song is...

“Free from the Law, O blessed condition!
I can sin all I want, and still have remission!”¹

Well, my brother & sister, the kingdom of God does not operate in a *legalistic* way neither in an *anti-law (antinomian)* way!

What way then?

Well, that will become clear under point 3 of this sermon. So, more about that later on.

Here, then, are our three sermon points...

- Abusing God's Law
- Example of Law-Twisting
- The Law's Place in The Kingdom

Abusing God's Law

Our Lord Jesus had just finished telling the parable of the shrewd manager; yes, how the shrewd manager used money in a very “smart,” sneaky and selfish way in order to get into people's good books!

And our Lord also added that nobody can serve two masters – i.e. God and mammon/money!

Guess who were listening to this teaching!?

The disciples (16:1)! But not *just* the disciples – no, according to v. 14, also the *Pharisees* were listening in, and they didn't like what Jesus said about money!

Why?

Well, our text says, because they were *lovers of money*!

Let's just pause here for a minute! What are the width and depth of the words “lovers of money”? My brother & sister, often we hear people say, “Money is the root of all evil.” But what does the Bible say? Does the Bible really say, “Money is the root of all evil?”

¹ Sproul, R.C. audio sermon on Lk 16:14-18 entitled, “Pressing into the Kingdom.” Cf. at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/pressing-kingdom/>

No! Rather, *this* is what the Bible says, “The *love of money*² is the root of all kinds of evil!” (1 Tim 6:10).³

Well, if the *love of money* is the *root* of all kinds of evil, then (as someone has said so well) from just a root, this love of money had sprung up to become *a whole forest of trees* in the heart of the Pharisees!⁴

So, no wonder they disliked our Lord’s teaching against serving both God and money!

Well, how did they show their dislike in Jesus’ teaching?

They scoffed at Him (NASB). They ridiculed Him (ESV). They were sneering at Him (NIV84).

Yes, in great contempt, they turned up their noses at Him!⁵

Wow! Imagine someone sneering at the *Son of God* – yes, the Son of God who came *to show love beyond measure!*

Should one not rather humble yourself before the Son of God? Should you not rather repent of your sins – turn around – and receive the Son of God with all your heart?

But the Pharisees turned up their noses at Him!

And many people are doing exactly that – not so much with facial expression, but by the way they reject God and His gracious Law!

Well, the Pharisees loved money, so they sneered at Jesus, and rejected His teaching!

They thought very little of Jesus’ authority – and even less of His teaching!

So? What is Jesus now going to do about that?

Well, He now exposes the Pharisees’ sin.

You ask, “What sin?”

Their thousands of sins against God’s Law – *that very Law* they claimed that they upheld; and, yes, the very Law they thought Christ was breaking!

So, of all their sins re the Law of God, here’s the first & foremost, i.e. their error in thinking that they can justify themselves (make themselves right with God)!

My brother & sister, here is a sin which, despite much preaching against it – yes, despite even a whole Reformation against it – still lives in the heart of every sinner, i.e. the thought that you & I can impress God by our good living, and so earn our own salvation!

But here’s the reality: Neither you nor I, nor any other human being, can make ourselves right with God!

Why?

Well, because to be able to achieve that, you & I would have to fully keep the whole Law of God not just by our outward action, but also in our thought-life!

I mean, did not our Lord Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, reveal to all who thought they could keep the Law perfectly, that murder is not just taking a knife and poking it into someone’s chest, but that you & I are already guilty of murder when we’re just hating someone in our heart!?

² φιλαργυρία, ας f: the state of loving money or wealth—‘love of wealth, love of money.’ ρίζα γὰρ πάντων τῶν κακῶν ἔστιν ἡ φιλαργυρία ‘for the love of money is the source of all kinds of evil’ 1 Tm 6:10 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 300). New York: United Bible Societies).

³ 1 Tim 6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

⁴ Sproul, R.C. audio sermon on Lk 16:14-18 entitled, “Pressing into the Kingdom.” Cf. at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/pressing-kingdom/>

⁵ ἔξεμυκτήριζον Imperfect Indicative Active 3rd Person Plural of ἔκμυκτηρίζω: (figurative extensions of meaning of μυκτηρίζω and ἔκμυκτηρίζω ‘to turn up the nose at,’ not occurring in the NT) to ridicule in a sneering and contemptuous way—‘to ridicule, to sneer at, to show contempt for.’

μυκτηρίζω: μὴ πλανάσθε, θεὸς οὐ μυκτηρίζεται ‘do not deceive yourselves; God is not one to be ridiculed’ Ga 6:7.

ἔκμυκτηρίζω: οἱ Φαρισαῖοι φιλάργυροι ὑπάρχοντες, καὶ ἔξεμυκτήριζον αὐτὸν ‘the Pharisees sneered at him because they loved money’ Lk 16:14 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 434). New York: United Bible Societies).

And did Jesus not also say that loving-your-neighbour is not just loving your friends, but even showing love to your enemy; and that you & I are guilty of adultery already when we're only thinking of it!?

So, who could possibly justify himself before God?

Not you! Not I! And no ordinary human being! No, the only way of getting justified before God, is to humbly acknowledge that you're a sinner, to confess your sins before God, and to receive Jesus Christ with all your heart!

Children, young person (older person), have you yet received Jesus this way? Answer for yourself!

Well, the Pharisees did not do that! No, they tried to justify themselves by thinking and saying that they have kept the laws of God perfectly! What's more, with pride, *they even paraded themselves before others* as people who were living in total harmony with God's holy law!

"But," says Jesus to them, "your righteousness is only a façade." "On the inside you are the very opposite of what you want people to believe you are." "However, God has your number!" "He knows that your religion is sham (fake)!" "For, what *human beings* see of you and admire is an abomination in *God's sight!*"⁶

Well, what foolish abuse of the Law of God – to think that you can fully keep it and make yourself right with God!

Here's another way in which the Pharisees abused God's Law – i.e. by twisting it so as to try and wiggle themselves out of being guilty of it – which brings us to point 2...

Example of Law-Twisting (The Pharisees' Divorce Laws)

My brother & sister, the Pharisees tried all sorts of clever ways to twist God's Law and still escape/evade guilt – as if that could be done!

And Jesus now gives them a clear example of their law-twisting – i.e. their shoddy interpretations of God's Law re divorce, which God had given through Moses!

You see, this was what the Pharisees did: They took what Moses had written in Dt 24:1 and then interpreted it whatever way seemed convenient for them.

Here is the short version of what Moses said (in Dt 24:1), "***When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her,***" then he may give her a certificate of divorce.⁷

So, what was the God-allowed reason for divorce?

Well, God, through Moses, had clearly used the words "some indecency,"⁸ which, according to what Jesus once said, refers to *infidelity*, i.e. sexual immorality.⁹

Yes, infidelity is the only reason God allowed for divorce – not that divorce *must of necessity* follow after infidelity, for the other half could always show gracious forgiveness!

⁶ My slight adaptation of the well-said words of Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.774)

⁷ Here is the longer version of what Moses said in Dt 24:1-4, "***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 and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.***"

⁸ The Hebrew expression in Dt 24:1 `ervat dāvār (עֶרְוָת דָבָר), clearly refers to *pudenda*, of man, רָאָה עַזְבָּר, implying shameful exposure Gn 9:22, 23 (J); mostly of woman: fig. of Jerusalem. (c. הַנִּשְׁמָרָה) La 1:8; Ez 16:37... nakedness of a thing, i.e. prob. *indecency, improper behaviour* Dt 23:15; 24:1 (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 789). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁹ Cf. Mt 19:8-9 (especially v.9) "***Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (porneia = πορνεία), and marries another, commits adultery.***" (NIV – Emphasis mine).

But look what the Pharisees made of Moses words “some indecency.” Some of them followed what the famous Rabbi Hillel said. (Remember, Rabbi Hillel lived during the last 50 years before Jesus was born). Well, Rabbi Hillel interpreted the words “some indecency” very freely. So, according to Rabbi Hillel, what Moses meant was that, if a wife served her husband food that was slightly burned, then he had the right to divorce her. Even if a man’s wife talked so loudly that the neighbours could hear her, or even if he found another woman prettier than his wife, he could divorce her!¹⁰

Unbelievable! The Pharisees *who prided themselves that they kept God’s laws perfectly*, had totally twisted some of God’s laws! And what they have done with God’s law on divorce is just one example of how they tried to sneakily allowed for themselves lots of wiggle room around God’s laws – thinking they would not be guilty before God – and even putting up a pious façade before the rest of God’s people – people whom they despised because of their inability to achieve what they (the Pharisees) could!

Well, here’s one other repercussion flowing out of the Pharisees’ easy-divorce-easy-marry behaviour – i.e. that it was absolutely possible that, with their easy divorce, they could put an innocent wife in danger of becoming an adulteress!

How?

Well, because through their loose divorce laws, a husband might too easily have divorced his wife. Then, before he had the chance to receive/take her back into his house, some other man might have come into her life. Yes, she might then have gotten married to another man whilst the issue between her & her first husband had not been talked through – yes, whilst she and her first husband had not been given a chance to become reconciled! Wow! what a messy scenario that could be – a scenario in which her husband has, for all practical purposes, driven her into adultery!

So, it’s within *this* context – the context of easy-divorce-easy-remarry – that our Lord now says (in v.18), ***Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.***

Indeed, the Pharisees who prided themselves that they followed God’s Law perfectly, in reality became *antinomian*, i.e. *against God’s Law!*

My brother & sister, young person, are you (am I) guilty of twisting God’s Law; of wiggling ourselves smartly out of God’s laws; yes, of becoming *antinomian* (*against God’s Law*)?

Young people, please listen very carefully! If you follow Jesus Christ, you cannot do what so many young people – *even many young people within our churches* – are doing, i.e. cohabiting (living together) before marriage!

You say, “But what’s a piece of paper – yes, what’s a marriage certificate anyway!?”

According to God’s Law, that’s everything! For you only get that “piece of paper” (marriage certificate), after you have given your marriage vows before God and His people – yes, before witnesses, some of whom are human beings, and One of whom is God Triune, who will all hold you to account regarding your vows and your signature on that marriage register!

But if you just live together without being married, presuming on God’s grace, or thinking you have, for some or other reason, nicely wiggled yourself out of being liable to God, beware, for then you’re in flagrant defiance of the Law of God!

My brother & sister, here’s a big irony.

You see, the Pharisees thought they were upholding God’s Law, whilst they were forever trying to catch Jesus out to see whether they could perhaps find any grounds to prove that *He* was not upholding God’s Law!

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.775).

Also cf. Hendriksen’s comments on Mt 19:3 in Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.714)

But our Lord often told (and proved) to them that He had not come to nullify the Law but to uphold it, not just sentence by sentence, and not even just word for word, but pen-stroke for pen-stroke – yes, dot for dot and tittle for tittle!¹¹

So, here's a question: what then is the place of God's Law in the NT (and in our day)? Well, that brings us to point 3...

The Law's Place in The Kingdom

In v.16 & 17, our Lord (as He had done many times before)¹² assures the sceptic Pharisees that He did not come to nullify the Old-Testament Law but to fulfil it.

Yes, our Lord says as much as, "The Law & Prophets (i.e. all of the Old Testament) were up until John the Baptist. Since then, the Good News of the coming of the kingdom of God is preached. But even so, not a pen-stroke of the Law will become void. In fact, heaven & earth would rather pass away before that happens!"

Well, someone might say, "But preacher, that's not altogether true, for all the Old-Testament laws regarding worship ceremonies – especially regarding sacrifices and rituals have then all stopped!" Well, that's true, *they* have ceased, because the ultimate sacrifice was given by our Lord Jesus on the cross! Yes, Christ fulfilled all the OT ceremonial laws. Therefore, there's no need any more for these!

You say, "But what about the moral laws of the Old Testament – laws like the Ten Commandments?"

Well, remember that, in the kingdom of God (in the New-Testament period and beyond) the Old-Testament moral laws have these three functions: 1) the schoolmaster function; 2) the order/protection function; 3) the gratitude function.

Yes, when the New-Testament believer hears the Law of God, he/she is cut to heart knowing that he/she has not perfectly kept (in fact, cannot keep) the Law! And what does such awareness then do? Well, just like a schoolmaster, it drives the sinner to come on his/her knees and in all humility before God, while crying out, "**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**"¹³

Secondly, just as road rules assure order & protection for all road users, so does the Law of God protect – and bring order – in the Christian's life.

Well, what's the third function the Law of God has? Well, for the Christian, the Law still has the purpose and the extreme benefit of revealing to us what is pleasing to God, and what isn't!

My brother & sister, if a friend of yours has done something nice to you, are you not sitting & thinking, "What can I do for him/her?" "Yes, how can I show my gratitude for such kindness?" "Let me think!" "What does he/she like?"

Well, God's Law tells us what He loves!

¹¹ The Greek word is *keraia κεραία, ας f:* a part of a letter of the alphabet—'stroke, short mark, short line of a letter, part of a letter.' ἵωτα ἐν ἣ μίᾳ κεραίᾳ οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου 'not one small letter or part of a letter shall pass away from the Law' Mt 5:18.

The reference of ἵωτα (33.36) and κεραία is to the small details of the Law, and therefore it may be appropriate in many languages to translate Mt 5:18 as 'not one of the smallest parts of the Law will be done away with' or '... will become null and void' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 392). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹² Cf. e.g. Mt 5:17-20 "**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**"¹⁸ **For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**"¹⁹ **Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**"²⁰ **For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."**

¹³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Lk 18:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Why will you & I not now – now that we have seen & tasted God’s enormously big love for us in Christ’s cross-death – yes, why will we not now show our gratitude to Him by doing our best to live out this Law with hearts that glow for Him – with souls that long & faint for Him!? (Ps 84:2)¹⁴

Jesus says (in v. 16), “...everyone is forcing his way into this kingdom.”¹⁵ It’s like when the crowds flocked behind Jesus to hear His Word – like when, during the Great Awakening, people forced their way in to hear George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and other biblical preachers! Wainui member (dear visitor), if you are not yet in the Kingdom – if you do not yet know the praise/thanks-giving place of the Law of God – then I urge¹⁶ you to receive Jesus as your Saviour/Lord! Why not do it now!?

AMEN (2532 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁴ Ps 84:2, *My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.*

¹⁵ Lk 16:16 *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.* (Emphasis mine)

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. the footnote to the ESV’s translation of Lk 16:16b, “Or everyone is forcefully urged into it.” Yes, most English versions have taken the Greek word *biazetai* (βιάζεται) as a *middle* verb, but it can just as well be a *passive* verb – in other words, a Present Indicative Passive 3rd Person Singular of **βιάζομαι** which, as transitive verb, means *to inflict violence on*; but, as intransitive verb, means *to use force/violence* – also in the good sense of *trying hard* (to enter)... “If, however, βιάζεται is to be understood as a passive... or in the same sense as the middle in Gen 33:11 and Judges 13:15, the sense would be *invite urgently*, of the ‘gentle’ constraint imposed on a reluctant guest’...” (cf. Bauer, W. 1979. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. Chicago, IL : The University of Chicago Press. p.140).

Also cf. *The word “is forcing” (*biazetai*) can be read differently, however, since the form is a middle-passive voice. We prefer to read a passive here and translate it: “Everyone is urged insistently to enter in.” With this reading, the emphasis is on the preached word, which is what Jesus gives here. He highlights that his call and the call of those who follow him is to preach the word of the kingdom* (Bock, D. L. (1996). *Luke* (pp. 425–430). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).