

Pharisaic Divorce

Book of Luke

By Daniel Costales

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Bible Text: Luke 16:14-18

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Berean Bible Church of Hilo

420 Lama Street

Hilo, Hawaii 96720

Website: www.hilobereans.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/hilobereans

The New Testament reading for this morning continues where we left off last week, and this week it's verses 14 through 18, Luke chapter 16, verses 14 through 18.

14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. 15 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. 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. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. 18 Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Let's pray.

Father, as we look at a difficult passage this morning and a difficult topic, we ask that you would commit our hearts to obedience to you, that whatever the desires of our hearts may be, whatever our past may be, that our desire here this morning is to conform to the image of your Son that we might be like Christ. We pray, Father, that you would direct our hearts, direct our minds, direct our lives in obedience. I pray, Father, that I would faithfully and accurately represent what the text of Scripture says and what it means, and that each person listening here would listen with a heart that is absolutely in love with you and committed to obedience. And I pray Father for your glory in all of this. I pray that you would be honored. I pray that you would be lifted up.

Also Father, as we bring our prayers before you, we do want to think and pray and ask that you would Intervene in the situation over in Israel right now as so many have undergone such horrors, and those who have perpetuated those horrors do not seem to be ashamed but seem to think that they're doing you a favor. We pray, Father, for the peace of Jerusalem, for the shalom. We pray, Father, that that peace would come not just in the absence of war, but in the presence of Christ. I ask, Lord, that you would use all of these circumstances to bring people to Jesus Christ, whether they be Israeli or

Palestinian, bring repentance to those men of violence who perpetuated these things. And we pray, Father, that ultimately, somehow, as you've demonstrated in this nation of Israel over and over again, that you would exact praise even through the most difficult and trialsome and sorrowful of situations. Make your excellence known even in difficulty. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Some people ask what I think about what's going on in Israel. I think it's really bad and I feel, I was going to pray last week for them and it just slipped my mind at the moment. Next week, my plan is to say something a little bit more extended about that. It's not in the immediate wake of the horrible things that happened but those things will still be horrible a week from now.

So we come to our passage this morning and there's an obvious part of this section of Scripture that peaks our curiosity, isn't there? There's a part of this Scripture that kind of stood out from the rest of it and the reason for that is that we have a lot of divorcees in our church, and a lot. I think, I don't know what the number is now, but I remember that when I preached through, I think it was Matthew 19, I had counted that there was I think 25 at the time, people who are, who have been divorced. I guess you don't just have been divorced, you continue to be divorced. And here's the thing, we've all gathered under the banner of Jesus Christ this morning and under his sanctification and our purpose in gathering this morning wasn't to wave anything as a banner of liberty, it was, and I think we're all sincere in this, that we have come this morning to worship him, to worship in prayer, to worship in giving, the reading of the word and preaching and listening, and it is my desire that as I proclaim the word of God, that I would teach the word of God with obedience and fidelity to the word of God and that every single person listening here would listen with that same attitude of obedience and fidelity to the word of God. That's the goal, right? I mean, it's not to elevate this church. It's not so that people will think this church is better than other churches.

I was grieved that not long ago someone who was moving from the mainland came and found out that in our understanding of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, where the Scripture says a husband of one wife, we took that to mean that that person is by character a person who is committed to his wife, and that the passage and the phrase itself has absolutely nothing to do with divorce, and we came by that not because we had been faced with a dilemma, we came to that conclusion because that's what we think the Scripture says and that's what we think it means. And what grieved me is that this person heard somehow that that's what we believed about that passage and said, "Well, I can't go to your church because in the previous church I was at, it was a big conflict in the church and our church took the side of the idea that if you've been divorced then you cannot be an elder in the church." And I want to say to you this morning that in all honesty and in forthrightness, that we do not come to that conclusion in our understanding of the elders of the church because we want to accommodate some kind of worldly whatever. It's a principled stand as far as I'm concerned. It's what the word of God teaches, and we want to stand on the word of God. We might have it wrong. Well, you guys know me. I'm not necessarily the brightest bulb in wherever bulbs are. But the fact of the matter is we can only be accountable for what we know and think to be true and we do our best to study these

passages out and come to conclusions and then hold tightly to this. And what grieved me about this, is that this person who had come to our church, didn't really come very many times, but they came a few times and they decided they weren't going to come to our church because of that. It really was the interpretation, not even of one verse, it was the interpretation of one word in one verse where we differed and so they felt it necessary to break fellowship with us, and that grieved me because the fact of the matter is we probably agreed on just about everything else the Bible had to say except for that one word.

I want to assure you that whatever I say, I'm going to say to you this morning, not with the idea of lording over anybody, not with the idea of being bombastic or showing how holy we are as opposed to other churches or how open we are as opposed to other churches. If we take a certain position or if I say something from this pulpit that implies that divorce isn't as bad as we think it is, I don't want everyone to rush out and tell all the people who are considering divorce, "Don't worry, come to Berean. You know, divorce is awesome there." Because that's not true and that's not what I'm saying. And if I take a position here that is really hard line and it is really, it is very strict in its interpretation and I say I think that this is what the Bible has to say and this is how we ought to apply this Scripture, I don't want everybody running out and bragging that hey, "Kahu Dan is like the holiest pastor around because he takes these principled stands on these things." I don't care anything about that. I just want to be faithful to the word and I just want you to be faithful to the word as well.

That said, I don't want anyone in here who has been divorced to feel less than. I don't want you to feel less a child of God than anyone else, less forgiven than anyone else, less useful than anyone else, less Christian than anyone else because you're not. And in fact, as we've been looking through the book of Luke, hasn't it been obvious to us that this is precisely who we find Jesus embracing in the book of Luke? It's all those who the religious leaders had cast out, and it's said that, "You don't really hit the mark. You guys are less than. You don't keep the law the way we keep the law. You don't do things the way that is prescribed, that we think you ought to do things, and therefore you're probably not going to be very high ranked when it comes to the kingdom of God." I don't want that.

That said, if there's in Scripture any one passage from everything that I've learned through my whole life, if there's any one passage that talks about God's view of divorce, that encapsulates what God thinks on divorce, it wouldn't be this passage. It would probably be Malachi chapter 2. You guys probably know it. You could probably quote it. God, what's divorce? Hates. God hates divorce. Okay, let me read it from the New American Standard. "I hate divorce," says the LORD." Let me read it from the King James, "the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away," or divorce. Now turn in your Bibles there. Malachi chapter 2 verse 16. We all know what it says, right? God hates divorce. "I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel." This is from the English Standard Version, the version that we've been using for a long time. Malachi chapter 2 verse 16, "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says Yahweh Sabaoth. So

guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." Is something missing from that? How about this? This is Malachi chapter 2 verse 16 from the Geneva Bible, "If thou hatest her, put her away," divorce her, "says the Lord." This is from the Jewish Publication Society, their translation into English. Malachi 2:16, "For I hate putting away, says the Lord, the God of Israel." This is an English translation of the Septuagint. The Septuagint is the earliest Greek translation, "But if thou shouldest hate thy wife, and put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel, then ungodliness shall cover thy thoughts, says the Lord Almighty. Therefore take ye heed to your spirit and forsake them not." One of the most recent translations, at least good translations, is the New English Translation, the Net Bible, and they call it the New English Translation and the Net Bible because it's available for free on the internet. "'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, and the one who is guilty of violence." The Dead Sea Scrolls has a copy of Malachi and it says this, "For if you hate and divorce, says the Lord God of Israel, they cover my garment with violence." Notice that, i"f you hate and divorce, says the Lord God of Israel, they cover my garment with violence." One of the earliest Aramaic interpretations of this, the Targum Jonathan, "But if you hate her, divorce her, says the Lord God of Israel and do not conceal sin in your garment, says the Lord of Hosts." John Wycliffe when he translated the Bible from Hebrew into actually, I think he did most of it from Latin, but I think he did some Hebrew too. When he translated the Bible into English, said, "When thou hatest her, leave her, saith the Lord God of Israel." By the way, that so troubled him that he went back and put in parentheses the word "not," which he says isn't there, but he put it in there because this was troublesome. So his translation reads, "When thou hatest her, leave thou her not, saith the Lord God of Israel."

Now, you say, "Kahu, why did you bring this up because that's all very confusing?" Well, good. I bring this up because sometimes we think we know what we know, but we don't actually know what we think we know and I want us to approach the Scripture this morning with that in mind, that maybe what you thought you knew, you don't know, and maybe what you thought you didn't know, you kind of had an intuition about. For the record, I think that the ESV is very good on this translation. It's a very difficult passage, and the reason for it is there are no subjects in the verse. There's no subject of the participle that talks about hating. There's no subject of the verb to divorce. There's no subject. They're just verbs or verbals, so who's doing the hating and who's doing the divorcing and is it bad and what what's going on here? And so every single translation has to decipher something, what's interesting is that all the linguistic commentaries that I saw said the one thing that's for sure is that saying "the Lord hates divorce or God hates divorce" is probably one of the worst of the translations. Does this mean God doesn't hate divorce? No, it doesn't because divorce is a violation of covenant, isn't it? You make a promise to somebody and then you don't keep it, that's a problem. That's what divorce is.

So with all of this in mind, we come to our passage where Jesus retorts to the arrogant Pharisees who are mocking him and he essentially says to them, "You're trying to justify yourselves before man, but don't forget that what God has said concerning divorce, God has said." Let's go through the verses and then we'll talk a little bit more about the background.

"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him." If you remember from last week's message, we talked about how the background of the passage was that the Pharisees had conflated wealth with spirituality, and the way they got there was that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. God's blessing is the sign of God's favor. God's favor is the sign of righteousness in me, and therefore, money, wealth, is a sign of righteousness, and we said that is the kind of rationale that goes on to this very day and leads to, you know, 70 million dollar jets having to be bought by televangelists so that they can keep up with the other televangelists and everyone will think that they're as spiritual as everybody else because they're as wealthy as everyone else.

So we said last week, this is actually a Pharisaic notion. It's an idea from that time within the Pharisees where they said that if you were wealthy, it demonstrated that God is obviously pleased with my righteousness and so they ridiculed Jesus, and Jesus says to them in verse 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." The word justify there doesn't just mean that they're trying to somehow get out of something, the word justify there literally means that they're declaring themselves righteous before other people. They're demonstrating before other people, "Look guys, look how righteous I am," and they're depending on the response of the other people to verify it. "You're justifying, you're making yourself out to be righteous before men." Now the point here is that if they're doing this before men, who are they not concerned about? They're not concerned about God and we find that over and over again in the gospels as it relates to the Pharisees that they fear men and they're concerned and revere the ideas of men rather than God.

They want people to think they're righteous so they justify themselves, but God sees your hearts, he says in verse 15. God sees that immaterial part of you and that you're an abomination. How? How are they an abomination? How are they an abomination in the sight of God? He says in verse 16 because, "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." In other words, the law is still governing them and he says, "You guys are trying to find technicalities so that you can force your way, demand entrance into the kingdom." I want you to think about that. If our salvation or if their salvation is by works, okay, if it is in following the law that somebody is saved and has their part in the kingdom of heaven, that means this, that anyone who thinks that they follow the law or actually follows the law, let's presume they can, anyone who follows the law can walk to the gates of the kingdom of heaven and demand entrance. They can reach out to God and say, "God, you owe me one ticket into the kingdom of heaven." Doesn't that sound horrible? It sounds horrible to our Protestant ears, doesn't it? That's exactly what they were saying, and that's exactly why he's saying you're forcing yourselves, you've adjusted the law to make it look like you're just in front of men, and now you're trying to force your way in, declare to God that you owe me entrance into the kingdom, God owes you the kingdom.

Then he says in verse 17, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." And folks, at that, you could probably imagine these Pharisees who live their life on a razor's edge of the law, you could imagine them standing there going, "What law? Bring it." And what Jesus is saying is that everything that you've constructed to demonstrate how righteous you are does not negate the Torah.

And then this is where he makes a statement that I think is a shorthand version of the kind of answer, it's not the same incident, but in another couple of weeks after this, in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, where this incident is recorded, where he expands on this, Luke records a very similar answer, in fact, verbally, they're identical, a short form of the answer of the expanded answer, and the short form answer is this, he tells them that not one line of the law, not one stroke of the law, a dot, is to be void. And as if they're sitting there going, "What do you got?" He says, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Now folks, I think we're going to need the broader answer to understand exactly what he's getting at here. Like I said, the verbal similarities between this answer and the one that he gives later in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 are nearly exact, but both of the other passages deal in much more detail.

So turn over to Matthew 19. We'll use that as our starting point. He's going to use the same phraseology, which either means that he's referring to something else, a source someplace else, or it's just his standard answer to the issue of divorce. But in Matthew 19:3, we see a completely different kind of situation where the Pharisees themselves come up to him and test him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" Now we need to be very careful when we're reading things like this that there is background to some of these things that people have not always been aware of. Even in the early church, the early church began to split away from its Jewish roots even as early as 70 when the temple was destroyed; others put it closer to 90 and some say it ended with the Bar Kokhba Revolution where the final split happened somewhere between 125 and 135 AD. But the point is that the early church had separated itself and often lost some of the nuance of what Jesus was saying and because of that, they had some pretty strange ideas. The fact is that they said that it seems to be, because we find it, I think, in the Shepherd of Hermes out of Rome and then Irenaeus in Ephesus, and they both say that one of the things that Jesus says is that the only cause for divorce is porneia or the idea of sexual sin and therefore you're required to divorce when that happens, and that you would be in sin if you didn't divorce when that happens. That's what these two early church resources, and I think they're absolutely wrong because they misunderstand some of the background of the passage. So let's look at some of the background.

So he says, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause," and the point of this is that phrase "any cause," and if you've heard this before, please bear with me. I think it's important that we not lose sight of this. I don't want to give a complete theology of divorce, but at least I want to give the background of the passage that we're in. So here it is. About 50 years before Jesus was saying these words, there were a couple of teachers that came on the scene. We can call them Democraticus and Republicanus. Those are not their real names, those are their metaphorical names, okay? And the reason I use them

as the metaphorical name is because when you read the conflict between these two teachers, it almost at sometimes, sometimes it almost reads like one person doesn't even hear the question and it's just like, "Yeah, whatever he says, I take the opposite position." What's the issue? "I don't know, just whatever he said, he's wrong and I'm right." Their real names are Shammai and Hillel, and they were in power about 50 years before this, maybe 20 years before the birth of Christ. And what was already existent, had been existent in Judaism, it seems, from very early on, all the way back to the time of Moses, perhaps even, is that they had four different grounds for divorce. And this comes from two different passages so I want you to at least write it down, but the first one is Exodus 21:10, and the second one is Deuteronomy 24, verse 1. This is what Exodus 21:10 says, and it's talking about the law as it relates to slaves. So a guy takes a slave, and then he decides he wants to marry her as his wife, so then he marries her, and then later on, he's like, "Ah, but she's just a slave. I need a different wife. I need another wife." And polygamy was rampant back then. It says, "If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights." Her food, her clothing, or her marital rights and right there, what we have is the qualifications for what marriage, the vow of marriage was supposed to entail for a Jew. Food, clothing, and marital rights. Now this passage is specifically talking about a slave but in Jewish law, and it's been this way as far back as I've been able to trace, the way that they view things is that if it's true for the lesser, it's true for the greater. So if it's true for a slave, then it's also true for a free woman.

So if you get married, what you are committing to in the marital vows, one to another, is that you provide food, clothing, and marital rights. The man would provide the food, the woman would cook the food and so we have union there. The man would provide the material, the woman would sew the material into clothing, and so we have a union there. And marital rights, as you can imagine, is talking about the sexual relationship within marriage, particularly as it relates to having children. In fact, I was going to do this thing where I started reading from our Old Testament, which we started today, we're going to start reading the passages of Scripture that have to do with Christ in the book of Isaiah. Well, it just so happens that we have in our reading today a very good illustration. Chapter 4, verse 1 of Isaiah, I don't know if you picked up on that, it just starts with, "And seven women will cling to one man," but this is what they're going to tell him, "We'll eat our own food, we'll wear our own clothes, just remove from us the shame." Okay, what's the idea here? The idea here is in our vows, you're supposed to provide food and clothes for us, you don't need to provide any of that for us. All you have to do is procure for us progeny and have children and whatever else that entails.

Now it's even worse than that because Isaiah 4, verse 1, shouldn't be with Isaiah 4. I think it should be the end of Isaiah 3, and it's pretty obvious when you read it through. I don't know why they divided it the way they did. Somebody said the chapter divisions in the Bible were because there was a monk sometime in the Middle Ages who was trying to write the chapter divisions on the back of a cart, and so he just... and he missed sometimes. So it's even worse than that. The reason that there are seven women to one man is because men have died under the judgment of God. That's what chapter 3 is about. But it's really interesting because chapter 3 talks about all the men who died. They're the

brave men. They're the warriors. They're the wise men. They're the good men. And so if you're a man in Isaiah 4:1 who has seven women, it's because you're not a very good man because all the good ones died in chapter 3. It's a really, really horrible situation and that's why it's important in chapter 4 verse 2 that the stump, the branch of the Lord bloom and bring peace to Israel.

The point here, though, is that it was their law, it was Jewish law that these are three reasons for divorce. If you cease to bring food, if you cease to bring clothing and if you neglect your spouse's marital rights, these are all reasons in that for divorce. And they were so close, how much food do you have to give that as the Pharisees and scribes got involved, it was this much food per person that you have to give and this much clothes you have to give. Even the marital rights, if you are a traveling person, your business required you to travel, then you're only required like once a month, but if you are someone who worked around town somewhere, then it was like three or four times a month. And here's a weird one, if you were unemployed, then you were required to fulfill these marital rights daily and somebody said that that was an unemployment benefit, but I don't, I don't... see, look, I'm not even laughing because I don't think it's funny.

The other part of grounds for divorce is found in Deuteronomy chapter 24 verse 1. Deuteronomy 24 verse 1 says, "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 the word indecency in this passage is the Hebrew word for nakedness or the shame of nakedness. Now, if you remember back all the way through the Levitical law and all of these things, the idea of uncovering the nakedness of somebody was a metaphor for some kind of sexual sin and so when it says here, "if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency," probably seems to mean that she has been unfaithful in some way. And of course, if it's good for the lesser, in this case the woman, then it would be good for the man as well. So if the woman finds indecency in him, she is allowed to leave as well.

Now here's the problem, that the interpretation of that word indecency had been consistent all through Israel's history and a reason for divorce could have been because of sexual immorality. It's so much so that Shammai takes this traditional approach that these are the four grounds for divorce, however, because Shammai says one thing, Hillel has to disagree. It's just what he does. And the phrase "a matter of indecency" in Deuteronomy, Hillel says, is two Hebrew words and therefore if it's two Hebrew words, it's representing two grounds for divorce, one is for a matter, and one is for indecency. So one is for sexual immorality and one is for a matter, other stuff. It's a catch-all category. It means everything. One historian said because of Hillel's opinion in this and the respect that people gave Hillel, this became such a prominent feature in Second Temple Judaism that within just a matter of years from him articulating this position, it became the standard practice everywhere and everyone from priests down to the lowliest person was just divorcing all the time, and divorce became a rampant thing and they all understood that this divorce was an "any cause" divorce. So when the passage says, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause," it's a technical phrase, "any cause," much like we

would say "no fault." And as soon as you say "no fault," everybody understands what you mean, everybody knows what you're talking about.

Jesus, in fact, appeals to them when he responds to them in Matthew 19, because remember also that they ranked their prophets from the greatest prophet to the least of the prophets and the greatest prophet was Moses. Second was Samuel. Moses gave the law. Samuel anointed David. And so they had this rank of prophets all the way down to Daniel was pretty low on the totem pole because he prophesied outside of Israel. And so they say, "Moses said this, Moses said get a bill of divorce. That's all. Get a bill of divorce." Now notice Jesus' appeal, because Jesus actually appeals and says, "Yeah, from the beginning God said he made you male and female," and then he quotes from Genesis chapter 2. So what does Jesus do? What's his strategy? You're gonna appeal to the highest prophet. Who does he appeal to? Jesus appeals to God. "God made you male and female." It's an ingenious response to that rabbinic kind of rationale.

Now, the answer goes on when they say, "Well, what about the fact that Moses said to get a certificate of divorce? Isn't that justifying what we do?" And he said, "It's because of the hardness of your heart." Now, please understand what this means and what it doesn't mean. When it says the hardness of your heart, it isn't because God gave them the law and they looked and they said, "Oh, wait a minute, what about divorce?" And Moses said, "Well, I never negotiated that with Jehovah. You know, this is what he gave me." And they said, "No, we want divorce. We've got to have divorce in here." And they all took their picket signs and went outside and said, "We're not going to follow this law until you give us divorce." That's not how this is going down. That isn't the hardness of heart here. The hardness of heart here is this, that there are grounds for divorce and human beings, because of our sinfulness, are going to insist on not providing, on sexual immorality. You're going to insist on these things. Men are not going to provide food and cloth. Women are not going to concede to marital rights. Men won't provide material, Women won't provide clothing. Immorality is going to be persistent. This is the hardness of the heart that it's talking about, therefore, God gives them divorce and a certificate of divorce; not because they want divorce, but because they're going to insist on doing the things that lead to divorce. I seriously believe that we get this wrong when we say that the hardness of heart is just about this institution of divorce. It really is what leads up to it. The hardness of heart leads to the concession made by God, just like why would God give a sacrificial system? He gave them all the law, why would he give them a sacrificial system? It's because the hardness of their hearts. They were sinful.

So Matthew 19 verses 9 and 10 says, "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Now the disciples are akamai, they pick up on this. They understand the milieu, the cultural milieu that everybody's getting divorced and everyone's having this big divorce bash all the time and they're jumping from person to person and marrying and unmarrying and no cause, any cause, whatever, and this is where we get the idea of people say, "Well, they're burning the toast." Well, they literally said if she burns the bread, she burns the stuff for the supper, that's an "any cause" because she's violated the idea of providing food; it's in "any cause" and you can get divorced.

And so Jesus responds, he says unless you divorce for sexual immorality. Now notice he says sexual immorality. The words that are translated as sexual immorality there are the word for word, logos, and the word porneia, for fornication, except for a matter, a word of fornication. Now, folks, through the years, people have stopped there, and they said, "Ah, any kind of immorality, porneia, porneia is any kind of immorality, and I know that my husband has lusted, and Jesus said that lust, if you've lusted in your heart, you've committed adultery in your heart already, therefore it's sexual immorality, therefore I can leave him." Well, that is some brilliant rationale and if that's the way you think, I want to give you your certificate of Pharisaic reasoning, that you've just qualified yourself to be a Pharisee, because that's exactly what they would have done. I say that sarcastically, by the way.

Jesus says a word of porneia. If you remember back that in Deuteronomy 24, it says a matter of indecency, the word matter there is the word davar, which is roughly the Old Testament equivalent of the word logos, and the word and the idea of nakedness means immorality. And so all Jesus is alluding to in this, he says, "You want to talk about this divorce for any cause?" He says no. In that passage in the Deuteronomy 24 passage that they're dealing with, the only legitimate reason is for the matter of indecency, which Jesus gives as the word of porneia. So he's actually alluding to Deuteronomy 24 saying that's the ground for divorce, not the anything goes matter.

Now the Apostle Paul probably alludes to this Old Testament idea too, that the grounds for divorce in 1 Corinthians 7. In 1 Corinthians 7.3, he says, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights." What is that talking about? It's talking about the idea of marital rights all the way back in Exodus. Not that they're under the law in any way, but certainly God has this as the idea. God created them male and female from the beginning, and this has always been right.

Verse 5, 1 Corinthians 7:5 says, "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer." Verses 33 and 34, "But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife." What does that mean? He needs to provide for her food and clothing. "And his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband." She needs to provide him with food and clothing and marital rights. These are the material and the clothing and the food of Exodus 21.

1 Corinthians 7:15 through 16 then says, "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved." In other words, if they are abandoned, then they're not enslaved to stay with this person and to consider themselves continually married. That phrase, "in such cases," also opens it up to other things and people have quibbled about that and said, "Why do you open it up so much?" I'm not. I'm just trying to say what the passage says, that there are other reasons that are not defined. And folks, if we don't take the view that what the Bible says directly in the words is not the comprehensive view of divorce, then we have a problem, I think. Because Jesus gives

one ground for divorce, in the case of sexual immorality. Paul gives other grounds for divorce, and he doesn't say anything about sexual immorality. If there's not other comprehensive strategy, then what we have is a contradiction between Paul and Jesus, and that's a dangerous place to be.

Now folks, it gets very very sticky when you reach your hand and you reach yourselves into the lives of other people's marriages and you think you know what's best for them and you think you know exactly what they ought to do. Whatever else, if someone asks you for wisdom, give them wisdom, but please understand this, it is a sticky world out there. It is a complicated world out there and there are things that are going to happen that are not the fault of someone within the marriage, that are not the fault of your brother and sister, and because of the hardness of the heart of unbelieving people, and yes, even sometimes believing people, this happens and I don't think that within the church, then, we should look upon people with a scarlet letter D attached to them that they are divorcees and they are somehow less than, unless, the only way you would ever want to think of them as less than is when you understand that Jesus throughout the book of Luke embraces the "less than's" and then in that case I want to be there too. I want to be a "less than."

Now back to Luke 16. Jesus has just debunked the Pharisaic notion that money is an emblem of their own righteousness. To that, the Pharisees sneer. They start to mock him. They start to ridicule him. Jesus, who seems to operate in the book of Luke in the state of continual defense of those who the Pharisees see as unworthy of the kingdom, these are the gatekeepers, the Pharisees are the most spiritual people, they're the gatekeepers, they're looking at everybody else going, "You're not gonna make it. You're gonna be like in the dirt in the kingdom. You're not gonna make it. You have to be like me. You have to be like us. You have to think the way I do, move the way I do." And Jesus seems continually to be defending those who are unworthy, the poor. "Every one of you," Jesus says, "thinks he can bully their way into the kingdom because others hail you as tzadikim, or righteous." But folks, like the little boy in the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, who has the courage or the ignorance to say to the king, "Look, the king has no clothes," Jesus stands here and has the courage and boldness to look at the Pharisees, standing as an advocate from the "less than's," the down-and-outers, the Gentiles, just like Theophilus, the man to whom this book is written, Jesus looks at the Pharisees and says, "All of you who have taken advantage and think that you are righteous, you are not just minor sinners," and then he says, "The emperor has no clothes," and he declares to them, "You are adulterers."

Now folks, you can imagine the Pharisees living in the delusion for 50 years that what they had done was completely justified and completely righteous and that gave them a platform from which to stand, looking down on other people and thinking that these people are unqualified for the kingdom, and Jesus pulls that stand out from under them and says, "As it relates to the law, you're not even following the basics. You are adulterers." And folks, Luke writes this to Theophilus, Theophilus who by blood is not a Jew, and has no Jewish right to a Jewish kingdom, has no Jewish right to a Jewish king, has no Jewish right to a Jewish Messiah, and Luke writes how Jesus stood as an advocate

for exactly people like Theophilus, for those who did not inherit the kingdom, for those who did not merit the kingdom, for those who did not inherit salvation, for those who did not merit salvation, for the "less than's," for the women, for the prostitutes, for the traitors, those he ate with in our message last week. He calls them to repentance and then he welcomes them in. Jesus stands as an advocate for them and folks, I want you to understand this same Jesus who stood there and castigated the Pharisees in the presence of the tax collectors, that that same Jesus stands as an advocate for us, those who by grace through faith find ourselves in the undeserved company of the King, those of us by grace through faith who find that King who advocates for these undeserving died for us, that he went on to die in the place of those for whom he advocated to take their sin on him, the sin of the prostitutes, the sin of the tax collectors, and to suffer the wrath of the Father so that poor, immoral, treacherous, divorced, married, otherwise undeserving wretches could be worthy to enter the kingdom. And folks, as he advocated for them, he advocates for us. Hebrews 7 tells us that he lives forever to make intercession for us. This Jesus calls us to give yourself to him and that Jesus died for you and will continue to advocate for you.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for Christ and we thank you for some clarity on this issue of divorce that brings such sorrow and pain and trauma to the lives of so many here. I ask, Father, that whatever else each one of us may feel in the presence of other men, may we understand that Christ is the advocate for the outcast, Christ is the advocate for the downtrodden, and he is the sacrifice for sin for all who will trust in him. We trust and we love you. In Jesus' name. Amen.