



Luke 16:14-17 The Only Standard

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

16 "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

17 "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

I've said before that one of the great benefits of preaching expositionally through an entire book, is that it compels a preacher to tackle sections and doctrines that he would not normally choose to preach on. By doing so not only is the congregation exposed to what Paul called the "full counsel of God" but the preacher himself is pushed way out of his own comfort zone, which sometimes needs to happen in order that he himself might grow. This is not a section of scripture I would have chosen to preach on, and as I prepared to do so, I couldn't help but notice that many of the great expositors and pastors of the past upon whose shoulders I am privileged to stand didn't either. I say that so that you know that to a certain extent we are entering together into uncharted waters. *Here be dragons* as the old maps used to say. By God's grace I hope we will sail them profitably and without shipwreck.

One of the greatest mistakes that you can make about the universe is to assume that you are at the center of it. That life is all about you, and that what you like or dislike is of paramount importance. That your opinions are the measure of all things.

In the scriptures we read, the Pharisees were sneering at and running Christ down. In their opinion, having money was a sign of God's blessing, and they used that to justify their own love of mammon. Jesus essentially told them that their opinions of His doctrines didn't matter, because they were men trying to sit over and judge God and His Word. Here God has sent them His word his messenger, His Son to tell them what they need to know to be saved, and they are sneering at it. "We don't like it, it doesn't agree with our views. You had better change or you will be in trouble"

But at the final judgment, whose opinion would be final? God's or theirs? They might be able to justify one another, but God knew the hypocrisy and selfishness of their hearts. And ultimately all their opinions about religion, all of their preferences and rites and ceremonies were worthless if they were not the product of humbly submitting to God. God knew their hearts, and he knew that what they desired was their own glory, for their own will to be done not His. God's word as taught by Jesus offended them. It hurt their feelings, and offended their sensibilities, it did not convict them it incensed them because they still saw their own feelings as the all-important standard.

Yesterday at Presbytery I watched a presentation put on by a youth ministry, part of it involved going around campuses and asking what college students thought about Jesus, and Heaven, and Christianity generally. Some of the answers were just inconceivably bad. One girl said "When you die, you go to whatever Heaven or Hell you happen to believe in." Every one of their answers depended absolutely on the feelings of the individual as if ultimate questions about hinged on the whims of individuals. But what was almost worse than the answers that were obviously supposed to be bad, where the answers that were supposed to be "good." "Who is Christ," was one of the questions and the girl answered that question entirely in terms of how she felt about him.

Well what's wrong with that? Isn't Christianity a relationship? Shouldn't we love Jesus? Yes, absolutely we should. But our subjective feelings do not determine or change who Jesus is. Jesus is infinitely more than a feeling we have, and the really sad thing is that her answer almost duplicated the old

Ritschlian liberal definition of Christianity. "*Christianity is a feeling of dependence on God.*"

That brothers and sisters, is not Christianity, Christianity is not a *feeling* of dependence, it is the unchanging gospel, it contains propositions, that are absolute and unchanging regardless of how we feel about them or what the prevailing attitude of the culture is. Men are sinners regardless of whether or not they feel like sinners, Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and there only hope even if we don't happen to feel like that is true. And it is good news that Christianity is made up of objective truths determined by an almighty God rather than subjective feelings and inclinations set by individuals.

Why? Because that means that if I have been united to Christ by Faith, He loves me and I am saved, regardless of how I feel that particular day because that is the testimony of God's word, it is his undying unchanging promise. If I can reduce it to terms that even the kids can understand the song isn't:

Jesus Loves Me this I know, because I happen to feel like that it is so

It is:

Jesus Loves Me this I know, Because the Bible Tells me So.

God's word is truth. Unchanging truth, which is not controlled by the whims, opinions, or feelings of any man. I am so glad of that, because the World, the Flesh, and the Devil will do all that they can to shake your confidence, to make you feel unsaved, to cause you to despair.

And in those moments, it is not profitable to try to drum up new and better feelings, what you need to do is go back to the promises of God. Go back to absolute truth because just one of those precious promises like

Romans 8:38 "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

is worth more than an ocean of feelings.

Now what is the meaning of *the Law and the Prophets were until John?* Well at this time one did not refer to the canon of scripture as the Old Testament, you will remember that the New Testament had not yet been written. So what did they use to call the scriptures? The *Law and the Prophets*. The Old Testament itself points forward to the coming of the Messiah, in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi we read in Malachi 3:1:

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts."

After this book was penned, God's revelation ceased for a period of roughly 450 years. The years of silence, during those words, God's word was intended to be the light to guide his people. But even that word acknowledged that with the coming of the messenger of the covenant God's revelation would begin again. The time of silence would end and God would once again speak directly to his people. The coming of John who was the Elijah who would come to prepare the way for the Lord, was the opening of this age of new revelation.

Is. 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; **Make straight** in the desert A highway for our God.

What Jesus is saying is that the day has come, I am not giving you words you can choose to disregard, these are not opinions, I am giving you the very words of God. I am telling you the truth about how you may be saved and you are rejecting not my words but the *words of life*. As a result Publicans and Prostitutes are entering into the kingdom ahead of you.

This points to one of the saddest experiences a pastor can have in preaching the gospel, when you declare the words of God and men sit in judgment of it as though these were merely someone else's opinions as if you were discoursing on which color is best or which car is coolest. As though the

Pastor were merely saying you must accept what I say, because I'm smarter, and my opinions are better. That is honestly how some hear the word. Gal. 6:14 But God forbid that I should **boast** except in the **cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In any event the OT pointed forward to him:

Luke 24:25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The terrible news is that the harmony means:

17 "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

They ignored him

They sought to be justified by the Law

Christ must fulfill the Law

No man can do it.

Their opinions will be their undoing their death sentence for they have not rejected the words of a man, they have rejected their only hope.

1) **Application:** Trust the words of God in all things and let your opinions fall by the wayside in all things:

Salvation – Put your trust entirely in God's words. "Whose words, after all, are true? Whose estimate is correct? Whose judgment will stand at the last day? By whose standard will all be tried, before they receive their eternal sentence? Before whose bar will the current opinions of the world be tested and weighed at last? These are the only questions which ought to influence our conduct; and to these questions the Bible returns a plain answer. The counsel of the Lord, it alone shall stand forever. The word of Christ, it alone shall judge man at the last day. By that word let us live. By that word let us

measure everything, and every person in this evil world. It matters nothing what man thinks. "What says the Lord?"--It matters nothing what it is fashionable or customary to think. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." (Rom. 3:4.) The more entirely we are of one mind with God, the better we are prepared for the judgment day. To love what God loves, to hate what God hates, and to approve what God approves, is the highest style of Christianity. The moment we find ourselves honoring anything which in the sight of God is lightly esteemed, we may be sure there is something wrong in our souls." – RYLE

Worship - but that God detests whatever men are disposed, of their own accord, to applaud. Hence it is evident in what light we ought to view all pretended acts of worship which the world contrives according to its own fancy. How much soever they may please their inventors, Christ pronounces that they are not only vain and worthless, but are even detestable.

2) Christians take heart, do not let the fact that often you will seem to be going against the prevailing opinions of the world especially regarding salvation and ethics (this morning)

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

69 "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."