

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 16- Luke 16:14-18

274- That Which is Highly Esteemed Among Men is
Detestable in the Sight of God- Part 3

April 19, 2015

Luke 16:14-18

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

15 And He said to them, "**You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.**

16 "**The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.**

17 "**But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.**

18 "**Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.**

To the Glory of God

Erik Reece is "writer-in-residence" at the University of Kentucky, in Lexington, teaching something called "Environmental Journalism". And back in April of 2009- Reece published a book entitled, *An American Gospel: On Family, History, and the Kingdom of God*. And while it certainly wasn't the first time that someone had written what Reece wrote- it may well have been the most recent and the most public and the most blatant.

Unlike me- Reece grew up in a fundamentalist Christian home. By God's Grace- I was brought to Christ at 16, and from that day to this- I have endeavored- with varying degrees of success- to remain faithful to Scripture. But Reece had the privilege of being raised to

love and serve God by believing parents and yet he has utterly rejected his upbringing and has sought to find a different form of Christianity with the guidance of people like Thomas Jefferson, Walt Whitman, and other American writers.

On page 28 of his book- Reece quotes from Jesus in **Luke 14:26&27** where the Lord said:

26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

And after quoting Jesus, Reece asks, *"Who is the egomaniac who is speaking these words?"* And then he elaborated, *"It struck me as 'Who is this person speaking 2000 years ago, a complete historical stranger, saying that we should love him more so than we should love our own parents and children?' It seems like an incredibly egomaniacal kind of claim to make."*

So in his book, Reece says that if Jesus talked like this, then He is an egomaniac, and he has confirmed that conviction many times in various interviews since he wrote the book that anyone who would talk like Jesus talked is egomaniacal.

So here is Jesus saying:

"Love Me more than you love anyone in the world. And if you don't- you are not worthy of Me."

And Erik Reece responds by saying:

"That is an egomaniac talking."

Now, as bad as this is- Reece is not the first person or the only person who thinks like this. Many of you have heard or read C. S. Lewis. Lewis was a professor at Oxford and a great writer of Christian apologetics and fiction about 70 years ago. But what you may *not* know is that Lewis was slow to come to Christ. He was 29 years old before he was converted.

And he says in his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, that one of the great obstacles in him coming to believe in the God of the Bible was that when he read the Psalms, the constant demand from God to praise Him seemed (to Lewis) to picture God as:

“... craving for our worship like a vain woman who wants compliments.”

In other words, Lewis stumbled, just like Erik Reece, over the Self-Exalting Commands of God that we praise Him, and the Self-Exalting Commands of Jesus that we love Him more than we love our parents or our children or our own lives. And to Lewis- for a while- and to Reece- this was sheer egomania.

In the March 30, 2003, issue of the London *Financial Times*, Michael Prowse wrote the very same thing from another vantage point. Prowse said,

“Worship is an aspect of religion that I always found difficult to understand. Suppose we postulate an Omnipotent Being Who, for reasons inscrutable to us, decided to create something other than Himself. Why should He . . . *expect* us to worship Him? We didn’t *ask* to be created. Our lives are often troubled. We know that human tyrants, puffed up with pride, crave adulation and homage. But a morally perfect God would surely have no character defects. So why are all those people on their knees every Sunday?”

Or if Prowse were here in this Church this morning- he would ask,

“Why are those odd people standing with their hands and their voices lifted in praise to a God and His Son- Who are such egomaniacs that they constantly demand that we think They are the greatest? Why do these people go to so much trouble and travel such distances to be cowed into doing just what these Egomaniacs want them to do, namely, admire Them and praise Them above everybody else in the universe?”

I recently was sent a “You Tube” clip of Oprah Winfrey describing being in a church service where the preacher was talking about the Attributes of God- His Omnipotence and His Omnipresence. And Winfrey said,

“Then the preacher said, ‘The Lord thy God is a Jealous God’. And I was caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said “jealous.” And something struck me. I was 27 or 28 years old and I was thinking, ‘God is All, God is Omnipresent, but God is . . . also Jealous? A jealous God is jealous of me?’ And something about that didn’t feel right in my spirit because I believe that God is Love, and that God is in all things and so I reject that God is jealous.”

Now please turn with me to **Exodus 34:14-16**. There God Himself is talking to Moses and He says,

14 — for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God —

15 otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice,

16 and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods.

Now notice the terminology that God used in verse 14. God says that His “Name” is “Jealous”. And then He says

... the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God...

Now we have already discovered in previous teachings that the word “Name” means: *Reputation*, and is associated with the very Character and Nature of God Himself. So, for example- when we pray “in the Name of Jesus”- what we mean is that the Authority by which we are coming to God the Father to have our petitions heard is *not* our *own* righteousness or our own goodness or anything that we have done or have become- but we come to God in the pristine Reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ and in His Righteousness and in His Goodness.

So here God says that part of His Name or part of Who God is- is Jealous; which is why He goes on to say:

The Lord... is a jealous God

So there are two things:

1. Part of God's Reputation and Character and Nature is Jealous
2. God Himself is a jealous God

So that makes us ask several questions:

- ✓ What is God Jealous *about*?
- ✓ How does God *manifest* the Jealousy that He is?

And then in verses 15&16- God used the word "harlot" in connection to discussing His people *stealing* worship from Him and *giving* it to other gods, and of them *abandoning* His Ways and going after the ways of those other gods.

But the word "harlot" is a fancy term for a prostitute, a whore, a sexually impure woman, someone who has no sexual fidelity. So when we realize that **Exodus 34** is *not* about sexual fidelity but is about worship- we see that God *demand*s that you and I and Oprah Winfrey give Him all our worship. And if we give any of our worship to anything or anyone else- God is jealous and we have "played the harlot" with our worship, and we have committed something called "Spiritual Adultery". And if we don't repent- God will break forth in Wrath against us because **Deuteronomy 4:24** says:

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

And that is exactly what Jesus is telling these Pharisees here in the Passage that Brother Andy just read to you in **Luke 16**. So Erick Reece and the early C. S. Lewis and Michael Prowse and Oprah Winfrey and the Pharisees from 2,000 years ago all turned away from the God of the Bible because they thought He was too Self-Exalting, too Self-Centered, too much interested in being worshipped. In other words- these people and many, many others like them think God is an Egomaniac, and since Egomania is a mental disorder, a defect, a sinful character flaw that craves to be seen and heard and adored- these people make the decision to refuse to love and serve a "god" like that.

Don Carson, who is the New Testament scholar from Trinity Seminary near Chicago, said a while back that as he has done

evangelistic outreaches on university campuses for many years and he has noticed that the questions have changed over the years. Thirty years ago the questions from college students tended to revolve around historical problems with Christianity. But lately he is bombarded with questions like:

How can you worship a God Who is so Self-Exalting and so Self-Centered as the God of the Bible—a God Who is constantly pointing to His Own Greatness and constantly telling people that they should recognize this Greatness and tell Him how much they like it?

So I really don't think this is a small, marginal, or tricky opposition to Christianity. I think what Erik Reece, and the young C.S. Lewis, and Michael Prowse, and Oprah Winfrey and the Pharisees and ten thousand other people are saying touches the very center of Christianity.

For example- if you thought that Christ crucified for sinners and risen triumphantly was the very heart and soul of Christianity- you would be right. Paul said, in **1Corinthians 2:2:**

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

But what we have to understand is that it is the intersection of this supposed Egomania of God- His jealousy if you will- His obsession with being known and loved and worshipped and enjoyed forever- it is the intersection with that and *with* the human condition of sin that made the Cross of Christ necessary in the first place. And it is this intersection that makes God becoming Man and dying for us on the Cross intelligible and it reveals the deepest things about God Himself.

So, the issues of God's Jealousy to want to be known and worshipped, and our Spiritual Adultery in being repulsed by that and refusing to worship God and to place our love and devotion and hope and trust in other things and other people is *not* small or something that we can take or leave. But we are dealing with something that is huge and weighty, and something central to God's Own Character and Nature, and thus, something utterly crucial to genuine worship of the one true living God.

And I didn't face this issue until about 20 years ago. I had gone from being a saved young man of 16 to a married man of 40 where I was taught and believed **1Corinthians 10:31** that says:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Which I thought at the time was pretty deep. And this knowledge that I was to live for God's Glory compelled me to alter my life and to start certain things and to stop other things so that God would be glorified in what I do and in what I think and in what I say. So it was clear to me for many years that *I* should live my life for the Glory of God.

But no one ever told me that *God* lives *His* Life for the Glory of God, too. And then I read Jonathan Edwards's book, *The End for Which God Created the World*, and everything changed. This 18th Century Theologian blew me away with page after page of Biblical Truth showing me a concept that I never knew and had never heard from anyone else: "God's Own radical God-centeredness". And so I began to search the Scriptures to see if these things were true. And I found out that the reason that God wants me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength is because God loves God with all His Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength! And the reason why I shouldn't have any other gods before Him is because *God* doesn't have any other gods before Him!

And I learned that while I am to do all that I do for the Glory of God- that God does everything from Creation to Salvation for His Own Glory as well! And I learned that God is going to magnify the Glory of His Grace by filling up Heaven with a sea of unworthy sinners who He has saved through His Mercy, and this same God is going to magnify the Glory of His Justice by filling up Hell with unrepentant sinners who refused to bow and who loved their sin.

And I learned that the God of the Bible is unwaveringly committed to uphold and display His Glory so that He will be known and feared and loved and adored and honored and worshipped and obeyed and enjoyed more and better than anything or anyone in all the Universe.

And what became clear to me then, and what *remains* clear to me to this day is that while many Christians today think it is good for *us* to

be radically God-centered- many of these very same people don't feel comfortable at all with *God* being God-centered. They agree that we should be Christ-exalting, but they are repelled by the notion that Christ is also Christ-exalting.

But what I have found in my own life, and in the life of many others, is that God's Own God-centeredness is the true test of whether our own God-centeredness is real. So, for example- do I rejoice in God's unwavering Commitment to uphold and display His Own Glory? Do I rejoice in God's Own God-centeredness, or am I God-centered only because deep down I really believe God is actually Man-centered?

In other words- do I feel real good about putting God first because I take that to mean that God is then putting *me* first? And, if so- then is not then my supposed God-centeredness actually a "Man-centeredness", even a "Me-centeredness"?

Does my opposition to God's Own God-centeredness actually reveal that my supposed God-centeredness is just a cover for wanting *myself* to be at the center of all that God does? And if that is true- then am I not really just *using* God to get what I want- which is to be the very focus of God? And how is that worship? How is that not the very height of Spiritual Adultery? How is that any different from what the Pharisees wanted?

Isn't what turned the Pharisees away the most was how Jesus wanted their attention to be on Him and what He was doing? In other words if the reason why I feel real good about being "God-centered" is because that makes God to be "Me-centered"- if that is what makes me feel loved and feel good- then I suggest to you that it is true only because it is satisfying my fallen and sinful need to be the center of attention, and that is the very definition of human pride and arrogance and I am guilty of spiritual adultery, and I am really not worshipping God at all.

And reading the Bible with *these* eyes, I began to see what Erik Reece and the unconverted C.S. Lewis and Michael Prowse and Oprah were seeing. And the thing that nauseated them and made them turn away from God is the very thing that drew me closer to God- which is that God really is radically devoted to seeing Himself be exalted. That God is radically committed to seeing that His Own Glory is esteemed as the supreme Value of the universe.

And this is what was at stake as Jesus stood there before the Pharisees in **Luke 16**. And Jesus didn't mince any words with them- because they should have known all this. Here is a sampling of what these Pharisees should have already known from spending so much time in the OT Scriptures. They should have known:

That God Creates for His Glory.

Isaiah 43:6-7

6 "I will say to the north, 'Give *them* up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold *them* back.' Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth,
7 Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

That God Elected Israel for His Glory.

Jeremiah 13:11

For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,' declares the Lord, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory...

That God Saved Them from Egypt for His Glory.

Psalms 106:7&8

7 Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; They did not remember Your abundant kindnesses, But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.
8 Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name, That He might make His power known.

That God Restrained His Anger in Exile for His Glory.

Isaiah 48:9-11

9 "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And *for* My praise I restrain *it* for you, In order not to cut you off.
10 "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

11 "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

Now look again at **Luke 16:16- 18:**

16 "The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

17 "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

18 "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.

Now this is very interesting. Right in the middle of Jesus confronting these Pharisees and condemning them about their false and man-made religion- He brings up the Law in verses 16&17 and then in verse 18- He starts talking about adultery. So what in the world is Jesus doing here?

Now last week- I told you that there were six things that Jesus was teaching here about the character of false religious leaders. And we went over them last week:

1. False religion promotes the love of money
2. False religion promotes antagonism toward God's Truth
3. False religion promotes self-justification
4. False religion promotes favor with Man
5. False religion promotes an evil heart
6. False religion rejects the Gospel

But there is yet one more characteristic of the false religion of the Pharisees and all man-made religions and that is:

7. False Religion Rejects Grace

The very thing that offended these people about Jesus was that He embraced wicked sinners who repent. Look back at **Luke 15:1&2:**

1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.

2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

You see, those who are deceived by the heresy of Legalism- who are trying so hard to earn Favor with God by what they do for themselves- *despise* the Grace of God. To a legalist- Grace makes God look soft and it robs God of His Righteousness. To a legalist- for anyone to talk about Mercy is just a way to excuse the fact that they are not obeying God. So while all heaven rejoices at the saving of one soul- those who are blinded with false religion act like the older son in **Luke 15:**

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be.

27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.'

28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him.

29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends;

30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

And we saw that this older son didn't love his father any more than the younger one did. This older son didn't uphold the honor of the father, and actually became enraged when the father exercised Grace and forgave the younger son.

This is what false religion does. It rejects the Grace of God and deceives people into thinking that they are different from the outwardly sinful people and that they *deserve* God's Favor through all their service.

But it is actually worse than that. Because the reality is that those who are deceived by false religion are also guilty of then elevated themselves into deity by what they are doing, and thus robbing God of

the Glory that God is entitled to, and are thus guilty of committing spiritual adultery and are really not worshipping God at all.

So by preaching Grace and Mercy and Forgiveness through genuine brokenness and repentance and trust in Him- the Pharisees believed that Jesus was attacking the Righteousness that the Law spoke of. Because if you're going to earn your way into Heaven- then the only way is through some effort of obeying some of the Law. And that forces you to have absolutely no pity on those who aren't trying as hard as you are to earn God's Favor.

And so as Jesus comes with all His Grace- talking about God embracing these repentant sinners- the Pharisees are outraged. They don't see God's Grace on undeserving sinners- they see Jesus attacking Holiness and attacking purity and attacking virtue, and they are highly offended, and they are convinced that Jesus is attacking God's Righteousness- which is why they believe He is satanic. And that is typical of Legalism and false religion.

And we must be careful about this in our day. Because we are watching the complete systematic dismantling of Western Civilization right before our eyes. We are watching time honored traditions and sacred institutions crumble before us. And we see awful, blatant sins that reprobates would not engage in 70 years ago without blushing being paraded right in front of us in broad daylight. And we must take heed to ourselves that we do not re-act to all this "loose living" by running into what we perceive as the "safety" of Legalism. We must realize that legalism is *not* safe, it is *not* a genuine pursuit of holiness, it does *not* honor God, it actually robs God of His Glory. We must know that Legalism is a heresy, it ignores Grace, it is false, it is a lie. We are no better off being in legalism than we are being in antinomianism or lawlessness.

So instead of running away from "loose living" into the arms of legalism- which would mean that we just traded one evil heresy for another one- we must run away from "loose living" *and* "lawlessness" *and* "legalism" and run into the Arms of God's Grace.

So what Jesus is doing here in these verses is upholding His great respect and great admiration for God's Moral Law. After all- the Moral Law of God is eternal because it reflects the very Character and Nature of God- which never changes.

But while showing His great respect for God's law- Jesus is also accusing these religious hypocrites of playing the harlot and of being spiritual adulterers precisely because they actually didn't believe God's Word in the OT, because if they did- they would repent and trust in Jesus. So Jesus says this in verse 17:

Luke 16:17

But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

Now this is a contrast from a human perspective. Jesus is saying, "It is easier for the entire universe, to go immediately out of existence than for one stroke of a single letter of the Law to fail."

And the contrast here is extreme- going from the greatest- the entire universe- down to the most minute- a stroke of a single letter of God's law. Now the Greek word here for **"stroke"** is *keraiia*, and it literally means: *a little horn*. And in English this would be the difference between a capital "F" and a capital "E"- that one little stroke at the bottom, or the difference between a capital "R" and a capital "B", that one tiny stroke.

Now in their Jewish minds- the Pharisees would understand Jesus to mean the difference between a Hebrew letters "baeth" and "koff". And the difference is that a "baeth" in the Hebrew language looks like a reverse "C", but it has a tiny little tag on the bottom. And a "koff" is *without* that tiny little tag.

So Jesus is saying, *"Look, the whole universe could go out of existence before one tiny "keraiia" on the pages of God's inspired Revelation would ever be changed."* And by saying this- Jesus was making the pronouncement that Him issuing Grace to unworthy sinners was *not* depreciating God's Moral Law at all- it was, in fact, magnifying the magnificent Glory of God's Grace.

Now as you look at the Old Testament, it is true that there were ceremonial and sacrificial and dietary aspects of the Old Covenant that God set aside and that no longer apply as indicated in the New Testament very clearly in **The Acts 10**.

Those aspects of the Law were for a certain time and a certain place and a certain people. But there are two elements to the Old Testament Law that can never change:

- ✓ Promise
- ✓ Righteousness

In other words, whatever God promised in the Old Testament will be fulfilled, and whatever God said is righteous will always be righteous. The Law taught about a Righteousness that comes only from obedience, and that is why Jesus had to be born as a real human being and why He had to live life on the earth as a real human being. Jesus had to literally *earn* His Righteousness by living on this earth as a Man and never sinning in thought, word, or deed a single time. And we are saved by trusting in what Jesus did and God imputing Jesus' Righteousness to us.

So God's Promises cannot change and God's Own Personal Morality cannot change. So the Law never changes in those two ways. All the Promises will be fulfilled. And they were being fulfilled right then, right there, that day in the face of those Pharisees. And they will continue to be fulfilled all the way out to the new heaven and the new earth.

Everything that the Old Testament prophesied through direct prophecy, through type, through symbols such as a sacrificial system, all of that will come to its complete fulfillment and will not fail. Secondly, all true Standards of Biblical Righteousness reflect God's Own Personal unchanging Holy Nature.

So in the first place- if God said it's going to happen- then it's going to happen because God can't lie. And secondly, if God said something is right or wrong- then it's going to be that way forever because God is immutable and cannot change. So prophetic Promises will all come to fulfillment and Righteous Standards of God will never change. And Jesus understands this and so Jesus is affirming this.

And if these men really believed in the righteous Character and Nature of God being inviolable, and the Law of God being inviolable and unchanging- then they wouldn't be deceived by their false religion and they would be on their face before Jesus like the publican in Luke 18 pounding their chests screaming for mercy because they would have known if they really understood the Law- then they would have known that they were sinners, too, and they would have known they were under the very same horrific condemnation as everybody else.

So when it came to God's moral Law- the Pharisees didn't pay attention to the reality of what it said, and so *they* were the ones who were guilty of depreciating and demeaning and disregarding the Law- not Jesus. *They* were the ones who were not truly worshipping God, and they were the ones who were putting their own self-righteousness ahead of the Glory of God, and they were actually worshipping *themselves*, and they were playing the harlot and not the real harlots who were repenting, and the Pharisees were the ones who were committing spiritual adultery.

Now what is interesting is that hypocrites are usually pretty careful about how they select their zones of operation, and these guys were no different. So Jesus picked out one of their favorite Old Testament Commands to ignore- and He cried out:

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.

So what Jesus was saying to them was, *"You're a bunch of adulterers- both in the natural and in the spiritual realm."* You see, divorce was rampant among the Pharisees of the 1st Century. And that shows you that trumped up spirituality isn't real because it doesn't restrain the flesh. And being a legalist is real hard work. You're working your way to Heaven, and so even though the Pharisees would never physically commit adultery- they just ignored their wives and after they used them- they dumped their wives and got another woman they wanted, and then when she didn't work out- they dumped her and went with somebody else. And so their excuse was that they were so busy serving God that they couldn't have a good marriage. And so by the time that Jesus was in His Ministry- Divorce was rampant among these self-righteous religious hypocrites.

And we learned from our Journey through Jude a few years ago- that this is pretty standard for *all* false religions. Sexual and financial sins abound in false religions. The *sensuality* by which false religions operate *encourage* sexual sins. And that is why one of the lasting hallmarks of the Pentecostal Movement will be a long standing history of sexual sins that wrecked havoc on the people.

It is common today for divorces and re-marriages to be carried out in the modern Church, and even in the Ministry with little or no

consideration about what God's Word teaches about this. I recently had a conversation with three people- who all claimed to be saved and who have been in Church for over 30 years- and they all had three different opinions about the issue of divorce and re-marriage- and none of them even knew what the Bible taught! The ignorance about this subject in the modern Church is breathtaking. And that is why God has burdened my soul that as soon as I finish teaching about Fasting on Sunday evenings- I am going to teach about what the Bible teaches about Marriage, Divorce, and Re-Marriage.

So while these men have the audacity to say that Jesus is the devil- Jesus calls them adulterers to their face. And in effect- He is saying, *"You're standing before Me and saying that I am depreciating God's law because I am showing Grace and Mercy to sinners who are broken over their sins and who are repenting, and you have divorced your wives and you've married somebody else with no regard for God's Righteousness? Who are you to tell Me I'm depreciating the Law?"*

And so the Lord says, *"You hypocrites! You parade yourselves around as if you are the paragons of devotion to the law, and you stand here before Me as a collective group of adulterers by the proliferation of your divorces!"* So Jesus was just shattering any claim that they had to genuine Righteousness.

So we must understand that in all of Redemptive History, from beginning to ending, God has this one ultimate goal: that His Name be glorified. And so the Goal of God in all that He does is most ultimately what the Bible calls, "the Praise of His Glory". And false religion cannot bring God any Glory because it is rooted in lies and deception.

But all of Redemptive history is bookended by this amazing Purpose in God the Father and God the Son. And in the very *center* of those two bookends stands the greatest Event in the history of the world- the Death of Jesus Christ.

And so these three points—the beginning and the ending and the center are crucial. And it is at these three points where God receives the most Glory and Man is brought the lowest. And it is precisely at these three points where the Truth of God's Word will help you the most and where false teaching will hurt you the most. So here are the three points:

1. The Beginning: The Predestination of our Salvation

2. The End: The Consummation of our Salvation in Heaven
3. The Center: The Purchase of our Salvation on the Cross

And it is no coincidence that it was at these points that we see the false doctrine of the Pharisees fail the most and we see the problem of God's supposed egomania finding its amazing solution.

So I invite you to consider three Passages of Scripture about each of these three points:

- ✓ The Beginning (Predestination)
- ✓ The Ending (Consummation)
- ✓ The Center (Propitiation).

The Beginning: Ephesians 1:4–6

Ephesians 1:4-6

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Before the foundation of the world, God planned a Redemption that would be "in Christ" with this great and ultimate goal: that unworthy sinners saved by Grace would praise His Glory! And the very apex of that Glory would be "the Glory of His Grace".

So from the very beginning, we see that God made His exaltation and our Salvation one single piece. You don't have to choose between God's Glory and your own Joy- because the apex of our joy is praise and the apex of God's Glory is Grace.

Unlike these Pharisees- by God's Grace, C. S. Lewis eventually did break through to comprehend the Beauty of God's Own Self-Exaltation (thinking at first that the Psalms sounded like an old woman craving compliments). He finally saw something very different and he said,

"My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we

delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation." (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958, 93–95])

Lewis saw that redeemed sinners praising God *is* the consummation of our Joy in God. Therefore, when God is pursuing- even *demanding*- our praise- He is also, at the same time- earnestly pursuing the consummation of our Joy!

And this may feel at first counter-intuitive- that when we are small and feel insignificant, while God is great and central, at those very moments we reach our highest Joy. But it's *not* counter to our deepest sense of where Joy comes from. Real and lasting Joy is never attained in thinking highly of *ourselves*. Joy reaches its height in moments of "self-forgetfulness" in the Presence of absolute Beauty and infinite Greatness.

So if Jesus wants you to feel most alive, most joyful forever, what would He show you?

The Ending: John 17:24

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

When all is said and done, and the history of the world is complete, and the new heavens and the new earth are established, and Eternity is here- the *ultimate* Joy, the ultimate climax of history for our aching hearts, is that Jesus' Prayer will be answered and **"we will see His Glory,"** and we will be transformed by what we see into the kind of people who can enjoy that Glory fully and not be incinerated by it.

So when Jesus says, *"Love me more than you love your mother and father and sons and daughters and your own children and your best beloved on earth"*, He is not hurting anyone!

He is saying: *If you find your ultimate joy in your most cherished earthly treasure, you will be disappointed in the end, and I will be dishonored. Because I am offering Myself to you as the all-satisfying*

and infinite Beauty and Greatness and Wisdom and Strength and Love of the universe. I am what you were made for. And I am telling you that, if you see this—if you see Me as your supreme Treasure—then you don't have to choose between your own satisfaction and My glorification, because in the very act of you delighting in Me- I will be most glorified in you.

And Jesus continues, *"When I pray that in the end you will see My Glory- it is simply because, as God- I am infinitely glorious, and I want you to see infinite Glory and value it and enjoy it. I want you to be with Me and be satisfied in Me. So I am not an egomaniac. I am your all-satisfying Friend."*

But we cannot stop here- because there is a great problem that will stop all of this from happening. And that is that we are all sinners. And because we are sinners- not only do we *not* want to treasure God above ourselves- we don't even deserve the privilege to try. And so how will sinners like us be able to stand in the Presence of God and enjoy His Greatness as our all-satisfying Treasure?

The answer to this question brings us to the very Center of history and the Work of Christ on the Cross.

The Center: Romans 3:23-26

Standing in between our predestination and our glorification stands the mighty Cross of Jesus Christ. And in it we see the clearest statement of God's Passion for His Own Glory- precisely and amazingly in the Salvation of unworthy sinners. Read **Romans 3:23–26** with me:

Romans 3:23-26

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

26 for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Note Paul's argument:

What God did: He put Christ forward as a **“Propitiation in His Blood”** (verse 25a). In other words- Christ died to remove the Wrath of God from us.

Romans 8:3: “What the law could not do . . . God did: . . . He condemned sin in the flesh.”

Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

But *why* did God need to do it this way- by dying on a Cross? Verse 25b: **“This was to demonstrate God’s Righteousness.”** But why did He need to demonstrate God’s Righteousness? Verse 25c: **“because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed”**

But *why* does passing over sins call God’s Righteousness into question? Verse 23: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”**. And the term **“fall short”** means *“lack.”* So we have exchanged the Glory of God in every sin (**Romans 1:23**). Every time we sin, we say that the Glory of God is *not* the supreme Treasure to be desired above all others. We are saying that God’s Glory is *not* satisfying. It is *not* worthy to be preferred above all else.

And so if God were to simply pass over that terrible insult to His Own Glory and not judge it- it looks like God agrees with what we are saying by our sin- that His Glory is really *not* worthy to be defended. But if He agrees with that- then God Himself is unrighteous- because He is acting in contradiction to what is true. His Righteousness- His Absolute Commitment to doing what is right- is also His Commitment to act as though His Glory is supremely valuable- which it is. So God’s Righteousness is His Commitment to uphold and display the infinite Worth of His Glory. And that is what the Cross does.

So we see that from the beginning to the end—from predestination before creation to the final state of contemplation of the Glory of Christ at the end of history—God is passionate for His Glory.

And right in the center of that history- the greatest Event that ever happened, the Death of the Son of God for sinners like us, is the demonstration of God’s Righteousness—the demonstration of His unwavering Commitment to uphold and display the infinite Worth of

His Own Glory as the supreme Treasure of the universe. And that is what was at stake with the Pharisees.

Which means that now when we come to him for Mercy and cry out to Him for the forgiveness of our sins, we do it *for His Name's sake-* or for the Sake of his Glory.

Psalm 25:11

For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great

And we hear the promise from **1John 2:12**,

“[Y]our sins are forgiven for his name's sake.”

So the greatest news in the world is that in the Death of Christ, God has made a way for His Name to be exalted and for our sins to be forgiven in the very same Act. And that makes God to be both Just and the Justifier of him who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

And what makes this so spectacular is that the foundation under our Salvation is not *our* value- but God's Value. So the consummation of our Salvation is *not* that Heaven will be a hall of mirrors where we will enjoy the reflection of our own goodness- but that we will be glorified to the point where we will be able to finally appreciate and enjoy the Glory of Jesus Christ!

So here is the end of the matter: God is the one Being in the universe for Whom Self-Exaltation is *not* an Act of a needy ego- but rather an Act of infinite Giving. The reason God seeks our praise is *not* because He won't be fully God unless He *gets* it- but that we won't be fully joyful until we *give* it.

And that is not arrogance- it is Grace

And that is not egomania- it is the highest degree of Love

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729 www.covenantofpeace.net

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.