

THE BIG IDEA: The law leads to loopholes; the Spirit leads to life.

The Take-Off

Welcome to week 2 of “Wait, what?”

Or, as some of you may call it, “Watch Paul teach on passages he’d rather not!”

What we’ve done is group the 16th and 17th chapters of Luke together in a 6-week miniseries dealing with things that Jesus said that kind of make us cock our heads sideways and say, “Wait, what??”

Last week we talked about money and the shocking thing we saw was that Jesus called out His followers for not using our money for eternal purposes as intentionally as unbelievers use theirs for temporary purposes.

Basically, Jesus challenged us to follow the money trail in order to find our heart. We give to what we love, so if we aren’t giving to eternal things, it’s because we don’t love eternal things like we might say we do.

Ouch. But the flip side is the good news: we can sow into what we want to grow into. Give to eternal things and eventually our hearts will beat with passion for those things.

So, there you have it. SHOCK and AWE. That’s how it works.

We hear what sounds harsh, surprising and yet when we hear the heart behind it, wow! God is FOR us, always!!

That’s so important for us to remember this morning as we take another step in the “Wait What” series.

Before we jump in, let me show you a video that I saw this past week that will help us set the stage for the teaching.

[VIDEO / The Cliff]

Let me shoot straight: it’s intimidating to talk about something you’ve never experienced, but our experience (or lack of) can’t stop us from looking boldly to God’s Word for truth and grace, even in hard areas.

And this morning is a hard area because divorce has affected so many.

Let me start by taking perhaps the one Scripture in the Bible that has been used to do the most damage to already wounded hearts and diffusing it.

It’s found in Malachi 2:16 and it simply reads, “God hates divorce.”

That’s true, but I’ve not met many - if any - who have been through divorce who also don’t hate it.

Listen to these words at the beginning of an article I read in my preparation for today:

Thirty years ago in February 1985, I got divorced. So far I’ve lived fifty-nine years, and without a doubt divorce was the worst season of my life.

Nothing I’ve suffered since that time even comes close. Not a wayward child, not a stroke, not the betrayal of a close friend, not job loss, not watching the collapse of a ministry, not the death of a parent, not a root canal when the Novocain didn’t work—absolutely nothing compares to the horrific pain of having a spouse decide, “I Don’t” after saying “I Do.”

God hates divorce because divorce hurts people and God loves people.

There are many here today who have felt the sting of it - you nodded your head inwardly as I read those words earlier. You would say, like God does, “I hate divorce.”

But know that you are loved, you are not weird or second-class or relegated to a life of “almost” God’s best.

You have the scars from the war, and no one would be able to out-Amen you when we share today, because you KNOW that God’s plans are good even when our plans aren’t.

So, let’s pick this up in Luke 16:14 so we can understand the context of the one-verse bomb that Jesus is going to drop in verse 18.

1. It’s always about the heart

- a. Jesus had just taught about money and loving God more than trusting money. He had focused on the heart more than the wallet. Look who laughed at Him - religious leaders.
- b. Why? They were looking to justify themselves (“We’re good”) but God knew who they really were (“You’re bad”)
- c. In Luke 16:16-17, Jesus talks about the Law but also about how the good news had come. That’s Jesus! Jesus is challenging their misunderstanding of the Law - they preached that obeying the Law could save people and Jesus is saying that only He can save people.
- d. Here’s why. Pharisees tended to set, keep, and break rules in their favor, and to reveal that, Jesus dropped a one-verse bomb on them in verse 18.
- e. Why did Jesus introduce divorce? Let’s look back at Matthew 19 to get the full picture.

- Even though divorce wasn't God's intent, they had created a system where they could divorce a woman for "any and all reason"
 - This gave all power to men and no power to women, and Jesus slammed the door on it
 - So in Luke, Jesus is highlighting the hardness of their hearts and the fact that they looked for loopholes in the Law more than for the heart or life of the Law
- f. The Law leads to loopholes, but the Spirit leads to life
- g. That's incredibly important as we begin to answer the obvious question: "When is divorce allowed?"

2. When is divorce allowed?

- a. As I prepared for this message, I read the following statement: Instead of asking if _____ is grounds for divorce, we should be asking is _____ grounds for forgiveness, restoration and/or counseling?
- b. We cannot state this enough: God hates divorce. Why? Because divorce hurts people and God loves people.
- c. Divorce is not inevitable, and bad marriages are not beyond God's redemption.
- d. More on that later, but for now just remember that these are not loopholes to get out.
- e. What was Jesus telling the religious leaders? The Law leads to loopholes; the Spirit leads to life.
- f. Reason #1: Adultery (sexual immorality)
- Matthew 5:32; 19:9
 - Greek word is "porneia" - word we get pornography from
 - Sexual immorality doesn't mean you have to or should divorce, but it's grounds biblically
- g. Reason #2: Abandonment
- 1 Corinthians 7:15
 - Why? So the remaining spouse can live in peace
 - Who? A believing spouse abandoned by an unbelieving spouse
- h. Reason #3: Abuse (hardness of heart)
- Malachi 2; Matthew 19:8
 - Men were treating women harshly and God stepped in and said He hated divorce but we also know from Matthew 19:8 that He allowed it because of the hardness of men's hearts
 - In other words, to protect the women from abuse (or the man in some instances)

The Landing

As we wrap all of this up, can I tell you that there are real life examples of believers who have overcome all 3 of those grounds for divorce by turning them into grounds for redemption

Instead of looking for a loophole, they trusted the Spirit to bring life back into the marriage

Would you allow me to offer you 2 extremely powerful insights from studies that have been done on marriage?

First, did you know that if a couple has 3 specific qualities, it reduces the chance of divorce by 50%?

- attend church together
- shared theology
- practiced faith in the home

Second, from Tim Keller's book, "The Meaning of Marriage" // two-thirds of unhappy marriages will become happy marriages within 5 years if people stay married and do not get divorced

What does this mean? Simply that when God is involved, nothing is impossible.

Do we recognize that divorce happens? Yes. Do we know that God has something better than divorce, even for those who have been through divorce? Absolutely, and we want to pray for His purposes to be fulfilled in our lives.

Let's pray.