

Luke 16:14-15

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Luke informs the readers that the Pharisees who had been listening to Jesus teach about money were scoffing at what He said. Luke describes the Pharisees as “lovers of money.” Jesus rebukes them as self-justifiers who seek to appear righteous before men and reminds them that God sees the reality of their wicked hearts. He also says that men are terrible judges of what is truly good.

There is no apparent parallel of this specific interaction and teaching in gospel accounts.

Luke briefly interjects a few lines of narrative in between Jesus’s teaching to provide important context for what follows. He reports: *Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.*

The Pharisees were the main religious leaders in the local communities. They taught God’s law in their synagogues and promoted a strong sense of Jewish identity and culture through their customs and traditions. *The Pharisees* were highly honored and respected for their apparent sense of righteousness. They were regarded by the common people as heroic figures of the Jewish faith standing against the tyranny of Rome’s pagan rule.

But Jesus knew that they were selfish hypocrites. *He* opposed and condemned their selfish behavior as sinful and shameful (see Matthew 23). The Pharisees hated Jesus and would ultimately conspire with both their religious rivals, the Sadducees, and their enemies, the Roman authorities, to have *Him* crucified. They hated Jesus because *He* spoke truth to their exploitative use of power.

The people marveled at what *He said* and the authority in which He taught (Matthew 7:28-29). And the people flocked *to Him* because of His wondrous miracles (Luke 9:11). *The Pharisees* rightly perceived Jesus’s influence among the people was a dangerous threat to their corrupt way of life, exploiting those whom they were supposed to serve.

Here, Luke comments that *the Pharisees were lovers of money*. They did not follow God; they obeyed their master, *money*. Therefore, logic would dictate a conclusion that they “hated” and “despised” God.

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”
(Luke 16:13)

The Pharisees heard Jesus say this and quite likely all the teachings before that (Luke 16:1-12). But instead of considering the truth of His statement and repenting of their love *of money*, which Paul teaches is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10), *the Pharisees scoffed at Jesus*.

Scoffing, in this case, appears to be demeaning what *He* is saying as not worthy of consideration. This was probably their approach since what Jesus was saying was true. So if they engaged in any way, they would be exposed. They were trying to dismiss or undermine His teaching through scorn rather than interact logically with it, and putting themselves at risk. Jesus was a highly skilled debater who did not fall for fallacious misdirections or reframings of the argument upon faulty premises. Their attempts to test *Him* always failed miserably.

Jesus directly addressed *the Pharisees'* scoffing,

You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men...

Jesus knew that they were trying to *justify* themselves. *The Pharisees* would rather ignore truth and appear *righteous in the sight of men* rather than confront reality and repent of the wickedness within their own *hearts*. This is similar to what Jesus says in Jerusalem when *He* publicly confronts *the Pharisees* and denounces them for doing “all their deeds to be noticed by men” (Matthew 23:5).

Here, after Jesus points out *the Pharisees'* hypocrisy and self-righteousness, *He* tells them an unsettling truth: *but God knows your hearts*. Jesus reminds them there is no hiding from God. This truth is a simplified restatement of what the Lord told the prophet Samuel when he was searching for the next King.

“Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

(1 Samuel 16:7)

This truth confronted *the Pharisees* with a personal question. Do you wish to be considered righteous before *men* or before your Father in Heaven? The answer should be “before God”, but the Pharisees were living the first option.

Jesus then reminded *the Pharisees* that *men* are poor judges of what is righteous, good, and true. *For that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.*

What *men* often think is good for them is in reality not good for them. God made us to desire and seek good. But among the consequences of the Fall is a warped perspective regarding what good actually is. The hearts of *men* are so naturally off-based, that the things we *highly* esteem and think are the most important—things like getting whatever we want by controlling and exploiting others—even enjoying the power kick that comes from the control and exploitation—are actually self-destructive. They are the epitome of bad, and the opposite of what God values. God values love and service, and He detests abuse and selfishness. It makes logical sense that when a society or organization serves a common mission together, loving and supporting one another, that life will be fulfilling. But our natural bent is to do the opposite, and become slaves to money, appetites, or other idols (Romans 6:16).

Even as Jesus exposed *the Pharisees'* hypocrisy when *He* confronted them for their scoffing, there was mercy in His rebuke. By pointing out that men are poor judges of what is good according to God's standards, Jesus was showing *the Pharisees* a path to repent. Their opportunity was to stop caring what wicked man thought and start caring about what God thought. If they repented, they would sow and reap life. But if they continued scoffing, they would reap the folly they were sowing, for God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7-8).

We, who also have wicked hearts, have the same opportunity before us. But which will we choose? Will we seek after the *things men highly* esteem or will we trust *God* to give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4)?

Biblical Text

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.