

Luke 16:18

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-16/luke-1618/>

Jesus continues to teach about the goodness of God's law and against the self-justified perversions of it by the scoffing Pharisees. He offers a prime example of their detestable manipulation of the law by pointing out how they exploit a manufactured loophole in the marriage laws of Moses.

This parallel gospel accounts for this teaching are found in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9.

While confronting the Pharisees for their self-righteousness, their love for money, and pointing out the folly of their scoffing at God's infallible laws, Jesus uses their positions on marriage and divorce as examples.

At first glance, the placement of this teaching about divorce amidst a conversation about money and God's law may seem like an unrelated topic, but it was quite relevant as an illustration of the Pharisee's legalistic self-justification approach.

Luke records that Jesus said to the Pharisees: *Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.*

It is possible that Luke's record is a much-condensed summary of what Jesus said. Matthew 19:3-9 is a fuller dialogue of Jesus and the Pharisees disputing divorce. This instance in Luke may be a simplified version of that conversation or it may be a separate conversation altogether. Either way it is worth considering that Jesus said more about *divorce* than what is recorded here by Luke.

This commentary will focus on what Luke records Jesus teaching about *divorce* in the flow of this particular confrontation with the Pharisees. If you wish to know a fuller account of what Jesus taught about *divorce* and marriage, we recommend that you see the commentaries for [Matthew 5:31-32](#); [19:3-9](#); and [19:10-12](#).

The word Jesus used for *divorce* in this verse are forms of "apoluo." It means to "send away." Jesus was teaching that *everyone who sends his wife away and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman who has been sent away from her husband commits adultery.*

In saying this, Jesus appears to be closing a loophole that the Pharisees manufactured and exploited regarding God's Law, which will not fail or be manipulated without God holding people accountable (Luke 16:17).

Moses' commanded in Deuteronomy 24:1-2 that whenever a man sends *his wife* away, he must give her a certificate of *divorce* that makes her eligible to marry another. This command was

given as a protection for women. Women in that era depended on male strength for protection and manpower to raise crops and basic provision for life. Marriage and family provided that protection. If a man simply dismissed and sent *his wife* away, she was helpless and unable to remarry without a certificate of divorce. Even though she was dismissed, she was still legally married to her husband. But if he gave her a certificate of *divorce* when he sent her away, she could demonstrate that she was eligible for marriage.

But men, who are corrupt, exploited even this protection. They would *divorce* their wives, not because their wives were unfaithful to them, but for any reason at all. Among the Pharisees it appeared there was no limit to how many wives they could run through. If a man wanted someone new, he could send his wife away and *divorce* her. Therefore, if a man in ancient Jewish culture wanted a different *wife* (and could not afford two) he could send *his wife* away (apolo— *divorce*) and justify his uncaring behavior as long as he gave her a certificate of *divorce*. (The Greek word for “certificate of *divorce*” is “Apostaseon).

Such actions violated the essence of God’s Law and made a mockery of it. It went so far that the Law itself became a scoffing byword. Jesus pointed this hypocrisy out in the Sermon on the Mount:

“It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’ but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”
(Matthew 5:31-32)

Jesus closed the loophole. Adultery is the only Biblically acceptable grounds for sending your *wife* away and divorcing her.

Jesus stated further that whoever *marries a woman who has been sent away from her husband* without a certificate of divorce *commits adultery*. Given the implication that it was common for the Pharisees to divorce wives like trading in for a new vehicle, Jesus’s statement here would implicate the Pharisees as being guilty of committing adultery. Adultery was forbidden in the seventh of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus’s remark about *divorce* is a natural fit within this conversation with the Pharisees. It shows the grotesque nature of their self-justification. They claim to be scrupulously religious while in actuality they were grossly immoral.

Just prior to Jesus’s remark about divorce, the Pharisees were scoffing at Jesus’s teachings on the Law as they pertained to money (Luke 16:1-14). Jesus rebuked them and reminded them that God’s law is perfect and enduring (Luke 16:17), while the self-justifications of man are detestable (Luke 16:15). By mentioning the marriage and *divorce* loophole that their self-justification manufactured, Jesus was displaying one example of how the Pharisees justified behavior that was detestable in the sight of God.

Next Jesus told them a parable that revealed the shortsightedness of such behavior by showing them that the negative consequences of their sinful lives would lead to great suffering in the next life (Luke 16:19-31).

Biblical Text

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