

Luke 16:14–18: ¹⁴The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed [Jesus]. ¹⁵And [Jesus] said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

¹⁸“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

You Know Where God Stands

INTRODUCTION

In 1995 pop singer Joan Osborne had a hit song called, “What If God Was One of Us.” The lyrics went something like this: What if God was one of us? • Just a slob like one of us • Just a stranger on the bus • Trying to make his way home • Like a holy Rolling Stone • Back up to Heaven all alone • Just trying to make his way home • Nobody callin’ on the phone • ‘cept for the Pope maybe in Rome.

That’s a good question. What if God really was one of us—just a poor slob like the rest of us? What if God was as petty and flawed as we are.

That would mean that God would value what people value, and disvalue what people disvalue. He would love the rich and ignore the poor. He would admire celebrities and look down on nobodies. He would venerate the greedy and despise the honest worker. He would reward the strong and punish the weak. He would exalt vice and licentiousness and condemn virtue. He would praise sexual promiscuity, and mock sexual chastity. And He would put money ahead of people.

If God valued what human beings value, would He be much of a God?

Furthermore, what if God was fickle and indecisive like human beings? What if God didn't have rules, or if He had rules, He wouldn't care if you followed them or not? Would you follow a God like that? Could you count on a God like that—a God that didn't really have much integrity?

I think the biggest gripe we have against politicians is that they so quickly surrender their integrity and values to appeal to special interests. But those who think that God—and His Church by extension—should change with the times for the same reason—to appeal to our special interests, are asking God to behave like a politician. If God so easily changed His will and His ways, that would make God an untrustworthy and unreliable being—and that would mean that God really isn't God—just a poor slob like the rest of us.

But God is God. He doesn't change, nor does His character, nor does His will. And since God's Law is a product of His Will and Character, His Law doesn't change, either!

That's pretty much what Jesus told the Pharisees at the end of our Gospel reading today:

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GOD'S LAW DOESN'T CHANGE, BECAUSE GOD DOESN'T CHANGE, AND THAT'S GOOD NEWS BECAUSE YOU WILL ALWAYS KNOW WHAT GOD EXALTS, AND WHAT HE CONDEMNS—YOU WILL ALWAYS KNOW WHERE GOD STANDS.

I. Sinners oppose God's will.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that sinners oppose God's will. That's what sin is—rebellious against God's revealed will. That rebellion comes out in the fact that we don't value what God values.

In our Old Testament reading, the Israelites were trampling on the needy and bringing the poor of the land to an end. They were cheating their customers with deceitful scales, and selling the chaff instead of the wheat. And God was not happy, because God values integrity and loving your neighbor, especially your neighbor in need.

And the Pharisees in our Gospel reading had made wealth and privilege a sign of God's favor, so of course that's what they taught the people: "We are wealthy and privileged because God favors us over you." The Pharisees didn't value women or marriage, either. They made divorce something quite easy for Jewish men to attain. For example, a Jewish man could justify divorcing his wife if she burned his supper.

We do the same thing today. We flock to self-absorbed celebrities, we pay millions of dollars and give our Sundays to ego-driven athletes, and we vote for politicians who deplore the very people they lead—all because of what we believe they will give us. We're so concerned about making money that we believe we can never have enough—so our neighbor in need suffers. And marriage has become an institution of men to be broken at will—and not an institution of God meant to be held in the highest esteem.

And to top it off, we want God to bend His will to ours, so that what is exalted among men is also exalted in the sight of God.

II. Jesus fulfills God's will.

So, what if God was a poor slob like one of us? Greedy, untrustworthy, focused on self and not on others. What if Jesus was that kind of person—what if Jesus valued what we value? He would have been born to a queen, not to a poor virgin; laid to rest in a royal crib, not in a smelly manger, raised in a palace surrounded by servants and given the finest clothing and food. And He certainly wouldn't have suffered a humiliating death on a cross, because rather than being obedient to God, He would have worked to save His own skin.

If Jesus valued what we value, where would that leave us sinners? On the short end of the stick, as they say.

But the thing is, Jesus did become one of us. But he wasn't a poor slob, worried about his own skin, just trying to make his way home. Jesus willingly left the glory and majesty of heaven to be one of us—to walk this earth and live this life. But Jesus suffered and died because He didn't exalt what we exalt. He didn't value money and power. He didn't suck up to celebrity or pursue comfort and security. He didn't value the opinion of human beings, but instead valued the Word of God.

Jesus fulfilled God's will by living the life of perfect love that God demands.

III. You fulfill God's will in Christ.

God's will for human beings doesn't change with the times because God doesn't change with the times—you always know where God stands. As transgressors of God's Law, we're all poor slobs—beggars in God's sight, because the Law stands against us. But in the Gospel, you know that God thinks more of you than a slob or a beggar or a stranger on the bus.

The Gospel shows you that Jesus is the enfleshment of what God values: He came for the poor in spirit, those with sick and broken bodies—the castaways and the throwaways of society. Jesus came not to be like sinners, but to call sinners to repentance. And because God loves the

world, Jesus came for all of us—He came to be the God-Man mediator between God and man, “for God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”—not just the important people.

The Gospel shows you that in becoming a human being, Christ valued humanity. But the Gospel does more than show you your Savior and forgive your sins. Through the Gospel, you receive the Holy Spirit, and with the Holy Spirit, you receive a whole different way of thinking. Paul writes of this 1st Corinthians (2:10–12): “¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”

Being counter-cultural used to be the thing. Just think hippies and flower children. But today, being counter-cultural will find you on the receiving end of society’s scorn and disdain. But from the very beginning Christians—since they had the mind of Christ—were counter-cultural. That’s because they no longer valued what a fallen world valued—they valued what God values, for they knew the truth and had been set free from the world’s blindness to and rebellion against God’s will.

They valued life, so they rescued babies from infanticide. They valued the poor, so they practiced charity. They valued the sick, so they built clinics and hospitals. They valued women, so in Christian marriages, husbands and wives were equal partners—it wasn’t that way in the rest of the world. I want you to realize that that is something that is uniquely Christian. Look at all the religions and cultures of the world and show me one religion or culture—that hasn’t been influenced by the Christian faith—where women are treated as equals, and not as property or

second class citizens.

By God's grace and Christ's redemption and the Holy Spirit's power, you exalt what God exalts—especially His Word—and that's what sets Christians apart from the world. And even though each of us still values what the world values because we're sinners, we hate the sin that's in us just as much as we hate the sin in the world—and rejoice that God is patient and forgiving toward our weaknesses and sins.

But still, because we don't exalt what the world exalts, we're hated by the world. And you know what I say, "It's good to be hated by the world, because if you're hated by the world, you know where you stand with God!"

Conclusion

In the Small Catechism's list of God's attributes, like good, holy, perfect, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and so on, there is also immutable. Immutable means that God does not change. In the book of Malachi, the Lord says, "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). God is remembering His promise to redeem His people, even though they stubbornly refuse to turn from their evil ways and turn to Him. Despite their unfaithfulness, God is faithful.

Because God doesn't change—whether you agree with God or not—You know where He stands on one the things that He values, such as His Commandments.

But you also know where God stands on your salvation. God will never change His mind about how He saves you from sin, death and the devil. That's because not only does God not change, God values the work of His Son—His life, death and resurrection. And because God values the work of His Son, He isn't going to change His mind about how you are saved. Just as the Law will never pass away, so the grace of God that comes to you through your faith in Jesus

Christ will also never change. As forgiven believers you will always know that you stand in God's good graces!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.