**Two Laws; One Master**

Based on [Luke 16:1-15](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk16.1-15)

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Jesus died on the cross, suffering for the sin of the whole world and paying the ransom to release you from bondage to sin, death and the devil. On the cross, Jesus said “It is finished.” And it ***is*** finished. You who believe are righteous; that means you are “right” with God *right now*. You *are* right with God, *but* you are not in heaven yet. Your righteousness is finished; but your race is not. You remain in this sinful world, and you still have worldly affairs to manage.

For this reason, Jesus teaches his disciples a great deal about how they are to live in a sinful world. They will, for instance, have money, “unrighteous wealth”. And so today, he teaches them how they are to regard money and what they are to do with it. In Luke 14, Jesus had said, “**any one of you who does not *renounce all that he has* cannot be my disciple**.” In today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches what “renouncing your possessions” means. It doesn’t mean to simply to get rid of them, but rather to *use all your possessions in the service of one master*, the Lord your God.

//Jesus tells a story about a manager who was wasteful with his master’s possessions. And when his master hears about it, he fires him. Soon to be jobless, he considers what he—(a man fired for incompetence)--will likely end up doing for a living. He figures he’s destined for heavy labor or begging, and he considers himself unfit for these things. So he devises a plan. Still having his master’s ledger, he goes to his clients and cancels a portion of their debts. He does this for two reasons, (1) to put his master in a bind and at the same time (2) to make friends who might hire him later. By forgiving their debt he gains their friendship, while at the same time ensuring the master cannot take action against him without appearing stingy, uncharitable, harming his business and his reputation.

Jesus says that his disciples should imitate this manager…not his dishonesty, but his *shrewdness*. And his shrewdness is not in that he’s particularly brilliant and has a large IQ. Jesus attributes the manager’s shrewdness to the fact that he only serves one master. Jesus says at the end of the story, “**No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and *Money***.”

//You see, the manager once had two masters and he could not serve both. It made him a bad bookkeeper for one of them because he was devoted to the other. So that master fired him; leaving him to serve only Money. And serving only one master made his thinking clear, decisive, and astute...in a word it made him shrewd. He was immediately willing to betray his old master and use his possessions in service to his new one.

Brothers, that’s true worship--to put all you have in service to one thing. Jesus is not commending the manager for what he worshipped…money, but for the *quality* of his worship. He doesn’t chase after other gods, he is devoted to serving only one master. Even though his master is “filthy lucre;” he serves that master with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind, and all his strength. His dedication is admirable; his worship is absolute, and it’s what makes him shrewd in dealing with the world.

As believers in the one true God, that’s should be the quality of our worship as well. So Jesus says, “It is written: ‘*Worship* the Lord your God and *serve* him only.” Jesus teaches that his disciples should be just as willing as the manager to sacrifice everything they have in service to their master, that is, to God. But this is not done through dishonesty; it’s just the opposite. The way you worship the true God is by loving him and keeping his commandments no matter what. Even if you end up having to dig or to beg, it is better to be a righteous man who digs or begs, than a dishonestly wealthy sinner. To recognize to worship God only and put everything in the world in service to him and his law…that would make shrewd disciples in dealing with the world and worthy to trust us with eternal treasures. Jesus tells his disciples elsewhere, “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be ***shrewd*** as serpents, and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

You are Jesus disciples, but he acknowledges that you have trouble serving your one master. He says, “**The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light**.” Jesus is not being judgmental here, he’s just stating a fact that you as his disciple are torn. Your true master ***is*** in heaven; but the world you live in only knows and serves another master; *and it’s constantly tempts you to do the same*. And that temptation is a struggle, because it speaks to your sinful nature. In Romans Chapter 7(:21-25), Scripture recognizes that y**ou have two laws at work inside of you and they are at war with one another.**  St. Paul identifies (1) the *law of his mind*, (which is the law of God, which he loves and truly delights in and wants to obey), and (2) a different law that dwells in his members, that is *the law of sin*. The law of God which the renewed mind serves, and the law of sin which the body serves. Paul had them both inside of him and you do too. And what it means is that you are at the same time a sinner and a saint, struggling to serve two opposing masters and obey their two opposing laws. //

As a redeemed child of god, you have two masters inside of you, the flesh and the Spirit, and you cannot serve both. You will end up loving one and despising the other. Since the Holy Spirit was given to you when you were baptized into His Name, He has changed your master from the flesh and sin’s law to the Spirit and His Law, and he is the true master you love and are devoted to. Nevertheless, the *old law of sin* still sticks to your body and you can’t get rid of it. The *Law of God* serves God; the *Law of Sin* serves the flesh. And this Law of Sin is written on your members. Adam’s sin is grafted into your nature. You despise it, but can’t get rid of it in this life. It’s a terminal disease and that means that *your body has to die before the law of sin will go away.*

But your body has not died, and so you continue to live in this world of temptation and struggle against the flesh. And Scripture tells us that we take an active part in this struggle by exercising self-control. St. Paul says, “**Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified**” (1 Cor 9:25-27). Understand, Paul is not talking about physical exercise here, though that is good for you too. **He’s talking about how the Christian should be engaged in spiritual exercises involving voluntary self-denial; so that you may be practiced to exercise self-restraint and self-control when temptations do come. And they will come so long as this world and its prince continue to prowl around us. So exercise, be sober-minded and ready for battle.** And if you worry about your ability remember, this self-control does not come from your nature, but is in fact a fruit that the Holy Spirit promises to produce in you (Galatians 5:23).

In preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumes his disciples will be about three such spiritual exercises (Matthew 6). He teaches them how to “fast”,--that, is deny yourself food or some other thing you desire. Fasting is not done to lose weight and stay healthy, but to ***renounce your appetites*** and keep them in check. He teaches them how to “pray”—to speak their requests and concerns to God. Prayer is done not because God needs to be informed of your needs before he can help you, but in order to ***renounce your will*** to serve his will. As Jesus prayed to his Father, “**Not my will but yours be done**” (Luke 22:42). And finally, Jesus teaches how to give alms; that is to give money to those in need. This is not done to solve the problem of poverty or so others can witness your generosity, but so you’re heavenly Father will see you ***renouncing your possessions*** and using them in service to Him, and he will reward you.

And almsgiving speaks to today’s teaching. In describing from the story how his disciples are to model the manager’s shrewdness, he says, “**make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you in eternal dwellings.”** Jesus says famously in the beatitudes… “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And if the kingdom of heaven is truly theirs; they have authority to receive you in eternal places. So use your money to make friends with the poor. But the poor in spirit are not those without money; but those without a home in this world, who are strangers here, who, like the son of man have no place to rest their head. You give alms to the poor when you give to anyone in need whose real treasure is in heaven, because they are struggling against the flesh in this world just like you are, and brothers need to deny themselves and help one another…to “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Exercises of self-denial, are truly “spiritual exercises” for the Christian, because they can only be done by those who have the Holy Spirit. And these exercises are the minds way of reminding the body of flesh that *its master is not your master*; its law is not your law. You cannot get rid of your flesh; but you don’t have to obey it, and you can bridle it with exercises of the Spirit who is in you, to tame your fleshly passions until Christ comes again to put your body to death, and raise it to incorruptible life. Jesus says, “**anyone who would come after me must deny himself and follow me**.” There’s no better way to show your body who your real master is, than by denying its commands and its urges in the name of your true Lord and master Jesus Christ.

Self-denial makes no sense to the godless, “the sons of this world.” Rather they preach self-indulgence instead. And that is why they are much better worshippers than we are. They don’t serve two masters, only one: money, greed, gluttony, lust, envy--many names but one and the same god. St. Paul says, “**Their god is their belly and they glory in their shame**” (Philippians 3:19).

In July, the City of Lethbridge sponsored a “pride parade” to celebrate the LGBTQ “Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer” community. Having a parade about sexual intercourse is immodest enough. But a City sponsored event inviting people to march in open support of what mankind has always known to be sexual perversion…they without a doubt “glory in their shame.” Their god is their belly, they have no struggle against sin because it is their master. They indulge it celebrate it and parade it in public. Sin is their *only* master and they serve him shamelessly with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

The shameless are out taking glory in their shame, and it seems unfair. Not that you are jealous to join them, but while they celebrate their sin and sleep soundly at night--**you struggle against sin and it causes you stress and anxiety that are spared the shameless**. But they aren’t the fortunate ones. They have seared consciences…nerve damage. **They cannot sense the danger of their sin or feel the guilt of their wicked behavior. And so in their blindness they heap more and more judgment upon themselves, never seeking forgiveness because they never know anything’s wrong.** God gave you a conscience so that you can feel the pain and guilt of your sin, and your conscience would be deadened too were it not for the Holy Spirit, who keeps your conscience sensitive to sin so you flee from it and seek refuge in Him and that is a gift.

You hate you’re sin, and hide it in shame and seek to do something about it. **And thanks be to God there is medicine. In your pain of conscience You go to the body and blood of Christ where he promises to forgive sins; you hear his word and believe it, because you know his words are truth and life.** And while the godless adorn themselves with shameless pride, you adorn yourself with modesty and self-control, with good works that profess godliness and give evidence your saving faith. And this faith is how god counts you worthy to handle true riches, entrusts you a steward of his mysteries in Christ until they are revealed to all eyes in glory in the day of the Lord.