

## Justifying Ourselves Before Men

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The Kingdom of God is filled with men and women who were once self-justifiers. People are always seeking to vindicate themselves before God and others. And, apart from Christ, how you talk, what you wear, what you drive, where you travel and what you fight for are all ways to show other people how great you really are.



For me, the temptation of self-justification still exists, and not just from time to time, but every single day. Financial gain can easily turn to thoughts of my own greatness, problems morph into opportunities to assert my superior wherewithal, and repented-of sins become stepping-stones to an aura of authenticity in the eyes of those who hear my confessions.

And because this sin has always been problematic for humanity, it is no surprise we find Jesus rebuking it after finishing his teaching about how to serve God with money in Luke 16. As Jesus ends, we find out that the Pharisees were predictably miffed at this final statement:

*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. v.13*

Money (Gk. mammon) is more than cash. It can be understood as wealth and possessions in general. The way the Pharisees respond to this assault upon their pockets reveals their hearts, and that Jesus had been poking around in the right place.

*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. v.14*

Jesus responds to this defensive blitz, as He often does, by explaining to the Pharisees what they are really like.

*And he 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. v.15*

What the Pharisees don't get is that they have bought in to the value-system of the world they live in. This is why Jesus speaks about some activity being "exalted among men." In the Pharisees' world, it seems that loving money was a good and even an exalted way of life. Loving mammon would surely gain you more of it, and getting more of it might just usher you into more influence and greater ease.

A Pharisee may have even said, "Look at what we can do for God with all of this stuff!" To which people would respond, "Those guys really know what they are doing."

Are we ever like this, buying in to the philosophies and values all around us, positioning ourselves in such a way that we appear wise before others?

What Jesus shows us is this: There is a way to be exalted in the world, to find outward happiness and success, to receive congratulation and award, and to all the while be detestable to God. And notice that Jesus, at least here, is not talking about sexual perversion, but the love of wealth—something that is upheld in our world. This means that we too may find ourselves completely justified before our coworkers and peers, because of our attitude toward mammon, and end up displeasing God.

In the same way that a prairie dog is not a dog, but a rodent—things are not always what they seem to be.

The outward activities and desires, whereby men may justify themselves before other men, do not impress God. Rather, he is looking at hearts to see whether they are set on Him or set on mammon.

So raise your gaze to Christ—considering His approval more important than the false justification of wrong-headed people.