

# Faithful Stewardship in Earthly Things: The Eighth Commandment, Part II. Luke 16

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- I. As I said last week, there are many ways to commit theft, to be dishonest. Not only may goods be stolen, but reputations, and spiritual qualities. This week I would like to look at this chapter of the scripture to draw some conclusions about what good sense it makes before God to be good stewards of God's possessions. The premise is this: this world's goods belong to God, and we are called to use them in a proper and godly way.
  - A. Unjust steward. In what ways was he unjust: This parable is for those who have been bad managers of the world's goods. This is true of us all, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
    1. He had wasted his lord's goods. Where there is such mismanagement, there is probably embezzlement. The charges were made, the master evidently was convinced, and informed his steward that he must give an account, and could no longer be steward. He was given a reasonable time in order to get his accounts in order, which was probably no small task. This steward was a freeman, who acted as the business manager, and executive officer who was in charge of all his master's goods, and whose agreements were binding. This was a common office in the ancient world.
    2. His character:
      - a. He was lazy: I cannot dig. "I am too lazy for such physical labor. I am used to a softer life."
      - b. He was proud: "I cannot beg" means I am of a station and position of society, that would keep me from begging. I am above that.
      - c. He was resourceful. He was clever enough to take advantage of things that he knew; so that he would be secure. He also had the authority for the present to put his plan into effect.
    3. Historical note. It was against the law of Moses for Jews to charge interest on loans. To avoid the law, it was common for notes to be executed in certain commodities. The scribes reasoned that interest on money loans was for the purpose of protecting the poor. Hence, mutually profitable transactions were not forbidden, and if a person had even a little oil or wheat, he could not be considered destitute. So usurious notes were executed in terms of commodities, with the interest added into the note itself, making it impossible to determine the original principle. For example, if the loan was for the value of 80 measures of wheat, interest of 20 measures or 25% would be added to the note, making a total of 100

measures. In this way, they made void the clear teachings of scripture, and were still able to indulge their covetousness.

4. This was often done by stewards, without their master's specific knowledge. That is called deniability, which is still very common today. The machine runs, but everyone denies any knowledge of the details. It is significant that when, the Pharisees derided him, because they were covetous Christ finished this parable.
  - a. The steward, then, simply went to each of the debtors, and removed the interest. Oil could be easily adulterated, and so interest as much as 100% was often charged. In this way, the illegal interest was removed; the original notes destroyed; the new ones probably backdated, and there was nothing the master could do; his hands were bound. If he protested, he was put in the position of violating the law of Moses. Scoundrels are very good at using the law to corrupt the intent of the law in order to gain immorally.
  - b. He chose the political way: He commended the steward, probably with pious phrases about loving the law of God. So it was the kind of situation that the world loves: a win, win. The master got rid of a crooked steward; he gained a public relations victory; the steward gained job security after being released (I wonder how many deals are cut like this by government officials with large companies, so that they have job security after they leave government "service."); the debtors avoided interest payments: (These were no small debts: 100 measures of wheat is about 1000 bushels: the good yield of 100 acres of land; 100 measures of oil is between 800 and 900 gallons; the yield of about 150 olive trees. Considerable amounts of money were involved here.)
  - c. Sadly, things like this are much too common in the business and political world. This is the reason the founders of our country did not want too cozy a relationship between business and government, for when money joins with power the opportunities for abuse are greatly magnified. Government must be limited and greatly dispersed in order to limit the opportunities for abuse. Government is necessary because men are sinners. Government must be limited because men are sinners. Keep those two ideas in mind, and you will have political balance.
5. So, it was a win, win situation. What the rich man lost in wealth, he gained in reputation; he had plenty of money so he was happy. A very nice cozy situation; all that suffered was the law of God, and perhaps the poor of the land. You can be sure that the steward did not call those who had contracted for small amounts and suffered badly from the usury; no, these people couldn't help the steward. Only God hears the cries of such people.

## II. The application:

- A. NOT; the dishonesty; the lawlessness; the conniving and scheming: But the children of this world make better use of this world than do the children of the light. That's the lesson: make better use of the world. The children of this world are wise only in their generation, but all things are of God, and just as we can

learn from the lilies, and the foxes, and the birds of the air; so can we learn from the children of this world. THIS is the lesson: LESSON: Make the best use of the opportunities you have!!

B. Specifics:

1. We are all stewards. The air we breathe, etc. vs. 12: he turns it around. If you are not faithful in another's i.e. God's. You do not have anything yet which is your own. Remember the wicked and slothful servant, who hid his lord's talent?
  - a. One man was given five talents [which was a great deal of wealth], another was given two, another one. A talent was a good deal of money.
  - b. They were told to do business—use the money wisely, and give an account someday
  - c. The two doubled their talents and gave good account and were commended for their industry. vs. 23 "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.
  - d. The third said that he hid his in a napkin. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.
  - e. His lord answered and said unto him, "Thou wicked and slothful servant...."
2. Take inventory: what do you have. What do you despise: do you only have five loaves and two fish? What has God given you? What are you responsible for? None of us have used our gifts as well as we should have: our bodies; our minds; our thoughts. We have given them over to sin and folly.
  - a. We have misused them---against the purpose for which they were given.
  - b. We have been derelict—lazy in their use.
  - c. We have pretended they were our own, as if we had not accounts to give to God.
3. We will fail: business term: "cease" bankrupt? Your bankruptcy is coming: and so is mine. The end of the stewardship of another's. Will you have any of your own then? Do you have at least as much sense as this unjust steward, to look ahead and plan?
4. Faithful in least: He was not faithful; but he took advantage of his opportunity. He used the law to his advantage, even though he had no heart for it; What are you do-ing. If the righteous scarcely be saved; where shall the ungodly and sinner appear, James tells us.
5. Mammon of unrighteousness: "Money" or figuratively: this world's goods. Un-righteous: very often unrighteous in its gain; in its employment; in its enjoyment. Very much sin associated with money. Very great evil comes

upon the world by the misuse of money. But Jesus is saying that if we were as clever as this unjust steward, we can turn the things of this world to our advantage. They do not have to be a snare, they do not have to be a cause of temptation.

6. What can we do?
  - a. See them for what they are: temporary; your power over them is only for a time. They do not belong to you; you have no eternal title to them; the time of your stewardship is limited.
  - b. Repent you misuse of them. Change your ways.
  - c. Honor the law that you have disregarded. If this steward can do it dishonestly for his own advantage, certainly we can do it with integrity, for the glory of God. Remember Zachaeus who restored four-fold. What is on your conscience that you have to make right? This steward prepared for the day when he would have no job; are you prepared for the day when you must stand before God. Have you planned for that day? If you have not been faithful now, how do you expect God to bless you then? Wise men prepare for the future. "A fool and his money are soon parted." Illus. Drunks and firefighting in Oregon. They were present-oriented men, who lived present-oriented lives: that is why they were drunks. **THINK AHEAD IS THE MESSAGE OF THE LORD.**
  - d. Jesus does not teach us to despise this world, but to use it for the world to come. Lay up treasures in heaven; work in this world for the world to come. You do not prepare for the next world by despising this one, but by using it for the glory of God. Not loving it; not serving it; not hanging on to it for dear life; but by using it, using your talents; using your goods; using your opportunities; knowing that the world passes away, and the lusts thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever.
  - e. Remember the mercy and the grace of God. God is not without resources. He does not require stewardship of us because the goods themselves are of value and He will be impoverished. **NO NO NO.** There are plenty of goods. It is for your benefit that He requires good stewardship, to honor and glorify Him.
    - (1). Remember the loaves and the fishes—he can multiply resources.
    - (2). Remember the promises of God. Joel 2: 26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. Remember Job, who was given much more than he had before.
  - f. Finally: Look at Luke 6:37-38. A generosity of mind and spirit is commended here.

37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.

For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

The issue here is not even primarily earthly goods, although they are used as an illustration of the kind of mindset that we are to have. We are to treat others the way that we want God to treat us. We want Him to be generous to us, to be pleased with our work, to reward us abundantly, to preserve our reputation before men.

Let us get started by treating others that way.

May God bless you.