

THE DISHONEST MANAGER

Luke 16:1–7 Jesus also said to his followers, "Once there was a rich man who had a manager to take care of his business. This manager was accused of cheating him. ²So he called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of what you have done with my money, because you can't be my manager any longer.' ³The manager thought to himself, 'What will I do since my master is taking my job away from me? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job people will welcome me into their homes.' ⁵So the manager called in everyone who owed the master any money. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe?' ⁶He answered, 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil.' The manager said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write four hundred gallons.' ⁷Then the manager asked another one, 'How much do you owe?' He answered, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' Then the manager said to him, 'Take your bill and write eight hundred bushels.'" [EXB]

To my surprise, Jesus continued the parable by relating that this manager not only was not punished for such blatant chicanery; rather was praised by his master:

Luke 16:8a "So, the master praised the dishonest manager for being clever." [EXB]

Jesus then offered this general observation:

Luke 16:8b Yes, worldly people are more clever with their own kind than spiritual people are. [EXB]

and concluded the parable with this advice for His followers:

Luke 16:9 I tell you, make friends for yourselves using worldly riches so that when those riches are gone, you will be welcomed in those homes that continue forever." [EXB]

Am I to understand that Jesus wishes me to be dishonest in order to be praised and to have a home forever?

No.

Rather, I may first recognize that Jesus often used shocking sayings so that the listeners understood that He was establishing an entirely New Covenant and a New Kingdom, as in His frequent refrain:

Matthew 5:21a, 22a "You have heard that it was said to those of old ^{22a}But I say to you" [NKJV]

For example, shortly following the parable about the dishonest manager, Jesus taught the famous parable of the widow and the unjust judge:

Luke 18:2–8a "There was a judge in a certain town who didn't fear God or respect man. ³And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or respect man, ⁵yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.'" ⁶Then the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷Will not God grant justice to His elect who cry out to Him day and night? Will He delay to help them? ^{8a}I tell you that He will swiftly grant them justice." [HCSB]

Why such a comparison between God and the unjust judge? Is Jesus telling me that God is unlikely to be any worse than him?

Not at all: rather, Jesus is telling me that any doubt I may have about God (*i.e.*, doubt that He "will grant justice to His elect who cry out to Him day and night) shows I regard God to be worse than the unjust judge.

Superficially, it may appear that the comparison is about God, but — spiritually — it is about me and my trust in God, as Jesus explained in His immediate conclusion of the parable:

Luke 18:8b "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find that faith on earth?" [HCSB]

Because this was a parable on:

Luke 18:1b the need for them to pray always and not become discouraged. [HCSB]

So then, what am I to understand from the dishonest manager, now that the Lord has awakened my attention?

I may remember that:

John 4:24 "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." [KJV]

And that:

John 6:63b "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit." [KJV]

Thus what the Lord says is always precisely true in the spirit, but sometimes confusing or even not understandable at all in the flesh:

John 6:54 "Those who eat my body and drink my blood have eternal life. I will raise them up on the last day." [ERV]

We know that Jesus was not teaching cannibalism; nevertheless,

John 6:66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. [NKJV]

Those many were deceived by a carnal misinterpretation and did indeed go away from Him, but not the twelve, because — as the Apostle Peter stated:

John 6:69 "we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." [KJV]

Hence, the words of the parable of the *dishonest manager* are also spirit and Jesus does not recommend I steal, rather reminds me that all (physical possessions and spiritual gifts) I have is not my own, since:

1 Timothy 6:7 we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. [KJV]

It is not my own, for it all belongs to the Lord, Who gave it to me to use for His purposes and to give to others.

Then, in obedience, I may ask myself: "Am I a *dishonest manager* of what the Lord has given me?"

Am I using my spiritual gifts to:

Colossians 1:10 walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [ESV]

Am I using my worldly gifts? As in:

Luke 12:33 "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys." [NASB]

If not so, I may begin by giving to others what the Lord has given me both spiritually and materially, according to His teaching and thus gain treasures in heaven, as well as an eternal house

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [NKJV]

as I have seen Jesus teach at the beginning, with the parable of the *dishonest manager*:

Luke 16:9 I tell you, make friends for yourselves using worldly riches so that when those riches are gone, you will be welcomed in those homes that continue forever." [EXB]

In conclusion, I may aim to be an *honest manager* by:

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. [NRSV]