

# God and Mammon

The gospel of Luke was written to the Greeks, the culture that came to form the foundation of Western Civilization. The Parable of the Unjust Steward is deliberately excluded to only this gospel. This Parable easily transcends the ancient world and punches right into our modern corporate world. Let us start with Jesus' complete telling of this Parable:

He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

"Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'

"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how

much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." (Luke 16:1-15)

Before I break this down, there are two important introductory points that must be made.

First, it must be noted that Jesus addressed this to His *disciples*. This Parable is addressed to committed believers.

Second, I want to reiterate what I wrote in my Essentials teaching, [Satan's Systems](#), regarding the use of the terms "mammon" and "money." The better English versions of the Bible generally translate the Greek *mamōnas* in Luke 16:13 as "mammon" or "money." I prefer to use the term "money" when referring to it practically, including its general "pull" on the daily lives of people, and "mammon" when referring to the influence of the broader spiritual system. As we travel through the context of this parable, we will see that mammon is the more appropriate term here.

The steward did not care about sin or his ethical conduct. Upon being accused of wrongdoing, he focused right in on: "my master is taking the stewardship away from me." (We must assume the accusation was valid since Jesus later describes him as "unjust"). The cursory translation of his thought process is: "I'm going to lose my access to money," however, there is more going on here that is easily overlooked.

When the steward said to himself: "I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." He revealed another reason why he served the flow of money: *social status and its related benefits*. This steward is the kind of person who will do *anything*—their conscience has no boundaries—to ensure that they remain in the *ecosystem of mammon*.

With this detailed contextual examination, we can see how the steward served money but was also lured by the broader influence of its ecosystem. Money is an affiliate of mammon.

The steward's concern over his loss of social status, points towards the superficial nature of the individuals in this ecosystem. Solomon told us:

"The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, But the rich has many friends." (Proverbs 14:20)

and

"Wealth makes many friends, But the poor is separated from his friend." (Proverbs 19:4)

and

"All the brothers of the poor hate him; How much more do his friends go far from him! He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him." (Proverbs 19:7)

The steward then devised a plan to curry favor with his master's customers—perhaps to secure favors for a new job. Business ethics did not matter so he used his master's money to develop mutually beneficial relationships. This was definitely a shrewd idea that allowed him to maintain his position in the ecosystem of mammon where *social status is on par with money*. Relationships and social status can lead to economic opportunities. This is somewhat echoed by the master *commending* the steward for *his shrewdness*. The master recognized that shrewdness in mutually beneficial relationships with no regard for any moral principles is the key to unrighteous mammon. This is further

revealed by the fact that he didn't seem to be upset over the theft, although he did fire him which is a sound business decision.

At this point in our dissection of this parable we have now uncovered the two key facets of mammon:

- Moral principles do not matter. They can be leveraged for "business" decisions if they go against one's self-interest but they really do not matter.
- People love and trust in money but they serve mammon. The shrewd understand that relationships are the real currency of the ecosystem of mammon. Shrewd dealing in mutually beneficial relationships is critical.

Now the parable shifts gears—more like dimensions—as Jesus takes us into the opposite universe of the kingdom of God with the declaration, "And I say to you ..."

Jesus instructs His disciples to use this mammon system—we must operate in it—to develop mutually beneficial relationships for God. Satan's workers use the visible church to deceive believers into the system of mammon, why shouldn't true disciples use mammon to lead the lost to the Lord Jesus? The phrase, "when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home," is a generalization on eternity

implying that people we lead to God through these relationships may end up welcoming us into heaven.

Jesus then goes on to give us the key to doing this: remain faithful to God in the midst of a system where everyone else is faithful to money. He declared, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much."

Translation: you are either morally faithful with money or not (unfaithful). You are either morally faithful in your professional life—to your employer and/or customers—or not. *There is no grey area.* No one lost in the system of mammon is going to respond to your gospel if you are morally unfaithful with money in your professional relationships. Your gospel will have no light.

Jesus made it abundantly clear:

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

No grey area means that we are dealing with either darkness or light in the soul of the individual. Previously, Jesus had taught:

"No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light." (Luke 11:33-36)

Jesus noted that "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light." Why are the sons of light less shrewd than the sons of this world? They are more focused on money or even religiously on the negative pull of money rather than on the practical, apathetic use of it to forge relationships that are pathways to Christ.

If a believer's faith is so weak that he easily lusts after or even fears inanimate money, then God will not entrust to him the true riches—the souls of men. The ecosystem of serving God is one of faithful disciples penetrating their light into the souls of the lost in the ecosystem of mammon. Relationships are essential. Souls are the focus of the will of God and the currency of His kingdom plan.

I will finish with a table that outlines the dichotomies found in this



parable:

<b>Rich Man / Master</b>	<b>Lord Jesus</b>
Steward ("unrighteous; sons of this world")	Disciples ("righteous; sons of light")
faithful service of Mammon	faithful service of God
Mutually beneficial relationships based on money	Mutually beneficial relationships based on "true riches"