

LUKE
Chapter 16:1-9, "The Unjust Steward"

Technical Notes of Matthew Poole

(1) And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. (2) And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. (3) Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. (4) I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. (5) So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? (6) And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. (7) Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. (8) And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Hierom of old thought this parable was very obscure; and Julian and other apostates, together with some of the heathen philosophers, took occasion from it to reproach the doctrine of Christ, as teaching and commanding acts of unrighteousness. But there will appear no such difficulty in it, nor cause of reproach to Christ and his doctrine from it, if we consider what I have before hinted, that it is no more necessary to a parable that all the actions in it supposed be just and honest, than that all the parts of it be true in matter of fact, whether past or possible to be; for a parable is not designed to inform us in a matter of fact, but to describe to us our duty, under a fictitious representation: nor doth every part of a parable point at some correspondent duty to be done by us; but the main scope for which it is brought is principally to be attended to by us, and other pieces of duty which may be hinted to us, are to be judged of an proved not from the parable, but from other texts of holy writ where they are inculcated.

The main things in which our Saviour seemeth desirous by this parable to instruct us, are, 1. That we are but stewards of the good things God lends us, and must give an account to our Master of them. 2. That being no more than stewards intrusted with some of our Master's goods for a time, it is our highest prudence, while we have them in our trust, to make such a use of them as may be for our advantage when we give up our account. Thus we shall hear our Lord in the following verses expounding his own meaning.

To this purpose he supposed a rich man to have a steward, and to have received some accusation against him, as if he embezzled his master's goods committed to his trust. Upon which he calleth him to account, and tells him that he should be his steward no longer. He supposeth this steward to be one who had no other means of livelihood and subsistence than what his place afforded him, a man not used to labour, and too proud to beg. At length he fixed his resolution, to send for his master's debtors, and to abate their obligations, making them debtors to his master for much less than indeed they were; by this means he probably hoped, that when he was turned off from his master he should be received by them. He supposeth his master to have heard of it, and to have commended, not for his honesty, but for his wit in providing for the time to come. What was knavery in this steward, is honest enough in those who are the stewards of our heavenly Lord's goods, suppose riches, honours, parts, health, life, or any outward accommodation, viz. to use our Lord's goods for the best profit and advantage to ourselves, during such time as we are intrusted with them. For though an earthly lord and his steward have particular divided interests, and he that maketh use of his lord's goods for his own best advantage cannot at the same time make use of them for the best advantage of his master, yet the case is different betwixt our heavenly Lord and us. It hath pleased God so to twist the interest of his glory with our

highest good, that no man can better use his Master's goods for the advantage of his glory, than he who best useth them for the highest good, profit, and advantage to himself; nor doth any man better use them for his own interest, than he who best useth them for God's glory. So as here the parable halteth, by reason of the disparity betwixt the things that are compared. And though the unjust steward could not be commended for the honesty, but only for the policy, of his action, yet we who are stewards of the gifts of God, in doing the like, that is, making use of our Master's goods for our own best profit and advantage, may act not only wisely, but also honestly; and indeed Christ in this parable blameth men for not doing so: *The children of this world* (saith he) *are wiser in their generation than the children of light*. By *the children of this world*, he meaneth such as this steward was, men who regard not eternity or the concerns of their immortal souls, but only regard the things of this life, what they shall eat, or drink, or put on. By *the children of light*, he meaneth such as live under the light of the gospel, and receive the common illumination of the gospel; though if we yet understand it more strictly, of those who are *translated out of darkness into marvellous light*, it is too true, they are not so wise, and politic, and industrious for heaven, as worldly men are to obtain their ends in getting the world. He saith, *the men of this world are wiser in their generation*, that is, in their kind, as to those things about which they exercise their wit and policy, than the children of God.

(9) And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

That by *mammon* here is meant riches is universally agreed We have the word in the New Testament four times, thrice in this chapter, once Matt. 6:24. It is called *the mammon of unrighteousness*, by a Hebraism; it is as much as, the unrighteous mammon: by which we must not understand ill-gotten goods, (for God hateth robbery for a burnt-offering,) we must restore such goods, not make friends of them; but riches are so called, because of the manifold temptations to sin which arise from them, upon which account they are also called *deceitful*. But others think that it is so called in opposition to *the true riches*, mentioned ver. 11. So that *the mammon of unrighteousness* is the mammon of falsehood, or hurtful riches, riches of hurtfulness Of these riches, which are no true riches, and which deceive the soul, and do hurt and mischief to a soul, exposing it to temptation, Christ commands us to *make friends*; either, 1. To make God our friend, not by meriting from him any thing by our disposal of them, but by obedience to his will in our distribution of them. Or, 2. To make poor Christians our friends, so as we may have their prayers. So that, *when ye fail*, when you die, when you fail of any more comfort from them, *they may receive you into everlasting habitations*; the holy Trinity, or the blessed angels, (whose work it is, as we shall hear, to carry souls into Abraham's bosom,) may receive you into heaven.