

Money and Christian Shrewdness

Luke 16:1-13

Pastor Richard Yu

June 24, 2018

The parable of the shrewd manager is one of the strangest and most difficult parables to understand and apply. A dishonest wasteful manager is about to be fired, so he's concerned with his future. His shrewd plan is to make others obligated to him by cancelling a large part of their debt to the master, a debt amounting to years of wages. He expects that these people would then owe him a favor and therefore he could rely on their hospitality. The master must not have liked being cheated, but he commends this dishonest manager in v.8. Some suggest that the manager used his own share of the wealth to cancel the debts, but this isn't explicitly stated. Another theory is that the manager acted on behalf of the master to reduce the debt. But if this were the case, the debtors would have an obligation to the master, not the manager. What is clear in the passage is that the manager is commended for acting shrewdly, not for being dishonest. Even though the manager is an unrighteous man, his shrewdness is a quality that Jesus highlights in this parable. Jesus uses unrighteous characters in other parables too, such as the parable of the persistent widow, which teaches us how much more God will listen to us if even the unrighteous judge listens to those who are persistent. Likewise, in the parable of the shrewd manager, He teaches us how much more the people of God should be shrewd if even the unrighteous manager is shrewd with the wealth entrusted to him. We are to imitate the manager's shrewdness, but not his dishonesty. Matthew 10:16 sums it up well when Jesus tells the disciples to be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.

Ministry is one area where we need this shrewd judgment. Shrewdness is necessary when dealing with legal issues, developing programs, and being attractive to people outside while maintaining a focus on the gospel. Another area that requires shrewdness is our work lives. We must understand the legal and ethical ways to witness to our colleagues while maintaining integrity and working diligently as to the Lord. Third is the area of holiness and morality, trying to balance prohibition and indulgence. We need discernment to use our Christian liberty wisely. For couples who are dating, don't ask how far you can go before marriage, rather ask what the best way is to grow the relationship and each other in Christ. Think critically about your behavior, but don't be too quick to impose your standards on others. We must be gospel-driven, rather than issue-driven. Some Christians boycotted Disney for their apparent support of gay

rights, but they don't boycott Nike for exploitation of workers in sweatshops. Keeping our focus on the gospel requires shrewd judgment.

But the one area that Jesus focuses most on here is that of personal finance. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which follows the parable of the shrewd manager, tells us the consequences of serving money instead of God. In v. 9, Jesus gives a promise to those who are shrewd in using their wealth for God's kingdom, that they will gain friends and will be welcomed into heavenly dwellings. He's obviously not advocating unscrupulous business practices, but rather using resources entrusted to you to prepare for the future. These resources aren't ill-gotten gain, but rather any wealth given to us by God. Clearly we cannot buy friends with money, but rather with the kingdom of heaven in mind, we should use our wealth to help others and win disciples for Christ. And certainly we don't buy our way into heaven, but since we know heaven is our home, we should store treasure in heaven rather than on earth. If even the people of this world prepare for their future, how much more should we—the people of light—prepare for eternity shrewdly?

True faith produces works, especially those of generosity. But there are a few prevalent misconceptions about Christian giving that prevent some from giving. The first is that God cares only about the heart and not about what we do with our money. However, the Bible talks about money in thousands of verses, and Jesus addresses it in many parables. Scripture teaches us to serve God, not money. We should plan and look after our family so that we may not be a burden to others. Yet we should put our trust in God, not in our savings. While God does care about what is in our hearts, if our heart is truly transformed, the Bible makes it clear that it should affect what we do with our money. The second misconception is that God will give us material prosperity if we have enough faith. This isn't a promise made to Christians in the Bible, so spiritual maturity cannot be measured by material prosperity. God is sovereign and entrusts some with more and some with less. No matter how much we have, we are to be faithful stewards of whatever God gives us. Why He gives more to some is none of our business. Third, some think that how much one gives doesn't matter. Tithing isn't required of Christians because it was tied to the land of Israel in the Old Covenant. It was like a tax which went to Levites and priests, which are no longer relevant for Christians. Any mention of it in the New Testament was before the establishment of the New Covenant, and afterwards there are no more references to tithing. Finally, the New Covenant isn't legalistic like the Old Covenant. However, this doesn't mean we

should hoard our wealth. The New Testament makes it clear that we must have sacrificial generosity from a heart of gratitude and worship. 100% of our wealth belongs to God and we must be good stewards of all of it. The Bible tells us we should use money to support preachers and the poor among us. We must not let money become an idol but give with gratitude. 2 Corinthians 8-9 suggests we should give in proportion to what we have, but it doesn't give a percentage. However, Luke 16:10-12 is clear that spiritual maturity is directly correlated with how we handle our money. Those who can be trusted with worldly wealth can be trusted with heavenly riches. Finally in v. 13 Jesus tells us that we cannot serve God and money, just as in Matthew 6:24. A slave belongs fully to his master. He cannot serve two masters fully. If someone were to look at your accounts, could they tell who you serve? Let us not be lovers of money as the Pharisees in v. 14. Our loyalty lies with God, who owns all the money on earth, and who sent His Son to become poor that we may be rich in heaven. The gospel frees us from slavery to money, so let us now serve God faithfully with what He has entrusted to us.