

The Character of Jesus 56
Parables about the Lost
Luke 16:1 – 18
Using or Being Used?

- **Characteristic: Shrewdness**
 - (1) Jesus turned to His disciples, but the Pharisees and scribes who complained about the company Jesus kept (15:2) were still there (16:14).
 - (1) The steward was being accused of being wasteful, not dishonest. The steward had control of his master's assets and could handle them as he saw fit.
 - (2) The master, who only cared about the bottom line, was not consulted concerning every transaction. Wastefulness would affect the bottom line.
 - (3 – 4) Apparently, the accusation of wastefulness was justified, as the steward immediately sought to manage his departure, not save his job.
 - (5 – 7) The steward had contractual authority, so could adjust accounts payable as needed. This was like invoking a price reduction for valued customers, or accepting less because the other choice was to get nothing. This was shrewd, not dishonest.
 - (8) The master saw the logic of the steward's maneuver and perhaps decided that this kind of shrewdness could make bigger profits in the future. Jesus contrasted the steward's shrewdness to that of the righteous (sons of light). Even righteousness can become inflexible and thereby miss opportunities.
 - (9) "Unrighteous mammon" was a bit of sarcasm. Money is neither righteous nor unrighteous – it is just money. But, "the sons of light" throughout history have confused the money itself with those who use money inappropriately (controlling others, focusing on wealth rather than quality of life, and such like). Jesus' point was to use money (not to be used by it) so that, when it fails (as it will at some point), the sons of light will be welcomed by God as those who used everything at their disposal for the kingdom. Unfortunately, the common explanation of this parable assumes that the steward acted unrighteously.
 - (10 – 12) Jesus' conclusion, "If you can't handle money shrewdly, God will not entrust you with His kingdom."
 - (13) The concept of "two masters" is another way of asking, "Does money control you, or do you control money." This is like 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."
 - (14) The same Pharisees who objected to the company Jesus kept were quick to ridicule this principle. Ridicule is the haven of those who have no facts.
 - (15) The telling comment from Jesus was, "God knows your heart." Religious people put up all sorts of fronts, but God is not fooled. Jesus insisted that, despite their ridicule, the principal of the parable remained true.
 - (16) John and Jesus preached preparation for the kingdom. Many, including these Pharisees, thought they were ideal candidates with their present value systems.
 - (17 – 18) An example of how societal norms perverted God's desires: justification of divorce. Rather, be shrewd and choose a spouse you will not need to later divorce.
- **Application: Shrewdness**
 - How does the church miss opportunities to be shrewd with "unrighteous mammon"?
 - How might the church encourage such creativity?
 - How is ridicule (not facts) used to thwart shrewdness?

- How might the principle of “God knows your heart” be used to encourage shrewdness?
- Other than divorce, what societal norms are excused as inevitable rather than shrewdly solving the problem?