

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Ninth Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Do You Glorify Yourself Above God?

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“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:13, ESV)

In the first eight verses of the Gospel Reading for today we see a man who is anything but honest. Fired because of his ineptitude, the man wrestles with the reality that he is out of work and his hope for the future is fading fast. In contemplating what his next move might be, he decides that work, actual labor is out of the question. He's not strong enough for that. Nor is begging an option, he could never lower himself to such a demeaning position. Filled with despair and at his wits end, he is stymied. But then like the proverbial bulb, the light of idea goes off in his head. I know, he says to himself, I'll give my master's clients huge discounts on their accounts, and out of gratitude for my master as well as myself, they'll take care of me. Then Jesus closes this parable by telling His disciples, ***“The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” (Luke 16:8–9, ESV)***

There is little doubt his plan is shrewd, so shrewd that even his master commends him for his shrewdness. But let us not fool ourselves, his shrewdness was the result of a dishonest heart. His deed is not noble. His plan was hatched out of a sense of desperation and preservation, but not the preservation of honest work, but rather by the shrewdness of an evil heart which sought to preserve his income at the expense of his master who had just fired him.

This statement by our Lord Jesus that the man's master commended him and that His disciples are to make friends by means of unrighteous wealth has confused many. So they ask, is He commending the work of the dishonest manager? Are we to use ill-gotten financial gain to make friends? Was not what the manager did a violation of the Seventh Commandment? Sure it was. So coming away from this reading with the attitude that Jesus is commending the shrewdness of the dishonest manager, is to come away from this reading with a misunderstanding of what Jesus is saying. It is like when our Lord sends His out disciples to proclaim the Gospel among those who will persecute them, He tells them, ***“Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16, ESV)*** Our Lord is not telling them to be crafty and sly as the world is crafty and sly, but to keep their heads up and their eyes open because their enemies can come from any quarter. Furthermore, they are not to be concerned about their eloquence or their ability to proclaim the Word, for whatever they are to say will be given them by the Holy Spirit. It is in this vein that Jesus tells His disciples to, ***“make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings,”*** while reminding them of the faithlessness of the manager, telling them, ***“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:10–12, ESV)*** Because ***“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the***

one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:13, ESV)

You cannot serve money and God, nor can you serve ego and God, or anger and God. If you are a follower of Christ, you can only serve Him. Yes, Jesus tells us to make use of unrighteous wealth, but not to be enslaved to it. He is telling us to use the wealth of the world to build up the kingdom of God.

So what is the proper use of our possessions? How should a child of God be prudent in the world? How should one who is a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1) use worldly possessions? These are the crucial questions to be answered in responding to the Gospel Reading for today. Hopefully, with the help of the Holy Spirit we will come to a proper understanding and answer these questions.

The children of men are relentless in their pursuit of temporal interests. There is little they will not do to gain earthly wealth. Thus, the children of men are wiser and shrewder in prosecuting their interests. Look at how quickly the dishonest manager hatched his plan. Desiring wealth, the dishonest manager laid all aside until he had the answer. His thoughts were of himself, of gain, of profit, thus he hatched an ingenious plan. Losing to a life of poverty was never on his mind.

In this same way many who call themselves shepherds of the flock, fleece the lambs. Obsessed with wealth, these dishonest managers of God’s Word devise ways to enrich themselves by promising profit through illicit means. One such dishonest manager is the prosperity preacher who promises that God will enrich those who love Him. In the same way the dishonest manager of our Lord’s parable offered gain to his master’s customers, preachers of profit lead the people into the false hope that if they attend his church, God will reward them in this life with earthly wealth.

Others, obsessed with wealth do that which got the dishonest manager of our Lord’s parable fired, they squander the congregation’s money. Through subterfuge, these preachers of profit fool their parishioners into lavishing them with the luxuries of life. In other cases they fool the congregation into unwise practices and programs, which many believe will benefit the congregation, but in reality, bring only detriment.

Those who engage in the subterfuge of dishonesty, build wealth through what Luther called the Theology of Glory. Their first desire is to create an aura of glory around themselves. Look, see how great our preacher is. Look at his communication skills, his stature, his booming voice, his wavy hair, his impeccable dress, and on and on it goes. But little or nothing is said about his proclamation of the Gospel, of his preaching Christ crucified. They speak babble, hot air, and lies. The Word of God does not proceed from their lips, because the Word of God is never before them. But before long, the congregation begins to grow because it is known as a great entertainment venue where the preacher really puts on a good show. Then not long after, the parishioners begin to take on the persona of the preacher, and they too begin to think in terms of glory. Soon, all is perverted; rather than confess their sins, they think of their sinless beauty, rather than praise God, they think of their splendor, rather than the glory of God, they think of their elegance. Soon their worship is like that of which God has warned it should not be, ***“This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore, behold. . . the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.” (Isaiah 29:13–14, ESV)***

However, God says, if you would glorify yourself, He will make you ugly. He will do this because you have stolen from Him. He says to you, ***“If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?” (Luke 16:11, ESV)*** If you can’t be faithful with what I give you, what makes you think I will give you more? So, don’t glorify yourself, rather deny yourself, be humble, refuse yourself, lest God deny and refuse you. Jesus says, ***“everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11, ESV)*** If you honor yourself, God confounds you. If you praise yourself, God disparages you. If you affirm yourself, God denies you. If you think you are strong, God makes you weak. If you think you are noble, God makes you common. If you think you are wise, God makes you unwise. If you think you can save yourself, God condemns you. But all who think little of themselves, God honors. All who disparage themselves, God praises. All who deny themselves, God affirms. All who see themselves as ugly sinners, God beautifies through Christ. All who make themselves weak, God makes strong. All who think little of themselves, God makes noble. All who consider themselves foolish, God calls wise, and all who condemn themselves, God saves. It is God who makes righteous, it is God who justifies, all for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

So in one case you have preachers of profit gaining wealth through false doctrine and in the other by robbing the treasury. But it matters not how shrewd these preachers of profit are, their method for ill-gotten gain is not to be commended, and they will be brought to nothing by the Lord.

To the contrary, the children of the light are more earnest in pursuing spiritual interests rather than earthly ones. Indeed, one is called a child of the light because they have been brought out of the darkness of the world and into the marvelous light of the Gospel. A child of the light can see the vanity of material and temporal things. Furthermore, unlike the children of men, a child of the light knows they must one day give an accounting of their stewardship to the Lord. Therefore, their focus is on the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit who leads them into an everlasting habitation. They know the importance of spiritual interests and honorable work which fortifies their souls. Thus, they are more concerned with their souls than with their bodies

Likewise, those who have been rightly called to be overseers of the souls of the children of the light also know the value of the Gospel. It is far more valuable than silver or gold. Silver and gold are fleeting, temporal, earthly gifts from God, but the Gospel is the divine Word of eternal life. Thus, there is no comparison. However, simultaneously, the overseer knows that the work of the Gospel often requires the use of ***“unrighteous wealth.”*** But unlike the dishonest manager, the overseer does not covet such wealth, but rather uses it to add souls to the kingdom of God, to add to the children of the light, to make friends for the eternal dwellings.

Those who would glorify themselves differ from those who humble themselves before God in repentance. A true follower of Christ knows that too often we’re like the dishonest manager of the parable, squandering His possessions, refusing to use them, or using them improperly. Applying the rod when we should apply soothing balm. Lording over our neighbor when we should be serving him. Rather than the good the Lord wants us to do, we turn and do evil. What’s worse, when we’re caught in our sin, rather than confess, we try to devise a way out of our culpability. Like the dishonest manager, we begin to scheme of ways where we don’t have to assume responsibility. We devise ways of taking the heat off ourselves while trying to profit in the process. If we are truly followers of Jesus Christ, can we say that our sinful and disobedient behavior is ***“righteous”***? I think not. So what now? Are we to react like the dishonest manager and scheme our way out of our sin? If we could, do we think Christ would commend us? Oh, I hope not.

To think this way is the old Adam in us. But can we really think God would commend our refusal to confess, repent, and seek His absolution? No. To the contrary, we know He won't. Thus, in penitence because we have grieved God by our sin, we repent and seek God's forgiveness for the sake of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Then, like the master in the parable, our Lord Jesus, because of our faithful trust of the forgiveness He has won for us by His Atoning Sacrifice on the Altar of the Cross, commends us to His Father.

Our Lord Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Thus, like the manager in the parable, He is willing to forgive us. He is willing to commend us when we are contrite and repent of our sins. But do not think for a moment that there is anything special about you that warrants your refusal to repent, that warrants your belief that somehow you can scheme your way out of your culpability for your sin. If you do, you will not meet the dishonest managers fate, a life secured by your dishonest scheming. No, instead you will die in your sin, receiving the due penalty for your sin, eternity in hell. You cannot *Glorify Yourself Above God*. You cannot work your way out of your sin. The forgiveness of sins can be found only in the death of God's beloved Son upon the Altar of the Cross. This is God's plan, His plan from before the foundation of the world. You cannot improve on it; you cannot out scheme it. Therefore, don't try.

When you sin, when you fall short of the glory of God, fall on your knees before Him and seek His forgiveness, all the while knowing that for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, He will forgive you, He will have mercy on you, restoring you as a child of His, assuring you that your eternal future is controlled by His plan and not your own. Give all glory to God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the commendation belongs to Him not to you. Do not try to live by unrighteous gain, but by the righteous gain which comes through faith in Christ Jesus. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.