

QUESTION: I don't understand Jesus' teaching in Luke 16:1-13 about the shrewd manager.

ANSWER: Jesus gives us a story from the worldly point of view, but He is not condoning their dishonesty - He only uses the story as a CONTRAST of how worldly people take advantage of money and worldly things for their benefit, whereas God's children (the "sons of light") are lacking in that area. He is not saying that God's children should be dishonest, but only that we should use what is here on this earth for the maximum benefit for eternal things. For instance, we should use "unrighteous mammon" or money to spread the Gospel and bring as many people as possible into the Kingdom of God. This may mean spending money on television or radio to get out the message of the Gospel, or travel expenses to go and preach the message in person, or the cost of printing Bibles, books and materials. Verse 9, "And I say to you, **make friends** for yourselves **BY** unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The "they" is the friends you made **BY** the USE of the unrighteous mammon or money. The "friends" are people you have helped to come to faith in Jesus Christ **by the spending of your money**, and they will be waiting to welcome you when you die and go to heaven.

Verse 11, "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon (money), who will commit to your trust the true riches?" This means that those who hold onto their earthly riches lightly, and use their money for the glory of God and His kingdom, will be given true riches and responsibilities in heaven. It is the same idea as where Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Matthew 6:19-20

As with most of Jesus' parables, we must be careful not to take every detail out and try to make it fit us as Christians. Jesus told these elaborate stories (parables) so that the people listening would get the feel of what was happening, but we are meant to only take ONE main point from each parable. The one main point of this parable is that God's people need to be wise and shrewd in our handling of earthy riches and resources in order to further God's kingdom. A similar parable that confuses people is the Unjust Judge of Luke 18. The unjust judge is not meant to represent God, it is the persistence of the widow that is the lesson for Christians. The one main point of that parable is that God's people need to persist and persevere in prayer.