

This is not to say that when we repeatedly mess things up in thought, word, and deed – which we will do – that we are in danger of God ceasing to forgive us. God is always willing to forgive when we repent. In fact, God is always more willing to give than we are to receive, and that applies to all His gifts. God is **“slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love” (Ex 34:6)**. The danger is when the Christian starts to think, “I can keep sinning and God will forgive me anyways apart from repentance and faith.” Or, another wrong way of thinking is that since God is so gracious and loving, the more we sin means there’s more opportunity for God to be more gracious and loving. That would be wasting or squandering the forgiveness of sins that Jesus earned through His suffering and death on the cross. We should never put the Lord to the test. Just as Pharaoh put the Lord to the test by hardening his own heart (**Ex 7:13**), we ought to learn from Pharaoh’s hard heartedness and repent before it’s too late! For remember Scripture records that after the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened *his own* heart. It was not until the sixth plague that the Bible says, **“the Lord hardened his heart” (Ex 9:12)**. Once the Lord hardens a heart, it’s too late. It’s like the rich man saying to the manager, **“Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager” (Lk 16:2)**. In other words, “You’re fired.”

Recognizing that it was too late, that the verdict was in, the shrewd manager assembles his master’s debtors before the “pink slip” becomes public knowledge. By trimming the bills down, the manager does two things. He earns the favor of his master with the debtors. He makes his boss look good, for the rich man can’t go back on the changes the manager made lest the debtors think him a cruel owner. This also ensures that the debtor’s would **“receive (him) into their houses” (Lk 16:4)** having earned their favor for himself with the unjust deal.

Now, we struggle with the fact that the master commends this unjust manager. But this isn’t teaching us that likewise we should also strive to be unjust or squander what is given to us. Instead, the point of the parable is summarized in v. 8-9, **“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. ⁹ 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.”**

Jesus acknowledges that the manager was crafty. The sons of this world usually are. The manager was commended because he took the situation he was given and craftily made the most of it. But Jesus is not teaching us that we likewise should be unjust in the same way. We shouldn’t squander the gifts given to us. Instead, we should make friends by means of all the unjust mammon we have. Mammon, which is the Greek word translated “wealth” in your inserts, is all the excess material items we have that we not only *don’t need* to support our body and life, but also *don’t deserve*. This is why it’s unjust or unrighteous wealth.

“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Lk 16:13). So while we should not squander the gifts entrusted to us, we shouldn’t hoard them either. Use all the excess gifts, your mammon, to serve your neighbor, not in self-interest as the manager did, but in a way that builds God’s kingdom.

This parable is almost all Law – what the Christian is to do, following the coattails of the Gospel-rich Lost parables of Luke Ch. 15. Again, this is a sanctification parable. And yet, the truth that salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone still abides. We have to read the three Lost parables and this one together because how we go about our daily life in this life still matters. We aren’t saved by grace alone so that we can now sit on our hands until Christ returns. That’s what the Church in Thessalonica got reprimanded for when Paul writes, **“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us...” (2 Thes 3:6)**. A few verses later: **“For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good” (2Th 3:12-13)**.

Don’t grow weary in doing good, brothers and sisters. Make friends. Do good works. And by faith trust that the “heavenly friends” will receive you into the eternal dwellings. Our friends can’t read our hearts. Our friends see only our works. We know this from experience. Who would you trust to watch your children? Some stranger? Someone who has never demonstrated any responsibility? Of course not. We know people by their works. But God will receive you into heaven only by faith. God knows the heart. Regarding salvation, He’s not interested in works. Works don’t save.

Thus to be a “son of light”, to use Jesus words, make friends. Share the excess material items, the mammon that God has undeservedly blessed you with. But don’t lose sight of what made you a son of light in the first place. God has restored you who were lost, you who squandered his inheritance and made you His own. He is more willing to give than we are to receive. When it happens that we return to being sons of this world in sin, repent, knowing your heavenly Father remains here with open arms. He, like the father of the prodigal son, has sent the “fattened calf” to the cross (**Lk 15:23**); the lamb to be slaughtered for the forgiveness of sins. The table is set for the feast. The forgiveness of sins is offered in Word and Sacrament. By grace through faith, the perfect friend we have in Jesus will receive you into the eternal dwellings that He has prepared for you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.