

Dishonest steward



Question: Why did Jesus praise the dishonest steward in Luke 16:8? At first sight it seems that Jesus praised him for being dishonest, which cannot be not the case. But I cannot find the real reason for Jesus' praise.

– **Stephen Formosa**, via email

Answer: The parable you reference is the well-known parable where a dishonest steward is stealing from his master by taking more than his share of the bills he collects. Once discovered, he quickly makes friends with his master's debtors by cutting their invoices substantially and, in effect, stealing even more from his master to ingratiate himself with others. Hence, when he loses his job, he will have friends to take him in.

The Lord ends the parable by saying: "And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light" (Lk 16:8).

We should be clear that the Lord tells the parable with a kind of sad irony, not with approval. It is a bit like our English expression that we must "give the devil his due." We are not approving of what the devil does, but have to sadly admit that he and many of the wicked are far craftier and more dedicated to their wickedness than we are to goodness and truth.

Yes, the worldly, and even many of us, are dedicated to developing worldly skills, and becoming very knowledgeable in worldly things. In earning money and holding down a job, many display great discipline: getting up early to go to work, working late, going the extra mile to please the boss.

But when it comes to faith, many of these same people display

only a rudimentary knowledge of things spiritual, and show little dedication in advancing in the Faith or in praying or pleasing God. The Lord laments this, and so should we.

Scriptural discrepancies

Question: I cannot understand contradictions in Scripture. There is racial exclusion (“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” Mt 15:24) versus benevolent universalism (“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...” Mt 28:19). The call to peace, (“Blessed are the peacemakers ...” Mt 5:9) versus violent defense (“... one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one,” Lk 22:36). I can’t understand these contradictions because Jesus is God, and God cannot change his mind as he knows everything.

– **Albert Vianello**, via email

Answer: Scriptural texts must be read in context and with a remembrance that many norms are general but not absolute. In the passage about being sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, there is evidence in the text that the Lord is testing the woman to see her reaction, rather than teaching the maxim as good. Even if one rejects that theory, ministry only to the Jews was a temporary context later eclipsed by the mandate to go unto all the nations. The blessedness of being a peacemaker is a general blessing but it does not set aside the right of one to defend his own life against unjust attack. Hence non-violence is a general norm but not an absolute one. It admits of a few exceptions.

There is not the space to elaborate a full answer, but it must suffice to say that we should not reduce Scripture to one text. Further, we must realize that one text may be balanced by another text that introduces distinctions or sets for exceptions, or applies a general norm to a different context.

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