

Dissolute Living

Luke 16:1-13

¹ Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.' ³ Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' ⁷ Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' ⁸ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; **for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.** ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

¹⁰ "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is also in much. ¹¹ If you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Please raise your hand if you have heard someone say, "I am spiritual but not religious." This saying has become the hallmark of people who have decided that the sins of organized religion are too much for them to deal with. They, in effect, say they believe that God exists, but they will not claim the history of the church. This statement is paradoxical to its core.

Let's face it; many atrocities have been committed in the name of God throughout history. And I will not stand up here and defend any of it. I agree; there HAVE BEEN MANY ATROCITIES DONE in the name of God. Too many to count. Everyone has a religion; whether they claim, they do or not. Everyone has a system of beliefs that govern how they live their lives. MW defines religion as "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with passion and faith." Yes, that system is going to be organized in some way.

A system is organized; a system of beliefs is organized religion.

What does one do with a system of beliefs that they hold in faith? Let's look at the last part. "Hold in Faith" This section is the foundation of the question. Faith is defined as believing in something with solid conviction, without question. To "hold" something in faith is to grasp that conviction with all our might.

The Israelites have a prayer called the SHEMA, found in **Deut. 6:4-9** Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷ Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

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This prayer is the core of the Jewish prayer life. Orthodox Jewish practitioners begin and end each day by reciting this prayer. It is all about holding in faith the belief that God is the only thing that matters in this world. The word we translate as **might** is the Hebrew word **me'od**. Me'od is more than an intention of strength. It represents our very being, our core self. Our "veryness." This is the essence of what it means to "Hold in Faith."

So, what does one do with a system of beliefs that one holds in faith if they are spiritual but not religious? **They enter a paradox**. They believe in God but follow a moral code set up by society. They may think they're unique in their understanding of spirituality, but they are wrong. They have traded God's rules for living a **just and righteous life** for society's rules for living a **safe and secure life**. They never really grow spiritually; usually, they end up like our shrewd manager, living inside the drama created by a broken world.

To be Spiritual is lovely. Exploring the Spirit and how we interact with the spirit world is essential for our spiritual growth, both as Christians and human beings. But to say "I am not religious" is to tell yourself a lie that squashes the Spirit. Everyone worships something; God, Money, Self (you fill in the blank).

As we follow Jesus through the gospel of Luke, we see some significant issues arise in his actions and teachings. Jesus asked his followers to deny everything, give it all up and follow him without question. Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the religion of his day. And Jesus points out the corruptive nature of wealth and greed. Jesus sounds like the people who say, "I'm spiritual, but not religious," But only if you look at him on the surface of his ministry. Jesus was much more in-depth than that. Jesus tells us today in this parable that the manager, knowing his impending termination, sets out to make the people he knows in his community "like" him. While he still has the power to impress them, he lowers all their debts. Thus, creating goodwill between himself and the people of the town. Therefore, when he loses his job, he will be in the good graces of those he had done business with and will be accepted by the community.

It is the manager's ultimate "take this Job and shove it" act. But Jesus points out that his planning is using the understanding of the "Children of this age" instead of being a "Child of the light (v.8).

I bet the shrewd manager followed the rules of the temple. He probably went there and offered his obligatory sacrifices as his religion instructed. He may have even convinced himself that he was a good Jew, a good person, and he probably believed that he was at no fault for his actions. And in all honesty, his community may have seen him as such.

But let's say for giggles that the charges brought against him were false (v1). Either way, he would lose his job because his boss couldn't trust him. At this point, his actions betrayed his station. His efforts were not of a good Jew. He relied on the system of beliefs that governed his society (flawed as it was) to gain favor with his friends. He did not rely on God. His faith was not in the One who created the universe but in himself and preserving that self within his community.

This brings me to my second point; to claim a religion but not adhere to it is also paradoxical.

The Non-religious people pile on the bandwagon of blaming the church for atrocities. And religious church people tend to ignore the same horrors. How do we reconcile the two sides of this proverbial coin? What is the correct way to believe in God and not be a hypocrite? Well, that is the \$64,000 question.

I have pondered this question since I was 17 years old, and if I had the definitive answer, that would be the only sermon I would ever preach. But I can tell you what has worked for me.

When faced with someone who tells me they are spiritual but not religious, I say, "I am spiritually religious."

As a Christian, a follower of Christ, I am compelled to study and follow Jesus' teachings found in the witness of the Bible. I must also live according to those teachings. I must love my neighbor, friends, acquaintances, and enemies. I must also live like the only thing that matters in this universe is the One Creator. This will show in my actions during daily life. [If the manager lived a spiritual-religious life, he might not have ever been in that situation]

I must also admit that, like the shrewd manager, I will stumble, and selfishness will creep in. But when that happens, I must be willing to adjust, repent, and accept the grace of God's forgiveness. I then need to move forward according to my faith that God's plan for me is ongoing. And part of that spirituality and faith is to accept that the church has done some horrible things, but also note that while I breathe, I will work to make the church a better, more accepting, more caring, more forgiving place. I cannot change the past, but I can certainly help shape the future. It is done through prayer, study, application in my spiritual journey, fellowship, worship, and work within the church.

We cannot put our heads in the sand and pretend like the world doesn't exist, just like we cannot pretend the church and organized religions don't come with some historical baggage. However, Jesus is clear; One **cannot serve both God and wealth**. This is what Jesus tells us at the end of the parable. The manager found this out the hard way. He lost his job; if he lived like 59% of Americans do today, he was only one paycheck away from homelessness—59%.

God calls us to be children of light. God calls us to be a part of God's family. All of Jesus' teachings in the book of Luke point us to a specific way of life. Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much. And as accurate as that is, the one who is unfaithful in very little is faithless in very much. Choose wisely how you live your life because it is a matter of not just life and death but eternal life.

Our religion should reflect how we commune with God. It conducts our lives in a broken world. It instructs our spiritual growth. It is how we live in Christ, so we do not end up like the manager, afraid of life and trying to get in the good graces of others.

Let us pray.

O God, you set forth a simple religious covenant when you came to us as a helpless baby. You showed us how to live, love our neighbors and care for the unloved in society. You showed us how to Worship and seek the HS's discernment through constant prayer. You gave us the family of God so we can fellowship, work, and worship for your glory. And when we fail, forget, and find guilt, you forgive us and assure us that we are loved. Thank you, Lord, for your unending love. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN, AMEN, AMEN!