

**“Business is Business”:
A Re-reading of the ‘Parable of Unjust Steward’
(Lk. 16:1-8a)¹⁾**

Jayhoon Yang*

1. Introduction

The parable of Unjust Steward is well known as one of the most perplexing parables in the Synoptic Gospels. It has been debated over a few issues such as the scope of the parable, the identity of ‘κύριος’ in verse 8a, characterization of the master and the steward, and the message of this parable, and so on. Many attempts to answer these questions have been made from various perspectives such as literary and social-scientific approaches, and they seem to have contributed to illuminating the contours of this parable. However, no conclusive interpretation has appeared and the dispute on the issues of this parable continues.²⁾

* Professor of the New Testament and Early Christianity at Hyupsung University.

1) This work was supported by Hyupsung University Research Grant of 2020-0023.

2) Due to the limit of space, we cannot elaborate the history of interpretation of this parable. For the exhaustive critical survey of issues and interpretations of this parable, see Yoo Tae-Yeab, “Critical Review of Interpretation of the ‘Parable of Unjust Steward’ (Luke 16:1-13),” *Theology and the World* 83 (2015), 6-34; Jung Chang Wook, “Re-examination of the Ironical Interpretation of the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16,” *KENTS* 11:4 (2012), 793-823; J. Goodrich, “Voluntary Debt Remission and the Parable of the Unjust Steward,” *JBL* 82:1 (2012), 547-566 [548-553]; K. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 406-410; M. D. Greene, “The Parable of the Unjust Steward

Amongst many complicated questions, the most difficult is the master's response to the unjust steward's behaviour at verses 8 and Jesus's comment at verse 9. The unjust steward did harm to the master, and the master accordingly dismisses him. At the end of the story, however, the master³⁾ praises the unjust steward (v. 8). Furthermore, Jesus teaches the audience to make friends by means of unjust mammon (v. 9), which seems that he approves of their behaviours. Why does the master praise the unjust steward? Why does Jesus exhort the hearers to do like that?

Many Church Fathers⁴⁾ such as J. Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Ambrose of Milan understood that the master praised the unjust steward because he behaved wisely by using money for the poor; the steward, although once was unrighteous with his master's possessions, removed the poor peasants of heavy burden of debts, and is now presented as a role model for Christians. Augustine agrees with those above by reading this parable in terms of alms giving,⁵⁾ but highlights helping the

As Question and Challenge," *ExpTim* 112:3 (2000), 82-87.

- 3) The Greek word, 'κύριος' in verse 8a can be translated either into the 'lord/master' or the 'Lord'. Some scholars like J. Jeremias (*The Parables of Jesus* [NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972], 45) and J. D. Crossan (*In Parables* [NY: Harper&Row, 1973], 108-110) argue that it refers to Jesus. However, many commentators and translations (e.g., ASV, NRS, RSV, NIV, NAB, NJB, NKJV, ESV, GNB, CEB) interpret it as the master. See Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 413; D. O. Via, *The Parable: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 156; B. B. Scott, "A Master's Praise: Luke 16:1-8a," *Bib* 64 (1983), 173-188 [175]. For a survey of various interpretations and examination of the identity of the 'κύριος' of 8a, see Min Kyoung Shik, "Who Praised the Unrighteous Steward? - An Inquiry into the Translation of 'κύριος' in Luke 16:8a," *Canon&Culture* 1:1 (2007), 235-267.
- 4) E.g., J. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3.6; Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary upon the Gospel According to S. Luke*, Sermon 108; Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, 16.1-13.
- 5) Augustine, "Sermon 359A," 10-12, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for*

poor not with ‘unjust mammon’ but with ‘what you rightly possess.’⁶⁾ This traditional view has been followed and developed (especially in terms of eschatology) by many scholars and preachers.⁷⁾

The traditional view has been dominant and Matthewson even argued that “recent alternatives to the traditional interpretation...are not compelling enough to overturn the traditional view.”⁸⁾ This paper, however, challenges this prevalent interpretation, questioning if this parable is really to give us a lesson on the wise use of money in times of eschatological crisis. It explores the meaning of this parable by examining the characters of the master, the steward, and the debtors: why do they do as such and what can we know from their behaviours? How do we explain Jesus’s comment on them (v. 8b-a)? It will argue that this parable does not suggest the steward as a role model nor is about the wise use of money by helping the poor

the 21 century, Part III, vol. 10, ed. J. E Rotelle (NY: New City Press, 1995), 216-217.

- 6) Augustine, “Sermon 113, 2”, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21 century, Part III, vol. 4*, ed. J. E Rotelle (NY: New City Press, 1992), 164-165. Cf. Unlike the Church Fathers mentioned above, Origen reads the steward’s rewriting the document in terms of God’s forgiveness of sins. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 13.
- 7) E.g., Jeremias, *Parables*, 45-48, 180-182; D. J. Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 159-160; D. L. Matthewson, “The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13): A Reexamination of the Traditional View in Light of Recent Challenges,” *JETS* 38:1 (1995), 29-39; J. Fitzmyer, “The Story of the Dishonest Manager,” *TS* 25 (1964), 23-42 [38-39]; K. E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant’s Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 86-118. J. Wesley, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse 8” (*Standard Sermons* 23.26); M. Luther, “Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity; Luke 16:1-9”. Luther understands helping the poor not as a way of earning salvation but as a fruit of faith. Both Luther and Wesley interpret the steward’s reducing the debts as an example of Jesus’s teaching on the works of mercy in Matthew 25:31-46 (esp. verses 40 and 45), which is eschatological.
- 8) Matthewson, “Parable of the Unjust Steward,” 39.

but about our cautious attitude to mammon, which is supported by a few other parables and teachings of Jesus in Luke's gospel.

2. The Socioeconomic Context of the Parable

The first audience of this parable lived in the world where the first-century Mediterranean Greco-Roman culture was prevailing, and this means that this parable should be understood against the backdrop of this contemporary culture.⁹⁾ This parable is full of economic issues; the steward squandered his master's possessions, which led him to be accused of and dismissed from his post; he tries to solve the problem by manipulating the account, and this risk management skill ironically results in the master's praise; there is a process of economic deal amongst the master, the steward and the debtors explicitly and implicitly. This implies that it should be read through the lens of the contemporary economic mechanism.

The first-century Mediterranean economy system is not merely the matter of money but sociocultural relationship.¹⁰⁾ As Jerome H. Neyrey well points out, the question of wealth and poverty is closely connected with honour and shame.¹¹⁾ He suggests two kinds of the poor, the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. The former refers to those who have fallen into poverty due to "misfortune", whereas the latter "because

9) Lee, Min-Kyu, "A Sociological Study on the Parable of the dishonest Steward (Lk 16:1-8b)," *KNTS* 8:3-4 (2001), 39-62 [42].

10) J. Stambaugh, D. Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians*, trans. Cheol-Won Yoon (Seoul: KTSI, 2000), 81-83; Song Jinsoo, "The Unjust and Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:1-8a)," *KNTS* 26:4 (2019), 909-942 [918].

11) J. H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss of Honour: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q," in P. F. Esler ed., *Modelling Early Christianity* (NY: Routledge, 1995), 139-58.

of their own fault". He, quoting Aristotle and Cicero, states that one is called "virtuous" if he helps the deserving poor and that it is a shame if one becomes the undeserving poor.¹²⁾ Providing economic support to the deserving poor is an honour for the benefactor, and the beneficiary becomes a client, which forms a patron-client relationship. The contemporary socioeconomic system therefore was formed in a shame-honour and patron-client structure, and in this regard Malina and Neyrey states that "first-century Mediterranean personality cannot be understood without a detailed understanding of the pivotal value of honour and shame."¹³⁾

There are two sources of honour, according to Malina and Neyrey, the ascribed honour and the acquired honour. The former is given through birth or endowed by a powerful person such as a "king or governor", while the latter is the honour obtained through one's interaction with others.¹⁴⁾ The problem is that the honour is limited in its amount, and it makes the honour a "challenge-riposte".¹⁵⁾ Therefore, the interaction between the patron and the client are to be active to gain honour and support respectively.

This implies that the patron and the client are interdependent upon each other. The patron-client system is a "simultaneous exchange of different types of resources"¹⁶⁾: the client receives resources from the patron by paying loyalty and honour and the patron loyalty and honour by providing resources to the

12) Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth," 143-44.

13) Malina, Neyrey, "First-Century Personality: Dyadic, Not Individual," *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 67-96 [76].

14) Malina, Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, 25-65 [27-29]

15) Malina, Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 29.

16) H. Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, 241-268 [248].

client. The patron is accordingly apt to be dependent on the client because his honour is acquired when the public validate his status; if they deny his status, it is a shame to him.¹⁷⁾ Therefore, the honourable tend to care about “the impression that others have of him” (i.e., what others will think of me if I behave as such?) and try to “fulfil their expectations”.¹⁸⁾

The social interaction happens not only in a vertical level like patron-client relationship but also in a horizontal level. Malina explains two types of relationships, horizontal dyadic relations and vertical dyadic relations. The former is between persons of “equal status, power or resources” and “involves the exchange of favours and help in time of need.” The latter is between persons of “highly unequal status, power or resources” and “involves the exchange of favours and help of a qualitatively different sort” such as “goods for honour and praise.”¹⁹⁾ For instance, the relationship between the steward and debtors is a horizontal dyadic relation, and the one between the master and debtors/accusers is a vertical dyadic relation. Against the backdrop of the contemporary socioeconomic context of this parable, we will now examine the narrative, questioning how Luke portrays the main characters and what he wants to tell the audience.

3. Luke's Characterization of Key Characters

3.1 The Master

17) Malina, Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 44-46.

18) Malina, Neyrey, “First-Century Personality,” 78-79.

19) See B. J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (NY: Routledge, 1996), 145.

The master appears only in the beginning and the end of the story. However, he is never an ignorable minor character. The master causes the conflict by dismissing the steward from his position (v. 2), and the story develops as the steward tries to find his way to get out of this trouble. The story focuses on how he struggles to survive, making the reader curious about whether his plan was successful or not. At the end of the story, the master suddenly reappears and praises the steward, which implies that the steward's strategy is successful. The master's praise of the steward is a conclusion of the story, and it is one of the important keys to the interpretation of this parable, which will be discussed below.

The master is a rich man (πλούσιος) enough to hire his own steward to manage his properties. A large amount of loan (vv. 6-7) also shows how rich he is. He seems a ruthless master; he summons the steward hearing that the steward squandered his possessions, dismisses him immediately, and just disappears from the scene. He does not give the steward any chance to defend himself or at least to make an excuse. It is not mentioned clearly whether the accusation was true or not. The master, however, does not double-check if the steward really squandered his possessions.²⁰⁾ This shows that he is a kind of person who

20) The Greek διαβάλλω signifies "to make a complaint about a person to a third party, bring charges, inform either justly or falsely" (BDAG, 226). Scott reads this word in a negative sense meaning "bring charges falsely" ("Master's Praise," 180) and argues that the accusation was not credible, and that the master was deceived by the tale-tellers. He assumes that the steward did not make any defence against the false accusation as he knew that it might not work. B. B. Scott, *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (CA: Polebridge Press, 2001), 89. See also M. A. Beavis, "Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8)," *JBL* 111:1 (1992), 37-54 [43, 48-49]. Kloppenborg supports Scott arguing that the judgment on the steward without any chance

is very interested in the possessions, and that he is coldblooded if the matter of profit and loss is concerned.

Strangely enough, however, this calculating person praises the steward at the end of the story. The verse 8a reads, “the master praised the unjust steward as he *did* wisely.” It is hard to understand why the master praised him. The steward had already caused a financial loss to his master by squandering (cf. 15:13) what he was entrusted. He betrayed his master’s trust by so doing, and the master did justice to him (v. 2); nevertheless, the steward continues to do more harms to his master by manipulating the account instead of asking for forgiveness or compensating for the loss. This time, however, the master does not rebuke but praises him (v. 8a). That is, he thinks *what the steward did* to the debtors was ‘wise’ (8b ὅτι φρονίμως ἐποίησεν).²¹⁾ This implies that the master thinks what the steward did to the debtors is not a loss but a gain to himself. Then, how can the loss of oil and wheat caused by the ‘unjust’ steward be a profit to the master? We need to examine the steward and debtors to answer this question.

3.2. The steward

The steward is a main character in this parable. He was charged to have squandered his master’s possessions. Like we discussed above, it may be argued that accusation does not

of defence given does not mean that he admitted guilty; rather it merely proves the master is ‘capricious and unfair’. J. S. Kloppenborg, “The Dishonoured Master (Luke 16,1-8a),” *Bib* 70 (1989), 474-495 [487-488]. Pace Kloppenborg (“Dishonoured Master,” 488), Nolland argues that the focus is to be on the fact that the steward was found guilty rather than on the master’s honour. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 797.

21) Kloppenborg, “Dishonoured Master,” 479.

necessarily mean he is guilty; it may be just a calumny and the accusation can be either true or false; someone who did not like the steward or coveted his post might have slandered him to remove him from his position. That no excuse or defence was laid out when the master dismissed the steward can be either because the steward admitted his guilt,²²⁾ or just because he could not have an opportunity to appeal his innocence,²³⁾ which shows his “precarious position”.²⁴⁾

However, the steward anyhow is depicted negatively in the story. What he did to the debtors (vv. 5-7) is surely a breach of trust which causes financial damage to his employer.²⁵⁾ The narrator clearly states that he is an ‘unjust’ person (v. 8a), and the word ‘ἀδικίας’ is used negatively in Luke (13:27; 18:6). He was accused of squandering the master’s possessions (v. 1), and the word ‘to squander’ (διασκορπίζειν) is used to describe the prodigal son’s profligate life in Luke 15:13. Having lost his job,

22) A. J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 149.

23) B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parable of Jesus* (MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 261-262. He argues that this shows how powerless the lower classes were at that time on the one hand, and makes the reader feel sympathy for him.

24) Scott, “Master’s Praise,” 181.

25) Some scholars argue that the steward discount of fifty *bath* and twenty *cor* from his own portion that he was supposed to receive as a reward. See J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1097-1098, 1101. Cf. J. D. M. Derrett (“Fresh Light on St. Luke XVI. The Parable of the Unjust Steward,” *NTS* 7 [1960-61], 198-219 [214]) calculates about 25% for the rate of interest on the loan of wheat and 100% on the oil (interest at 80% plus insurance at 20%). However, they are too immense to be regarded as a commission. Snodgrass (*Stories with Intent*, 406) suggests 100 *bath* is equivalent to 800-900 gallons, the yield of 150 olive trees, and 100 *cor* is to 7.5 years of labour. Furthermore, as J. Nolland well notices, if the redemption is from the steward’s portion, it just reveals that the steward has charged too high commissions, and he cannot expect to be received by the debtors later. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 799.

he says to himself “I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.” (v. 3) He is a self-contradictory person; he needs to work to enjoy a decent life, and if he fails to do so there is no other way but to beg. However, he wants to secure his decent life, yet he is not willing to work. Rather, he improvises a plan to obtain what he wants by guile; to deceive the master and the debtors.

That the steward told the debtors to rewrite the bill is devious. He says, “Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty...Take your bill and write eighty.” (vv. 6-7) He pretentiously reduces quite a lot of debts (50% and 20% of remission rate), hoping to be seen as “resourceful in a difficult situation”.²⁶⁾ The word ‘quickly’ (ταχέως) implies that he recognizes it illegal. He hustles the debtors to complete his unscrupulous scheme. Furthermore, he does not falsify the bill himself but pushes the debtors to do it, making them his accomplices. Traditional view of this parable understands the steward’s remission of debts as works of generosity, which exhorts the audience to learn how to use money wisely. However, it is not the steward’s money but the master’s what he used to reduce the burden of debts, and his behaviour does not portray him positively but proves that he is just a fraud (see footnote 50 below).

3.3. The debtors

The debtors also play a key role in the parable in relationship with the steward and the master respectively. Firstly, they at first glance look passive who just follow what the steward directs them to do. However, it is doubtful if they did so without knowing anything. The steward suddenly summons the debtors

26) J. R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia: 1988), 165.

and hurries to relieve ‘a great amount’ of debts, which is a quite abnormal business. Furthermore, he urges them to complete the contract ‘quickly’. Therefore, they might have noticed something wrong has happened to the steward.²⁷⁾

The debtors, while probably having noticed something suspicious in the business, just do as they are asked to. It is not certain if they already knew the steward’s change of status or not.²⁸⁾ In either case, however, it reveals the lust and unrighteousness (ἀδικία) of the debtors. They may have known that they were doing something illegal together with the steward, if they knew that the steward was dismissed and had no right to write off their debts, or at least they could have doubted if there was procedural defect with the remission. However, the debtors just do as the steward directs, pretending as if they know nothing.²⁹⁾ Their lust for the money paralyzes their conscience that they quickly pick up the windfalls.³⁰⁾

27) Lee, Min-Kyu, “Sociological Study,” 60.

28) Cf. Malina and Rohrbaugh assume that the debtors praised the master not knowing that the steward was dismissed. B. J. Malina, R. L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 375. They argue as such because the steward lost all the power and authority for the management of the entrusted properties when he was dismissed. Malina, Rohrbaugh, *Social Science*, 292.

29) It may be argued that the debtors simply understood the write-off as a gracious gift (Hultgren, *Parables*, 151). Bailey assumes that the debtors did not know what happened to the steward; had they known it, he argues, they would not have cooperated (*Poet and Peasant*, 98-100). However, reductions are “out of blue” and “enormous and unprecedented” as he agrees (*Poet and Peasant*, 100), and the debtors must have noticed something wrong happened. Then it proves that they are dishonest and craftily “taking advantage of the situation” even if they are not accomplices. See S. E. Porter, “The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16.1-13): Irony is the Key,” in D. J. A. Clines, S. E. Fowl, S. E. Porter eds., *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, JSOTSup 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 127-153 [143].

The Lukan audience has a background of the contemporary Greco-Roman patron-client and the shame-honour culture, which is a kind of ‘give and take’ culture, and these two mechanisms are closely related to each other. The powerful give something good to the powerless, and the powerless pay back the powerful by honouring him. It is an honour for the powerful to be generous to the powerless, and the beneficiary is obliged to praise the benefactor in return; if they fail to do what they are due, it is regarded as a shame.

Then the debtors might have secured their luck by praising the master. It is highly possible, according to the Greco-Roman culture, that they visited the master (otherwise, who did tell the master about the steward’s underhanded business with the debtors?) to pay him an honour, praising him for his generous remission of the debt. They are so shrewd that they make the master caught in a cleft stick; they knew that the master cannot nullify what had been done by the steward when they praised him to his face for the patron’s gracious favour.³¹⁾

4. Power Dynamics and Business amongst the Characters

The three groups of characters above form an interesting relationship with each other. Each party exerts power over other parties on the one hand and is influenced by them on the other. The master appears the most powerful outwardly. He is a creditor and has a power to entrust or dismiss the steward. However, he is deceived by the steward, and controlled by the debtors

30) It is true that the debtor wrote the contract and the lord or steward kept it according to the custom of that time (Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 799; Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 101). But the debtors are *anyhow* involved in the crime by rewriting the bill.

31) Hultgren, *Parables*, 151-152.

and accusers. As Kloppenborg well pointed out, the charges against the master's own steward concern with his honour; the charges may make him look like an incompetent master "who cannot control his *oikos*".³²⁾ Therefore, the master had to keep his honour, and he proves his authority as an *οικοδεσπότης* by dismissing the steward. His action to the steward – and reaction to the accusers – ironically shows that he was influenced by the accusers, and that they have power over the master and the steward; they control the steward by controlling the master by means of talebearing. The master is vulnerable in that he is to be sensitive to what others think of him (honour)³³⁾ and that he acts based on the information the accusers provide.³⁴⁾

The steward is positioned in the middle of the power pyramid. He is under the control of the master and has a power over the debtors as a manager. However, he is above the master by deceiving him (vv. 1, 5-7) and under the accusers as they influence the master to dismiss the steward. He is also under the debtors because he has to rely upon their hospitality in times of trouble. The debtors seem the weakest in the battlefield of power; they owe debts to the master, and the steward collects principal and interest from them. The master has a right to call back the money, and the steward carries out or sometimes arranges the payment. However, they can control the master to be caught in a cleft stick by paying him honour and have cards in their favour in dealing with the steward.³⁵⁾ They all know how to

32) Kloppenborg, "Dishonoured Master," 488.

33) As Malina states, the powerful "need the 'status support' that only [the powerless] can give them." Malina, *Social World*, 143. That is, the powerful are subordinate to the powerless in that they are relying on the powerless to secure their honour and status.

34) Beavis ("Ancient Slavery," 43, 48) argues the accusation was false. If so, the master *was deceived* by them, and it shows how easily the master could be controlled by them.

35) Seeing the amount of their debts (cf. footnote 14 above) and their rewriting the contract, they seem more than poor illiterate peasants.

control other parties, and they all have gains and losses in this relationship.

The three groups of characters are quite shrewd in calculating their gains and losses. The debtors lighten their burdens of debt by making use of the steward's difficult situation; they give thanks and honour to the master and take financial benefit in return. The master also weighs the gains and losses. He might have been surprised when the debtors visited and expressed their gratitude to him, as he might have not known what happened before they came. As stated above, the steward's act of writing off is illegal, and the master could nullify the renewed contract. However, he does not do so because the master received an honour,³⁶⁾ although it was not what he expected.³⁷⁾ Rather, he praises the steward being surprised at his shrewdness in making a deal (v. 8a).

Luca Marulli argues that the master had to bite the bullet and accepted what the steward did to the debtors to keep his honour.³⁸⁾ This argument is partially acceptable. It is right that he wanted to keep his honour. But the steward's behaviour is illegal as noted above, and the master could nullify it if he wanted. However, he does not do so; rather, he praises the steward for what/how he *did*, and this proves that the master *willingly* accepted the process and the result of 'unjust' steward's remission. To gain praise from the debtors and keep his honour is more profitable than to collect the loss back and lose his face.³⁹⁾ In this sense, the master joins the 'give and take' business

36) Park, Jeongsoo, "Serving God in a World Dominated by Money: A Model of the Unrighteous Agent (Lk 16:1-13)," *JYT* 47 (2019), 7-37 [24-27]. Unlike my argument, Park interprets the unjust steward as a role model who used money wisely.

37) D. Landry, B. May, "Honor Restored: New Light on the Parable of the Prudent Steward (Luke 16:1-8a)," *JBL* 119:2 (2000), 287-309.

38) L. Marulli, "'And How Much Do You Owe...? Take Your Bill, Sit Down Quickly, and Write...'(Luke 16:5-6)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 63:2 (2012), 199-216.

with the debtors: the debtors get money at the cost of paying honour, and the master gets honour at the cost of money.

The steward also joins this deal. He uses his expired authority to give the debtors a chance to reduce their debts.⁴⁰⁾ He, in return, expects the debtors to secure his life when he cannot make use of his position anymore.⁴¹⁾ The master, the steward, and the debtors all influence each other, and thereby they form a kind of ‘give and take’ business relationship. They have their own gains and losses, and they are smart in making use of each other to get what they want. This shows how the “sons of this age are shrewder in their generation than sons of light.” (v. 8)

5. Making Friends with Unjust Wealth

Verse 8b is Jesus’ evaluation of the characters in the parable who are identified with the sons of this generation, and verse

39) As Landy and May (“Honor Restored,” 304) well points out, “honour is more important than money” in the ancient Greco-Roman culture.

40) Goodrich contends that the steward’s writing off the debt is for the benefit of the master not for himself. That is, the steward worked as an intermediary between the master and the debtors, and he secured the master’s property by reducing the debtors’ burden so that they could pay back the principal and the interest (Goodrich, “Voluntary Debt Remission,” 547-566). However, there is no remark or implication in the parable that the debtors are suffering from the burden of the debt being unable to pay the interest, or that they plead the steward or the master to reduce the burden or to be patient with them till they pay the debt. It is not the debtors but the steward who came and suggested to rewrite the bill. What the steward did was not for the master nor the debtors but *for himself*. His monologue, “I *found out* what I will do” (v. 4) implies that he is “to act as a successful rogue”, and his subsequent action is to “make friends *for himself*.” (Hultgren, *Parables*, 150. my italics)

41) Bailey argues that the steward did not want the debtors notice the change of his status, and that he hurried to forge the contract. *Poet and Peasant*, 98-99.

9 is an application of the parable. Jesus continues to teach the audiences to make friends by means of unjust mammon (μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας). The sons of this generation are portrayed shrewd so that Jesus' disciples are advised to follow the footsteps that the characters, especially the unjust steward, tread. If we read verses 8b and 9 like this, it may look natural to say that Jesus agrees with the master in verse 8a.⁴²⁾ But it is quite the opposite.

The teaching of Jesus in verse 9 is embarrassing, because the characters of the parable are not positive role models for the disciples to follow. The steward is a negative character; he squanders other's goods, deceives his master who entrusted his properties, and does harms to his master to secure his own life. Most of all, the narrator states that he is 'unjust' (v. 8). The debtors and the master are no less interested than the steward in pursuing their own profits; they do not feel guilty if only they can reduce their financial burden. The master trades his money for his honour. They deal with each other to obtain what they want, and they know what to give, what to take, and how to do it.

How then we are to understand this embarrassing exhortation of Jesus of verse 9? The key to solving this dilemma is 'αἰώνιους σκηνάς' (v. 9b). It resounds the steward's plan: 'they will receive me into their *houses*' (v. 4). The steward thinks that people will welcome him if he does something good to the debtors, which implies a kind of 'give and take' mechanism. Jesus, however, says that making friends by means of unjust mammon will make him/her received into the 'αἰώνιους σκηνάς'. The steward expected to be received into their 'οἴκους' (*houses*), but Jesus says that he will be received into the 'αἰώνιους σκηνάς' (eternal *tents*).

The 'σκηνή' appears twice in Luke (9:33; 16:9), and three times in Acts (7:43, 44; 15:16). The context of Luke 9:33 is

42) E.g., Min Kyung-Sik, "Who Prised the Unrighteous Steward," 235-267.

the transfiguration episode, and Peter suggests that he will make ‘σκηνάς’ for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The ‘σκηνάς’ here does not mean proper houses to live in but *temporary* tents. The ‘σκηνή’ in Acts 7 is also referring to a temporary tent. Luke deliberately distinguishes the ‘σκηνή’ (7:43, 44) from ‘οἴκους’ of Solomon (7:47); the “tent/tabernacle/bivouac” is mobile that it can be brought into the promised land (7:45), but “by contrast...the house that Solomon his son built was a structure of stone, immobile, fixed to one spot” (7:47).⁴³⁾ The ‘σκηνήν’ in Acts 15:16 is just a quotation from LXX Amos 9:11 (τὴν σκηνήν Δαυὶδ). Louw and Nida argue that ‘σκηνή’ is not to be understood as a temporary ‘tent’ but a dwelling place for the nomad in the OT times,⁴⁴⁾ and that the ‘σκηνή’ in Acts 7:44, which refers to the tabernacle of God, is an equivalent to the Temple.⁴⁵⁾ However, we can find a clear contrast between the mobile tent and Solomon’s Temple a fixed building as we examined above. Then the ‘σκηνάς’ in Luke 16:9, unlike the ‘οἴκους’ in 16:4, should be understood as referring to temporary ‘tents’ not proper dwelling places for a living.⁴⁶⁾

43) F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 149.

44) J. P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1 (NY: UBS, 1988), 82, 83-84.

45) Louw, Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 83-84.

46) Some scholars have noted the difference between ‘οἴκους’ (v. 4) and ‘σκηνάς’ (v. 9) and argued that the ‘σκηνάς’ should be translated as ‘tents’ meaning temporary places. See J. F. McFadyen, “The Parable of the Unjust Steward,” *ExpTim* 37 (1925-26), 535-539 [586]; C. E. Bowen, “The Parable of the Unjust Steward *Oikos* as the Interpretative Key,” *ExpTim* 112 (2001), 314-315; Jung Chang Wook, “Ironical Interpretation,” 793-823. Bowen follows McFadyen noticing the difference between ‘οἴκους’ and ‘σκηνάς’. But he reads it from a perspective of Reformed theology, arguing that “entrance into a house is only obtained by unmerited invitation, not as the result of certain deeds...Entrance into God’s Kingdom cannot be earned; such entrance is obtained only by means of God’s gracious welcome.” (“*Oikos* as the Interpretative Key,” 315)

The contrast between ‘οἶκος’ and ‘σκηνάς’ is a key to understanding Jesus’ statement in verse 9. The steward thought that he could be welcomed into houses if he buys friends by means of unjust mammon, but Jesus teaches that he would be welcomed into temporary tents. Furthermore, the tents are ‘αἰωνίους’. A tent is just a temporary place to rest in not a dwelling place for a long-term living, and it is a nonsense to modify the ‘tent’ with ‘eternal’ for there is no eternal tent. By qualifying the ‘tent’ with the word ‘eternal’, Jesus scoffs at the overconfident plan of the sons of this generation. That is, the sons of this generation think that they can secure their life if they rely on mammon, but Jesus asserts that it is wrong.

6. Either Mammon or God (vv. 9-13) and Luke’s View on Mammon

Jesus’ teaching through this parable is concluded with a final speech, “You cannot serve God and mammon.” (v. 13) He urges people to choose one, either God or mammon, and his intention is to say that one should serve God only. Then, three groups of characters of the parable are presented as examples that serve mammon. They make use of their money and power to buy friends, to secure their life, and to keep honour. They believe that mammon can help them in hard times. Their contrivance looks successful in the story: the master gets honour, the steward secures his position which is alluded to in the master’s change of mind (v. 8a) although it was not what he anticipated (v. 4), and the debtors reduce their financial burden.

However, Jesus teaches that they will just be received into ‘eternal tents’ even though they believe that they would take ‘houses’. Jesus scoffs at their ideas and beliefs. That is, the

exhortation in verse 9 is not to be understood at face value but as ironical sarcastic remarks. Jesus is not presenting the master, the steward, and the debtors as positive role models; they are the ones that serve mammon believing their choice is right. Jesus means that the sons of this generation are shrewder than the sons of light in dealing with each other by means of money. However, when Jesus says 'shrewder', it is not a praise but a scoffing remark.⁴⁷⁾

Jesus does not approve of the manners that these characters, i.e., 'the sons of this generation' maintain, and it is consistent with Luke's views on possessions. The parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) is a good example. This parable begins with Jesus' warning against relying on one's possessions (12:15). It tells the reader what the problem is with the rich man; he relies on what *he* earned, and he believes that it can satisfy what he wants. He repeats a word, 'my' (v. 17 *my* fruit; v 18 *my* barn, *my* wheat and goods; v. 19 *my* soul), and he thinks that it is *he* who achieved what he has, and that *it*, not God, secures his happy and enjoyable life (12:19); there is no God but only mammon in his mind, and in this sense, he is called 'a fool' (12:20), which reminds the reader of Psalm 14:1 (cf. Prov. 1:7). This parable tells how the earthly things are unreliable by an allusion to the rich man's sudden death on the very night (12:20).

The parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11-32) also supports the idea that the worldly resources or worldly craftiness are not reliable. As is often acknowledged, this parable and the parable of Unjust Steward are closely connected to each other.⁴⁸⁾ The main characters, the younger son and the unjust steward make

47) Jung Chang Wook, "Ironical Interpretation," 793-827. Fletcher reads the parable as an irony, interpreting shrewdness (v. 9) as "craftiness", "*savoir-faire*", and "worldly wisdom" in a derogatory sense. D. R. Fletcher, "The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?," *JBL* 82:1 (1963), 15-30 [23-29].

48) Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 109; Donahue, *In Parable*, 167-169.

friends with money which they did not earn as a reward for their labour; they squander it (διασκορπίζειν 15:13; 16:1); they improvise their ways of solution to escape from the trouble (15:18-19; 16:4). However, as S.E. Porter well points out, the “welcome reception” that the younger son purchased with money, which is just the same one that “the unjust steward anticipates”, fails⁴⁹⁾ and this shows that this parable maintains the idea of unreliability of worldly resources, i.e., mammon.

The subsequent parable of Dives and Lazarus (16:19-31) is another example. This rich man lived in luxury not caring about Lazarus a beggar, and it implies that he did not care about God (Prov. 19:17; cf. Matt. 25:40). Like a rich fool in Luke 12, this rich man enjoys luxurious foods and clothes too. He is a fool who believes his wealth can promise him a secure and enjoyable life. But this life does not last forever, and his possessions cannot keep him from death and great torment in the fire (16:22-24). Luke shows us that the worldly things are not reliable.⁵⁰⁾

As I examined above, the parable of the Unjust Steward

49) Porter, “Parable of the Unjust Steward,” 138.

50) M. Ball (“The Parable of the Unjust Steward and the Rich Man and Lazarus,” *ExpTim* 106:11 [1995], 329-330) finds a contrast between the steward and the rich man in 16:19; he suggests that the steward is a positive character because he used money for the poor while the rich man is a negative one for he did not use his possessions wisely. Similarly, R. C. Tannehill (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Gospel According to Luke* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986], 247-248) argues that the steward is wise because he, unlike the rich man who stored up harvest for himself, shared the wealth with others. He understands “making friends by means of unjust mammon”(16:9) as “storing up unfailing treasure in heaven”, which refers to the act of charity (Lk. 12:33). However, their arguments are not persuasive. The steward did *not* share *his own* possessions; what did he sacrifice to show mercy on the poor? He is just a fraud who tried to secure his future by sacrificing *other's* possessions.

tells us how foolish it is to think that the worldly things can secure our future. Luke is against this kind of worldly 'give-and-take' business that the master, the steward, and the debtors do. Lukan Jesus clearly states that one should not do this business in Luke 14:12-14. Jesus urges not to invite those who can pay back what they owe; rather, to invite those who cannot repay what they owe such as "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." (14:12-13) This teaching is quite opposite to the way the master, the steward and the debtors pursue. These 'sons of this generation' make a deal with each other to secure what they want relying on mammon. But Jesus clearly shows that he is against this kind of business, and he declares that "one cannot serve both God and mammon" (16:13) as a conclusion of the parable of Unjust Steward.

We need to pay attention to the response of the pharisees to Jesus' teachings. When they heard 'all these' they ridiculed Jesus (v. 14). The phrase 'ταῦτα πάντα' refers not only to the final remarks at verse 13 but also to the parable and the subsequent exhortations (16:1-13).⁵¹⁾ The reason why they scoffed at Jesus is because they did not think Jesus' teaching was right.⁵²⁾ They did not agree with what Jesus taught through the parable and the subsequent exhortation, because they thought it nonsense. Luke refers to them as "lovers of money" (v. 14) and thereby explains why they scoffed at Jesus. The Pharisees serve mammon, and they belong to the sons of this generation.⁵³⁾ Therefore,

51) Cf. Porter ("Parable of the Unjust Steward," 152) notes that verse 13 is the "final message of the parable", but eventually the conclusion of parables of the Prodigal Son and the Unjust Steward.

52) Jung Chang Wook, "Ironical Interpretation," 820-823.

53) For the function of verses 14-18 as revealing the unjust nature of the Pharisees in relation to the surrounding parables of the Unjust Steward and Dives and Lazarus, see Jung Chang Wook, "The Relationship between Two Parables in Luke 16 and 16:14-18," *KENTS* 4 (2005), 102-125.

they think that the master, the steward, and the debtors are all clever. However, Jesus scoffs at their beliefs and behaviours, and he condemns them as mammon worshippers. Jesus warns that they will, although they believe they can get many things, go back with empty hands. This makes the Pharisees the money-lovers feel uncomfortable and sneer at Jesus.

7. Conclusion

This parable is to exhort people not to rely on mammon but to serve God only (16:13). I read the parable in the Greco-Roman cultural context, especially the patron-client and the shame-honour culture, and contended that the master, the steward, and the debtors are portrayed negatively. The master has the power over the other groups of characters, but he is deceived by the steward and is controlled by the debtors and accusers. The steward belongs to the middle part in the power pyramid. He is under the power of the master and above the debtors. However, he deceives the master, and relies on the debtors. The debtors are the weakest amongst them, but they make the master caught in a cleft stick. They get the financial benefits taking advantage of the steward's desperate situation and contribute to the steward's potential reinstatement.

This relationship is built upon the 'give-and-take' mechanism. The debtors pay honour to the master and take the financial profit from him. The master keeps his honour and secures his social status support from the debtors at the cost of his financial loss. The steward gives the debtors a chance to save money by means of his illegal authority and by using *other's* money, and seeks to secure his life in return. All these characters are doing a kind of business with each other, and they are all business partners in this sense.⁵⁴⁾ This is the way how the sons of this

generation survive, and they believe it works.

However, Jesus scoffs at their *savoir-faire* by making a contrast between the ‘houses’ and the ‘eternal tent’ in verses 4 and 9, and thereby denies their way of life. The exhortation in verse 9 may look as if Jesus agrees to what these unjust characters pursue at first glance. However, Jesus is against their way of life as we can see clearly in his teaching on invitation (14:12-14) and concludes that one cannot serve both mammon and God. The parables of the Rich Fool (12:13-21) and Dives and Lazarus (16:19-31) maintain that one should not rely on mammon, which is a foolish thing (12:20). Jesus never teaches to imitate the steward, the master, and the debtors who serve mammon, and that is why the Pharisees the money lovers ridiculed Jesus when they heard this parable and the subsequent comments.

<Keywords>

Irony, parable of Unjust Steward, God and Mammon, Patron-Client, Shame-Honour

<주요어>

아이러니, 불의한 청지기 비유, 하나님과 맘몬, 후견인 제도, 명예와 수치

* Received August 8, 2022, Revised September 2, 2022, Accepted October 8, 2022

54) Song Jinsoo (“The Unjust and Shrewd Steward,” 909-942) understands this relationship positively, which signifies solidarity of the oppressed against the exploitive Roman Empire. Cf. Kim Jae-Sung (“The Parable of the Dishonest Steward and Communication with Neighbors,” *Theological Studies* 69 [2016], 63-85) also reads the business between the steward and the debtors positively, arguing that they are role models who make an ideal community of “friendship and generosity”. See also E. van Eck, “Realism and Method: The Parable of Jesus,” *Neotestamentica* 51:2 (2017), 163-184 [173-182].

Bibliography

- Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, Translated by I. M. N. Rian, Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001.
- Augustine, "Sermon 113, 2," *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21 century*, Part III, vol. 4, Edited by J. E. Rotelle, NY: New City Press, 1992.
- , "Sermon 359A, 10-12," *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21 century*, Part III, vol. 10, Edited by J. E. Rotelle, NY: New City Press, 1995.
- Ball, M., "The Parable of the Unjust Steward and the Rich Man and Lazarus," *ExpTim* 106:11 (1995), 329-330.
- Bailey, K. E., *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant's Eyes*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
- Beavis, M. A., "Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8)," *JBL* 111:1 (1992), 37-54.
- Bowen, C. E., "The Parable of the Unjust Steward Oikos as the Interpretative Key," *ExpTim* 112 (2001), 314-315.
- Bruce, F. F., *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Chrysostom, J., "Homilies on Genesis," *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 74, Translated by R. C. Hill, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986.
- Crossan, J. D., *In Parables*, NY: Harper&Row, 1973.
- Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to S. Luke*, Translated by R. P. Smith, Oxford: University Press, 1859.
- Derrett, J. D. M., "Fresh Light on St. Luke XVI. The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *NTS* 7 (1960-61), 198-219.
- Donahue, J. R., *The Gospel in Parable*, Philadelphia: 1988.

- van Eck, E., "Realism and Method: The Parable of Jesus," *Neotestamentica* 51:2 (2017), 163-184.
- Fitzmyer, J., "The Story of the Dishonest Manager," *TS* 25 (1964), 23-42.
- _____, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, NY: Doubleday, 1985.
- Fletcher, D. R., "The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?" *JBL* 82:1 (1963), 15-30.
- Goodrich, J. "Voluntary Debt Remission and the Parable of the Unjust Steward," *JBL* 82:1 (2012), 547-566.
- Greene, M. D., "The Parable of the Unjust Steward As Question and Challenge," *ExpTim* 112:3 (2000), 82-87.
- Hultgren, A. J., *The Parables of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Ireland, D. J., *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992.
- Jeremias, J., *The Parables of Jesus*, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972.
- Jung, Chang Wook, "Re-examination of the Ironical Interpretation of the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16," *KENTS* 11:4 (2012), 793-823.
- _____, "The Relationship between Two Parables in Luke 16 and 16:14-18," *KENTS* 4 (2005), 102-125.
- Kim, Jae-Sung, "The Parable of the Dishonest Steward and Communication with Neighbors," *TS* 69 (2016), 63-85.
- Kloppenborg, J. S., "The Dishonoured Master (Luke 16,1-8a)," *Bib* 70 (1989), 474-495.
- Landry, D., B. May, "Honor Restored: New Light on the Parable of the Prudent Steward (Luke 16:1-8a)," *JBL* 119:2 (2000), 287-309.
- Lee, Min-Kyu, "A Sociological Study on the Parable of the dishonest Steward (Lk 16:1-8b)," *KNTS* 8:3-4 (2001), 39-62.
- Louw, J.P., E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, NY: UBS, 1988.
- Malina, B. J., J. H. Neyrey, "First-Century Personality: Dyadic, Not Individual," *Modelling Early Christianity*, Edited by P. F. Esler, NY:

- Routledge, 1995, 67-96.
- , “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” *Modelling Early Christianity*, Edited by P. F. Esler, NY: Routledge, 1995, 25-65.
- Malina, B. J., R. L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Malina, B. J., *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*, NY: Routledge, 1996.
- Marulli, L., “‘And How Much Do You Owe...? Take Your Bill, Sit Down Quickly, and Write...’ (Luke 16:5-6),” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63:2 (2012), 199-216.
- Matthewson, D. L., “The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13): A Reexamination of the Traditional View in Light of Recent Challenges,” *JETS* 38:1 (1995), 29-39.
- McFadyen, J. F., “The Parable of the Unjust Steward,” *ExpTim* 37 (1925-26), 535-539.
- Moxnes, H., “Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts,” *Modelling Early Christianity*, Edited by P. F. Esler, NY: Routledge, 1995, 241-268.
- Neyrey, J. H., “Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss of Honour: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q,” *Modelling Early Christianity*, in P. F. Esler, NY: Routledge, 1995, 139-158.
- Min, Kyoung Shik, “Who Praised the Unrighteous Steward? – An Inquiry into the Translation of ‘κῦριος’ in Luke 16:8a,” *Canon&Culture* 1:1 (2007), 235-267.
- Nolland, J., *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Dallas: Word Books, 1993.
- Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 71, Translated by R. E. Heine, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1981.
- Park, Jeongsoo, “Serving God in a World Dominated by Money: A Model of the Unrighteous Agent (Lk 16:1-13),” *Journal of Youngsan*

Theology 47 (2019), 7-37

Porter, S. E., "The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16.1-13): Irony is the Key," *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, Edited by D. J. A. Clines, S. E. Fowl, S. E. Porter, JSOTSup 87, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990, 127-153

Scott, B. B., "A Master's Praise: Luke 16:1-8a," *Bib* 64 (1983), 173-188.

_____, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parable of Jesus*, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.

_____, *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, CA: Polebridge Press, 2001.

Snodgrass, K., *Stories with Intent*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Song Jinsoo, "The Unjust and Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:1-8a)," *KNTS* 26:4 (2019), 909-942.

Stambaugh, J. and D. Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians*, Translated by Cheol-Won Yoon, Seoul: KTSI, 2000.

Tannehill, R. C., *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, vol. 1: The Gospel According to Luke*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Via, D. O., *The Parable: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.

Yoo Tae-Yeab, "Critical Review of Interpretation of the 'Parable of Unjust Steward' (Luke 16:1-13)," *Theology and the World* 83 (2015), 6-34.

<Abstract>

God or Mammon:
A Re-reading of the 'Parable of Unjust Steward'
(Lk. 16:1-8a)

Jayhoon Yang
(Hyupsung University)

The parable of Unjust Steward has often been interpreted as an exhortation about the wise use of money in times of eschatological crisis. This article challenges this traditional view, arguing that the characters of the parable are not positive role models for readers to follow but mammon worshippers (16:13). It examines the parable from the perspective of the patron-client and the shame-honour culture and contends that they are 'the sons of this generation' who are crafty in making a deal with each other for their own interests. It understands that Jesus scoffs at their *savoir-faire*, reading his exhortation at verse 9 as an irony, and teaches that one should not rely on mammon. This reading of the parable is coherent with Luke's views on possessions found in the parables of the Rich Fool, the Prodigal Son, Dives and Lazarus, and his teaching on invitation (Lk. 14:12-14).

<초록>

하나님이나 mammon이나:

다시 읽는 ‘불의한 청지기 비유’(눅 16:1-8a)

양재훈

(협성대학교)

불의한 청지기 비유는 종말론적인 시대에 지혜롭게 재물을 사용하라는 가르침을 주는 비유로 종종 해석되었다. 이 논문은 이러한 전통적인 관점에 의문을 제기하면서 이 비유에 나오는 등장인물들은 독자들이 본받아야 할 긍정적인 모델이 아니라 mammon 숭배자(16:13)에 지나지 않다는 주장을 펼친다. 이 논문은 그레코-로만의 후견인 제도와 명예와 수치의 관점에서 비유를 분석하면서, 이 비유의 등장인물들이 자기의 이득을 위해서 서로 약삭빠르게 거래를 주고받는 데 능숙한 “이 세대의 아들들”이라는 주장을 한다. 이 논문은 9절에 나온 예수의 가르침을 아이러니로 읽음으로써, 이 비유에서 예수께서 이 등장인물들의 처세술(savoir-faire)을 냉소적으로 비웃으시며 mammon을 의지하지 말라고 가르치신다는 해석을 한다. 누가복음에 나오는 어리석은 부자의 비유, 탕자의 비유, 부자와 거지 나사로의 비유에서 견지하는 세계관과 이러한 비유 해석이 일맥상통하며, 특히 초대에 관한 예수의 가르침(눅 14:12-14)이 이러한 해석을 뒷받침해준다.

