

There can be an other-worldly temptation among some Christians, and no doubt others, to dismiss the things of this world as unimportant in the light of our true end in God. This can lead to a care-less attitude to both the material world and other people. Me is my purpose in either case – I can ignore the needs of others as my goal is prayer and fasting in order to save my soul for heaven or I can use the things and people of this world in as greedy a manner as possible because they are essentially of no worth. The difficulty we have with today's passage is that the steward is praised not for his carelessness but for his care to make sure his future on earth is secured. It has the nature of one of the many arguments in the scriptures from the lesser case to the more important one. If a dishonest steward takes such care to look after the material world, and even friendships, to secure his own future then surely we who are concerned with our eternal end in God should take even more care to use money wisely and to win friends. The nature of our task is similar but the ends are not and so too our motivation. The motivation is not greed but a recognition that all is one, that the material world and its people matter to us because they matter to God, indeed God shows his love for the world by sending his only son, that is God's self, to save it, to save us – to show us how meaningful every bit of creation is

*“If you then cannot be trusted with money, that twisted thing .... who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?”*

All is gift including what is our very own – and what is our very own is our kinship with God, our end in God, the love which binds all things together – the greatest gift of all, and we get there through our attention to detail, or better because of God's attention to detail, to a universe in which everything and everyone matters. When we pay attention to the details of our lives, including our relationships to one another, so we are paying attention to God, or rather sharing in God's love for all, or, put more simply, in the one dynamic of love. There's nothing else going on here apart from our inattention to detail. This in its turn could become a huge burden because we are so imperfect as creatures, prone to mistakes, to inattention, especially as we grow older but then our need of God becomes all the more clear, our need that is to share in God's love for us which is inexhaustible, which does not fail, which cannot fail because Christ has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The duty of care of course remains, the duty that is to source this care from God in so far as we are able. St. Robert Bellarmine put it well only the other day

*“Prosperity and adversity, riches and poverty, health and sickness, honour and ignominy, life and death should not be sought after for themselves by the wise.....nor are they to be avoided for themselves: If they contribute to the glory of God and your eternal happiness they are good and to be sought after; if they are obstacles to this then they are evil and to be avoided.*

Of course one can so lose oneself in the detail as to lose sight of the larger picture; perhaps the steward is guilty of that too. All perhaps best summed up in these wonderful words of St. Augustine

*“love and do what you will.”*

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