THE QUESTION

How did early Christians explain making friends with unrighteous mammon (Luke 16:9)?

Asked by a THF member on April 11, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 5 numbered quotations · the 13 early Christian passages and 49 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/how-did-early-christians-explain-making-friends-with-unrighteous-mammon

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Yes. Early Christian writers both quoted Luke 16:9 and explained it. Clement of Alexandria read it as a call to share possessions with people in need, Tertullian said mammon means money, and Cyprian tied the verse to giving alms. Tatian's Gospel harmony also kept the saying in its story.

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POINT 1 OF 5

Clement: wealth kept for oneself is unrighteous

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria quotes Luke 16:9 and explains it. Wealth is called unrighteous, he says, when a person keeps it for himself and does not share it with those in need. Yet that same wealth can do something righteous and saving when it gives rest to one who has an eternal home with the Father.

1

> “And again: "Make friends for yourselves out of the mammon of unrighteousness, so that when it gives out, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." By this He shows that, by nature, every possession a man holds for himself alone — treating it as his own and not laying it out in common for those in need — is unrighteous. Yet out of this very unrighteousness it is possible to do something righteous and saving: to give rest to one of those who has an eternal dwelling with the Father.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 31
(c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 4, page 5 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 2 OF 5

Possessions are needed to help the needy

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement asks whether Jesus wants everyone to give away all they own. He answers that if no one had anything, there could be no sharing, and that would clash with Luke 16:9. No one could feed, clothe or shelter others if he had nothing himself.

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2

“For what fellowship would be left among people if no one had anything? And how would this teaching not plainly be found contradicting and conflicting with many other excellent teachings of the Lord? "Make for yourselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."”

later in the same passage

“How could anyone feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, or take in the homeless — actions for which he threatens fire and the outer darkness on those who fail to do them — if every person were already short of all these things himself?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 13
(c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 5, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 3 OF 5

The saying was kept in the Gospel story

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tatian's Diatessaron, which blends the four Gospels into one story, keeps the saying right after the Lord praises the steward for acting wisely. This shows the verse was copied and passed on, though here it is only repeated, not explained.

3

“And our Lord commended the sinful steward because he had acted wisely; for the children of this world are wiser in their own age than the children of the light. And I also say to you, Make friends for yourselves with the wealth of this unrighteousness, so that when it is exhausted, they may receive you into their tents forever.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 26
(c. 150–180 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 5

Tertullian: mammon here means money

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian quotes the verse and ties it to the steward who made friends by cutting his master's debtors' bills. He says mammon here simply means money, and that the Pharisees understood it that way when they mocked Jesus.

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4

“If you have no interpreter with you, you may learn again from Him what He meant by mammon. For when He advised us to provide for ourselves the help of friends in worldly matters, after the example of that steward who, when removed from his office, relieved his lord's debtors by reducing their debts so that they might repay him with their help, He said, "And I say to you, Make friends for yourselves from the mammon of unrighteousness," that is, from money, just as the steward had done.”

later in the same passage

“Then the Pharisees, who were covetous of riches, mocked Him, because they understood that by mammon He meant money.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 32 (c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 6, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 5 OF 5

Cyprian ties the verse to giving alms

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian, rebuking Christians who held back from giving, says the Lord spoke this teaching about almsgiving. He reads it as a warning to make friends with our earthly wealth through good works, so that they receive us into eternal dwellings. He compares stingy believers to the covetous Pharisees who mocked Jesus (Luke 16:14).

5

“The name Pharisee fits you better. For when the Lord in the Gospel was speaking about giving alms, and faithfully and helpfully warned us to make friends for ourselves by means of our earthly wealth through wise good works, so that they might later receive us into eternal dwellings, Scripture then added and said, "But the Pharisees heard all these things, who were very covetous, and they derided Him."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 10, page 6 Read it in the library ›

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not settle exactly how the "friends" receive people into the eternal dwellings.
- Tatian only repeats the verse in the Gospel story and does not explain it.

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- The passages are examples from a few writers, not a full list of every early Christian comment on Luke 16:9.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 13 early Christian passages and 49 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–13, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 14–16, in Bible order), then 46 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *13 passages from 8 writers*

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 1*

1 *Diatessaron* 26 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "16:9 And I also say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends with the wealth of this unrighteousness… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) "by means of these same do we erect in ourselves the tabernacle of God: for God dwells in those who act uprightly, as the Lord says: "Make to yourselves friends… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* "the saying "You cannot serve two masters" is explained by Him: "You cannot serve God and mammon," recognizing God as God but mentioning mammon as something that exists. He does… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 31 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "again, Make to you friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 13 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 3** "to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when you fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 6–8*

6 *Against Marcion* 32 **Quote 4, page 4** "13, because while one is pleased, the other must necessarily be displeased. He mentions God and mammon. If you have no interpreter with you, you may learn again from Him… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On Patience* 7 (1885 English; on point 4) "shall we fashion to us friends from mammon, Luke 16:9 if we love it so much as not to put up with its loss… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *De Fuga in Persecutione* 13 (1885 English; on point 4) "how we are to understand, Make to yourselves friends of mammon, let the previous parable teach you… [continues online] **read ›**

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Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 9*

9 *Commentary on John* 10 “are there not those who prefer the mammon of unrighteousness to… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “when in the Gospel the Lord was discoursing concerning almsgiving, and faithfully and wholesomely warned us to make to ourselves friends of our earthly lucre by provident good works, who… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 5) “if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? Luke 16:11-12… [continues online] **read ›**

Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · source 12*

12 *From the Discourse on the Resurrection* “is not made with hands. As the Lord also showed when He said, “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when you fail, they may receive you… [continues online] **read ›**

Peter of Alexandria, *c. 300–311 AD · source 13*

13 *Genuine Acts of Peter* “with hands. As the Lord also showed when He said, "Make for yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, so that when you fail, they may receive you… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *3 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

14 **Luke 16:9** And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when you fail, they may receive you into the eternal tents. **read ›**

15 **Luke 16:13** No household slave can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and mammon.” **read ›**

16 **Luke 16:14** The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they scoffed at him. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *46 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Exodus 4:22

Psalms 2:8

Isaiah 40:3

Jeremiah 17:10

Matthew 5:40 · 5:42 · 6:19 · 10:39 · 10:41 · 11:11 · 18:10 · 21:43

Luke 3:11 · 5:29 · 6:29 · 12:32 · 16:11 · 16:12 · 16:15 · 16:16 · 16:17 · 19:9

John 2:12 · 2:13 · 2:14 · 2:16 · 4:21 · 4:40 · 4:45 · 5:19 · 8:38 · 8:44 · 11:48 · 13:4 · 19:23

Acts 16:3

1 Corinthians 15:42 · 15:50

2 Corinthians 5:1 · 5:2 · 5:4 · 5:7

1 Timothy 5:10 · 6:10 · 6:20

1 John 5:19

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “How did early Christians explain making friends with unrighteous mammon (Luke 16:9)?” on April 11, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY