



Hard Sayings of Jesus

Lesson 10: Be Like Snakes!

Opening Prayer

Introduction – What it CAN'T mean to live as a snake.

1.) What do the following passages teach us about how Christians are called to conduct themselves?

2 Corinthians 4:2 We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Matthew 5:37 "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

2 Corinthians 1:12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

Colossians 3:9,10 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Studying God's Word

Christians are to be characterized by *truth*. We don't follow opinions or the changing tides of society, but the truth of God's Word. And we're to live by the truth, as we speak plainly and honestly. Deceit doesn't have a place in a Christian's words or actions. So what does Jesus mean when he calls us to be as shrewd as snakes: **Matthew 10:16-18** "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles."

1. How would you define shrewdness? Looking at the context of the passage, why would the disciples need this characteristic/trait?

2. Why might shrewdness in the likeness of a snake lead Christians to struggle with these words?

3. Consider the following godly examples. How do you see shrewdness displayed in each?

1 Kings 3:16ff (Solomon's judgment to find out the true mother)

Luke 24:15,16,28 As [the two disciples on the way to Emmaus] talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.

Proverbs 9:8 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

4. Being shrewd—crafty, even—is not out of place for the Christian. However, what reminder does Jesus give us as he calls us to live this way?
5. Agree or disagree (and why?): All deception is sinful.
6. List some circumstances from your own experience where the church or individual Christians have needed to be particularly shrewd.

Luke 16:1-9 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' ³ The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' ⁷ Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

7. Summarize Jesus' parable. In what way does he call us to be like the shrewd manager? (And what *isn't* the point of comparison?!)

8. There are some translation difficulties in verse 9. This seems to be the best way to translate Jesus' words: "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings." What, then, is Jesus' point?

9. List some ways you can put this shrewdness into practice.

Summary

- Christians are to exercise shrewdness as we deal with the people of this world.
- Being aggressively crafty does *not* mean Christians have a license to sin.
- Exercising shrewdness is all the more important because of the precious goals we are pursuing: the salvation of other souls.

Prayer