

Shrewd and innocent

In sending out the Twelve, Jesus said to them, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.*"(MAT10:16) Jesus was compare two unlike things to instruct His disciples the right attitude to practice during their ministry and evangelism in the midst of wicked people who shall stand against preaching the power of truth in the gospel. Just before He warns them that they were being sent out "*like lambs among wolves.*"(LUK10:3) Jesus choosing and sending forth His disciples into the towns, villages and to the ends of the earth to preach the gospel of the kingdom and performing miracles. In commissioning his disciples, Jesus' guidelines for trials and persecution in the midst of hostile world that they will face. The world, then as now, was hostile to believers. Wolves are intentional about the harm they inflict upon sheep. In such an environment, question becomes: How can we advance the kingdom of God effectively without becoming predatory ourselves? Jesus taught His followers that, to be Christlike in a crooked world, they must combine the wise of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. Jesus invokes the common view of serpents and doves. The serpent was "subtle" or "crafty" or "shrewd"(GEN3:1) The dove, on the other hand, was thought of as innocent and harmless—doves were listed among the "clean animals" and were used for sacrifices.(LEV14:22) And doves are used as symbols of peace, purity, simplicity and snakes are thought of as "sneaky."

When Jesus sends disciples to bear witness to him in the world, he does send them like vulnerable (weak, defenseless) sheep among hostile wolves. But the key to being effective is not to be sheepish. As they were going to the enemy's area to gather the Lord's harvest they needed to find ways to give faithful witness in a way that does not bring down unnecessary persecution. They were to avoid all things which gave advantage to their enemies, by interfering with worldly or political concerns. Jesus foretold troubles, that worst can meet with in His service. He means that disciples will be treated the way wolves treat sheep. He laid down a general principle about the system of kingdom work. As we take the gospel to a hostile world, we must be wise(avoiding the snares set for us) and we must be innocent(serving the Lord blamelessly). Shrewdness is a virtue the disciples should cultivate but when misused it become guile. Jesus simply tells us the necessity of shrewdness and innocence as they represented Him. Let us boldly confess Christ, and show love to him in all things.

The disciples of Christ are hated and persecuted and their ruin is sought, he is constantly in situations where he must deal with others and respond to unexpected questions, circumstances, and attacks. If he does not know how to handle for himself, he will discredit himself quickly, and the "wolves" will make inclined of him. Prudence, alert, grace, discernment in interacting with others and in managing stressful situations and they need the serpent's shrewdness. So, cautious care there must be, but not an anxious, or confusing thought; and let this burden be cast upon God. The disciples of Christ must think more how to do well, than how to speak well.(LUK21:15) In case of great threat, they may go out of the way of danger, though they must not go out of the way of duty. No sinful, unlawful means may be used to escape; for then it is not a door of God's opening. The fear of man brings a snare, that disturbs our peace; an entangling snare, by which we are drawn into sin; therefore, it must be endeavor and prayed for. Tribulation, distress, persecution cannot take away God's love. *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*(MAT10:28) They must deliver the message, for all should deeply concerned in the doctrine of the gospel. The whole counsel of God must be preached. So, go among wolves and be vulnerable as you preach the gospel, but when they dive at you, step aside. When they open their mouths, don't jump in. And don't give them any legitimate reason to accuse you of injustice or immorality. *But He walked right through their midst and went on His way.*(LUK4:30)

Sheep, Wolves, Snakes, and Doves: "I send you out" The "I" here is emphatic, holding up Himself as the fountain of the Gospel ministry, since "all authority" belongs to Jesus, he might intervene and shut the mouths of the wolves, like he did the mouths of the lions that surrounded.(DAN6:22) He is also have Great Burden of it. Jesus compares disciples to "sheep", because they were meek and humble in their spirits, and harmless. And their conversations; were weak, unable to protect themselves. They were sent out by Him unarmed and defenseless; and their oppressors and persecutors to "wolves", a terrible beast of prey known for its appetite, fierceness, cruel, hurtful, as these creatures are, especially to sheep. In the presence of wolves, sheep are in great peril because they have, in themselves, no effective means of defense.

We want to get this in the right order—do not be wise as doves and harmless as serpents! Because doves are not known for being wise, "*Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless.*"(HOS7:11) and serpents are not known for being harmless. Serpent is a most crafty creature; therefore, devil made use of the serpent to deceive men. *that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.*(REV12:9) The serpent is a deceitful creature, it is full of poison. The serpent stops her ear, it is obstinate deafness.(PSA58:4) Do not be deceived by the devil, God is good all the time. *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve.*(2CO11:3,14) Beguiled means misled, deceived, and manipulated.

Paul warns the elders that grievous wolves are coming from without and from within,(ACT20:29) His plea for the elders to keep a vigilant watch over God's blood-bought flock. He fought tirelessly against the infiltration of false teachers. Now, there is an antichrist spirit that has now infiltrated and seeped into every part of our society, from our schools, courts, and now into every part of our media. The battle lines are now being drawn. The dark side is getting stronger with what they are able to get away with—with all of it eventually leading up to a real live antichrist who will be ruling this entire world. Now, more than ever, God is looking to raise up spiritual warriors who will not be afraid to stand up and resist against the Devil. We need to heed Jesus' instruction in order to keep the sheep out of trouble. Detect and avoid danger, while giving no provocation, offense or irritate. Be wise and harmless always. A believer's choice is to believe God and maintain sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Successful Christian living required that we strive optimal balance between dove and serpent.

How can I be wise as serpent?

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Snakes are very sharp sighted, cunning creature pros for especially in the quickness of its perception of danger and the rapidity with which it escapes from it. Their most common form of self-protection is avoidance. A snake's first line of defense is to escape to safety among rocks or vegetation. Snakes have to be alert to dangers. Snakes display a unique combination of defensive mechanisms and survival strategies. Most of the snake relies on camouflage (hiding) or fleeing from predators as a first point line of defense. Most snakes are not aggressive. Snakes do not want to attack humans. Snakes bite humans only in self-defense. They would rather not confront us. The serpent was typical of shrewdness, is that of keen observation and cleverness both in avoiding its enemies and catching its prey. Therefore, to be "wise as serpents" refers to the ability of the disciples to avoid unnecessary conflict with the "wolves," and if such conflict occurs, should know how to handle the situation in a way that minimizes the ability of the "wolves" to succeed in an attack.

To be wise means to be marked by understanding of people and situations, to have keen and unusual discernment, and a capacity for sound judgment in dealing with people and situations. To discern means to detect with the eyes and with senses. It also means to read character or motives. We would all do well to have this ability. The word "wise" refers to practical wisdom, prudence, cleverness and discernment. One who is "wise," is a person who shows presence of mind and has the understanding and sound judgment necessary to act prudently. For example, *the wise are those who know when to hold their peace.* (PRO11:12;17:28) *the wise hear reproof* (PRO17:10;19:25); A synonym for wise is prudent. *A prudent man conceals knowledge.* (PRO12:23) *"A prudent man foresees evil and take refuge; but the simple keep going and suffer for it.* (PRO27:12) *The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways*" (PRO14:8) In place of "wise," other translations use "shrewd" and "wary." Shrewd means to be practical and to be given to an artful way of dealing with situations and people. To be wary means cautious and watchful in detecting and escaping danger. So that we can be as wise as serpents by avoiding danger and escaping from it! Jesus' disciples should not invite or provoke attacks from their enemies, but behave in such a fashion that frustrates the designs of the wicked against them. (EPH5:15-17;COL4:5)

Harmless as doves: The mission of serving Christ in the world also requires disciples to be "harmless as doves" Harmless; rather, simple, "unmixed, unadulterated" and emphasizes the simplicity of character. (SOS2:14) The dove is an excellent creature. It was so acceptable that, in the old law, God would have the dove offered in sacrifice. The Holy Spirit, when He would appear in a visible shape, assumed the likeness of a dove. We should be as doves in three respects: (1) In respect of meekness; (2) In respect of innocence; (3) In respect of purity. It expresses the need to be above reproach in both conduct and speech. It tells the disciples to have pure intentions, it is a characteristic of those with integrity. Disciples must be clever and shrewd in dealing with their cunning wolf-like adversaries, but they must never stoop to the ethics of their enemies. They must be free from guile and evil. Sin in the life and speech of the disciple gives his foes an easy opening to discredit and counteract his witness. The word "harmless" means, literally, "unmixed," and was used to refer to such things as pure gold. The dove is symbolic of purity, faithfulness, and guilelessness. (ROM16:19;PHI2:15)

Doves evoke a sense of peace and gentleness. To be harmless as doves requires us to relate to our community with a gentle and humble spirit that displays respect. We are to respect people as God's image bearers. We are called to listen and discover another person's worldview with respect. Harmless as doves also relates to purity, innocence, and simplicity that can relate to our motives. In one sense, Christ's disciples want to see all come to faith in Christ. Help people discover the reality of the transforming life of Christ, and the value of abundant eternal life that is available today. We should continue to display love and compassion because that is what Christ has called us to do. If our motive is pure, to display God's love to our neighbors where we live, work, study, and play, then we will be more likely to display love and respect.

There are ways to be both wise as serpents and harmless as doves. To be wise and innocent consists to be sensible of an injury—yet not revenge or bitterness. He is so wise that he knows when an injury is done him—but so holy that he knows how to pass it by. This is a most excellent temper of soul. The mixing of wisdom and innocence is seen in this: to be humble. Humility is part of the dove's innocence. "Be clothed with humility." (1PE5:5) A gracious soul has low thoughts of himself, and carries himself lowly toward others. A godly man is so humble as to oblige others—but not unworthy as to disobey God. Paul had lived a life with good conscience before God and men. He has become "all things to all people" in order to save some by leading them to faith in Christ. (1COR9:20) *"but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."* (ROM16:19) Bible exhorts us to wisdom in practice of what is good and pleasing to the Lord. God wants everyone to grow to maturity in the Lord. We must seek in doing what is good. Let us continually ask God to bring us to repentance and to establish our hearts with the desire and understanding needed to do what He seeks from us.

The three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace were humble; they gave the king his title of honor—but they were not basely fearful. *"Be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods!"* (DAN3:18) Though they showed reverence to the king's person—yet no reverence to the idol he had set up for worship. A godly Christian will not do anything below himself—nor ever cater to men's lusts. The prudence is seen in this: to reprove the sin—yet love the person. We are commanded to reprove, (LEV19:17), *'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly—so you will not share in his guilt.* but the sword of reproof is a dangerous weapon, if it is not well-handled. To reprove and yet love is to act both the serpent and the dove. Christians should be free from guile, evil deception, corruption. scandal etc. Christians should avoid inviting or provoking unnecessary conflict with their enemies. However, fear of conflict should not be allowed to paralyze the Christian into idleness and compromise. When you are ill-treated publicly, you must conduct yourselves with calm faith with patience and endurance in avoiding unnecessary danger. These instructions are wonderful and balanced of prudence and purity. *"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life"* (PRO4:23)

Who then is a wise and faithful servant?

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Christ's directive to us that we become "wise and harmless " implies that we must develop skill in discernment, the ability to detect motivation and the spirits, quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is doubtful. The gift of discerning the spirits become important as we approach the end of this age because deception will be extremely dangerous times. We have warfare with enemies that cannot be won by conventional weapons. The weapons we must seek should be spiritual, having power to destroy arguments and every false claim that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.(2CO10:3-5) In Mat 10:19, promise is that the Holy Spirit will help us in most frightening settings and He will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say. God will be there to give you what you need. God calls us to speak for Him, we may depend/trust on Him to teach us what to say. Strength shall be according to the day; it is encouragement to those who are doing God's ministry. *Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*(PHI2:14)

This union of the *dove* and the *serpent* is hard to find. Faithful, there is the dove; wise, there is the serpent. If one would seek for a faithful man, no doubt, he may find many. If one would seek for a wise man, he may find many. But, if he seeks men for one both wise and faithful—it is possible, though not common. The most instance was in Jesus sets the example. Let us consider Jesus: The Lord was known as a gentle person. But was He always (and only) gentle? When the occasion demanded it, He took whip in hand and chased the moneychangers out of the temple.(JOH2:15). Jesus demonstrates the power of using a combination of dove-like Man of Innocence spoke loudly, clearly with His assertiveness in the temple.

When the Jews came to Jesus with an ensnaring question.(MAR12:14,17) *"Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?"* He answered wisely, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's—and to God the things that are God's."* Do not deny Caesar his civil right—nor God His religious worship. Let your loyalty be mixed with virtue. Here He showed the wisdom and innocence? *"There was no deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again"*(1PE2:22) He opened His mouth in praying for His enemies—but not in reviling them. He did not seek to provoke conflicts with them. If opposition to his ministry became too intense, he would leave the area for a time. He knew how to answer their attacks and at the same time expose their folly. A classic example of how Christ dealt with the cunning, crafty leaders is found in.(MAT21:23-22:46) Furthermore, Jesus understood that the “wolves” that sought his downfall were the religious leaders and not the common people.(MAR12:37) By ministering to the needs of the people, he won their trust, and on various occasions, the support of the people protected Jesus from who were intent on destroying him. Jesus was pure as a dove. He could challenge his enemies, *"Which of you can prove Me guilty of sin?"*(JOH8:46) and they were speechless. Those who hated him could never find anything in his life to discredit him. He lived a pure and holy life. He refused to be caught in the many traps that His enemies laid for Him.(MAR8:11) Pilate judged Jesus to be an innocent man.(JOH18:38;19:4,6)

Moses was a man "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,"(ACT7:22) There was the wisdom of the serpent. And he was the meekest man alive. *"Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."* There was the innocence of the dove. Miriam murmured against him,(NUM 12:2) Moses was so wise as to discern her pride and denial of him—yet so meek as to bury the injury. When God struck her with leprosy, he prayed for her.

Daniel was an excellent person.(DAN5:14), *Excellent wisdom is found in you.* There was the prudence of the serpent. (DAN6:4) "They began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling his affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize. He was faithful and honest and always responsible." Behold, here, the innocence of the dove.

Joseph. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him but Joseph ran out of the house, refusing her advances. here, the purity of the dove and wise as serpent. *How then could I do such a wicked and sin against God?*(GEN39:5-9) Egypt was faced with a grave national crisis. The need of the hour was for a wise and resourceful man who could provide the solutions to the problem. Joseph was chosen because he had a practical plan to meet the crisis. Pharaoh appointed him to be governor over all the land, even though he was a Hebrew and a slave! Pharaoh said, *there is no one as discerning and wise as you.*

Paul, The apostle Paul also modeled this "When Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were all my ancestors!"(ACT23:6) By this speech, Paul got all the Pharisees on his side. He lived in good conscience before God.(ACT23:1) learned to deny his carnal desires so as not to risk his ministry. *"A man's wisdom gives him patience;*(PRO19:11) How lovely is this union of the dove and serpent!

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.(JAM3:13,17) The Scripture joins these two together—meekness and wisdom. Wisdom—there is the serpent; Meekness—there is the dove. We must have innocence with our wisdom—else our wisdom is but craftiness. And we must have wisdom with our innocence—else our innocence is but weakness. We must have the innocence—that we may not harm others. We must have the wisdom—that others may not harm or deceive us. In short, innocence without wisdom is too weak to be safe. Wisdom without innocence is too subtle. When wisdom and innocence appear together, they preview the soul's happiness. A truly wise person will demonstrate the humility of wisdom whose faith in God leads to good works. The true test of God's kind of wisdom is a life well lived, a life spent doing good works for others. Without setting ourselves aside to serve others, we cannot hope to become wise servants God has called us to be. The result is first pure, then peace, gentleness, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere, that follow from living by Heavenly Wisdom. Heavenly Father, I take heed to Jesus' instructions to be as wise as a serpent when serving new area for Kingdom of God. Lord, I ask You to show me Your ways and grant me a wise and understanding heart. Teach me how to walk in accurate discernment. I want to finish assignment You've given me, so I am willing to move slow and steady to avoid harmful mistakes. Thank You for giving me wisdom and innocence I need for each venture. Amen.