

The One Trait Characterizing Satan that Believers Should Cultivate and Exercise

Those who tread among serpents, and along a tortuous path, must use the cunning of the serpent.

—Thomas Becket (<https://bit.ly/3GIPLug>) —

Key point: Christians have concerned themselves with being innocent and harmless for far too long and neglected the need to be shrewd and wise. Being shrewd is just as important as being innocent. As Jesus' followers, let us therefore be both, for God's glory.

Genesis 3:1 states, "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"'" The Hebrew word translated *cunning* in the NKJV appears a total of 11 times (<https://bit.ly/3IIEJrH>) in the Old Testament. It is rendered *cunning* only in Genesis 3:1 and *crafty* in two other places (see Job 5:12; 15:5). Interestingly, in each of the remaining eight instances the word appears, it is translated *prudent*. We find all of these in Proverbs.

1. "A fool's wrath is known at once
But a prudent man covers shame"
(12:16).
2. "A prudent man conceals knowledge,
But the heart of fools proclaims foolishness"
(12:23). In the Christian Standard Bible (CSB),
the word is translated *shrewd*: "A shrewd
person conceals knowledge, but a foolish
heart publicizes stupidity."
3. "Every prudent man acts with knowledge,
But a fool lays open his folly" (13:16).
4. "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand
his way,
But the folly of fools is deceit"
(14:8).
5. "The simple believes every word,
But the prudent considers well his steps"
(14:15).
6. "The simple inherit folly,
But the prudent are crowned with
knowledge" (14:18).
7. "A prudent man foresees evil and hides
himself,
But the simple pass on and are punished"
(22:3).
8. "A prudent man foresees evil and hides
himself;
The simple pass on and are punished" (27:12;
here, obviously, the proverb we see in 22:3 is
repeated).

These verses from Proverbs demonstrate that shrewdness, sensibility, and discernment are traits to be desired and cultivated by godly people. Therefore, a wise individual can and does honor God by being shrewd. This can mean being silent in certain situations (see item 2 above), but it doesn't always. It necessarily means choosing wisely when to speak and what to say—and what action or actions to take. In this sense wisdom is not benign, but a catalyst for righteousness.

Consider the fifth item in the list of verses above, Proverbs 14:15: "The simple believes every word, But the prudent considers well his steps."

Oh, if only Eve had been prudent! If only she had been wise! Yes, she was inexperienced, but relying on God, she could have avoided failure when tempted by the serpent.

No wonder Jesus commended the shrewdness, though not the deceitfulness, of the unjust servant in Luke 16:1-8. No wonder He warned His followers that "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (v. 8). And no wonder He also warned and advised them, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

Do you desire to be shrewd for God's glory? Seek wisdom (see Prov. 8:1-36), and pray that you will have and exercise this important attribute!

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture passages have been taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

One Scripture passage has been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

This edition of this article is copyright © 2019 by B. Nathaniel Sullivan, author of the article. All rights reserved.

This article is available online at <https://www.wordfoundations.com/2019/04/13/shrewd/>.

In its original form it cites the Holman Christian Standard Bible and appears at <https://sundayschoolzone.com/cunning/>.