

# HOW “SHREWD” ARE WE?

by Carl McMurray

Let me encourage you to read Lk. 16:1-8. Luke records an interesting parable there of a steward who is about to lose his job. He prepares for unemployment by calling in his master's debtors and marking their bills down while he still has the authority to “work on the books”. His plan is that they will feel kindly toward him and help him when he has nowhere to go, so that he will not have to beg. Evidently his master discovers the plan, but instead of being angry that this steward is cheating him - he praises his wisdom. In v. 8, Jesus says, “the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.” His point is well taken. Self-preservation is an excellent motive for “figuring the angles”, making efficient plans for the future and acting wisely. Frankly I'm a little amazed sometimes at how little thought we put into some of our activities. I have to think that Jesus' point here is still a good point for our consideration because sometimes we show little wisdom in our efforts as the stewards of the gospel. For example...

If the “sons of this age” have a product that they wish to put before the people, they don't sit it on a shelf somewhere and wait for people to come and find it. They realize that there are many similar products that people will settle for, even if they're inferior, if they don't know about this particular brand and its advantages. In order to get its product to the people, most companies choose to advertise. The kingdom of God has a superior product to offer. Satan is pushing inferior brands with all his might and some churches are sitting on their hands waiting for people to come in and take it off the shelf. Rarely does this happen and when it does it's always a shock. We need to advertise! I'm talking about putting the product out before the people and showing that it is superior. I'm speaking of public comparisons. I'm talking about radio, newspaper, television, renting rooms and drawing attention. Can we afford to allow a business pushing dish soap or garbage bags to be wiser than ourselves offering eternal salvation? People need to know what we've got, and that means we must open our mouth, somehow, and tell them.

Have you noticed that we haven't made cars “one at a time” for many years now? Have you read where robotics are replacing human hands on some assembly lines? Have you paid attention during the last couple years as a couple of car companies started selling cars at a set price, without any price dickering, like other merchandise? What's my point? As needs and desires change, methods should and do change - that only makes sense. In the church however, we sometimes refuse to see that. I'm not opposed at all to gospel meetings, but what is our point? What are we trying to accomplish with our meetings? We are not having rural “brush-arbor” meetings anymore. We are competing with TV, movies, sports, vacations and school activities. If we're not accomplishing our goal (whatever that is!) we need to adjust and change. Is it wisdom to spend large amounts of money in 2 week long meetings every year that so many members won't even attend, just because that is what we've always done? If the meetings aren't doing what we want to do, let's change our methods. If our Bible classes are not getting the job done, let's get involved and adjust them. Worldly men selling cars show more wisdom than Christians sometimes who settle into “ruts” of ineffective activity. Weekend meetings, special meetings on specific topics, evangelistic efforts, updated curriculums, using “assembly times” for other meetings and studies...these ideas and more are available and being used by some congregations to keep their overall teaching program effective.

And while we're on the subject of teaching - have you visited a classroom at your local public school lately. The walls are absolutely covered with pictures, charts, graphs, articles and teaching aids - things the students are doing and things that they are learning, visual effects to help the kids learn and stay interested in their efforts at learning. Take another look at the Master teacher. Jesus used illustrations, parables, O.T. references, visual aids, etc., to make His points. People of the world show more wisdom than some of us. We ought to use bulletin boards, charts, time lines, pictures, chalk boards, white boards, games, video recorders and monitors...any illustration or visual aid that will help teach the

lesson that we can lay our hands on. We ought to be embarrassed that in so many Bible classrooms around the country there is taped up around the ceiling a faded, construction paper choo-choo train (or something else like it) with the books of the Bible on it that hasn't been touched in 10-20 years! If our children were taught in public schools using 20 year old illustrations and lab equipment, we'd be raising the roof. Can we show that same wisdom in our classes.

Space prohibits us from discussing our lack of wisdom sometimes in dividing churches instead of reaching out to a lost world with greater effort; or in planning for and encouraging effective leadership instead of just waiting around till someone is 50 years old and then asking him if he wants to be an elder. There are many areas of service in the kingdom that we just don't give enough thought to. We make decisions based upon "what we've always done", rather than upon "what's best for the present situation?" or "What's best for all concerned?" Let's not allow the world to show more wisdom in carnal pursuits than we do in spiritual things. Let's listen for instructions from the Lord, put our heads together in prayer, give due consideration, and then launch into every work with the best effort we can muster. God will reward those efforts.