

The Subversive Jesus: Shrewdness

STUDY AIDS

1. Definitions.

Shrewd 1. Characterized by keen awareness, sharp intelligence, and often a sense of the practical. 2. Disposed to artful and cunning practices; tricky.

Steward The manager in this story is a Steward. In the ancient world, the very wealthy employed stewards to manage their assets. Stewards were paid on commission and were authorized to execute business on behalf of the master.

2. Interpretations.

There are three main camps among theologians as to how the manager reduces the debtors' bills:

1. The Traditional View: He wields his authority as steward and simply lowers the prices.
2. The Interest View: He removes the interest charges from the debts, following Mosaic law. The differing rates of reduction seem to be against this view (unless there are different interest rates for different materials).
3. The Commission View: He removes his own commission, so what he sacrifices is his own money, not that of his master. Differing rates would make sense here as oil and wheat differ in value by volume.

3. IVP New Testament Commentary

I favor the commission view because I find it hardly credible for the master to commend a steward who has just cheated him. If the reductions are dishonest price cuts, they constitute further injustice against the master beyond the steward's earlier squandering. If so, the master now has two charges against the steward: ineptitude followed by dishonesty. The traditional view hardly allows the steward to gain credibility and respect. Another problem is that Jesus himself praises the steward's actions in his subsequent remarks. Would he really commend such immoral behavior?

It is better to see that the previously dishonest steward learns something by his failure and comes up with a generous solution, one that can be commended. In my view, the master commends his formerly dishonest steward for a shrewd solution. **The steward has sacrificed what he could have taken now and has given it to others so that he can receive gain later.** The implicit moral about perspective in the use of resources is exactly the application Jesus makes in verse 9.

Jesus' applications extend in various directions. First he notes that people of the world are more shrewd than *the people of the light* (the disciples) are. **People of this world think about how they use their resources. Even if they misuse them, they still give it thought. They think about the long-term benefits of what they acquire.** Disciples should apply themselves to honor and serve God by their use of resources. They should think through their actions, both short and long term.