



## Proverbs Daily Justice

We are going back to Proverbs 2 today.

As we grow to know God, we become more familiar with His character. And as we worship Him over a lifetime, we become more like Him.

Some of what God is like we never become. We never become omnipotent (all powerful) or omniscient (all knowing.) Those are incommunicable attributes of God - things we never get. We'll never rule over the universe or reach a god-like state in that regard.

But other attributes of God are communicable and do become ours in increasing measure as we live by faith. God is perfectly pure, and we grow in our practical purity. God is perfectly true, and we grow in truthfulness. We don't reach his level of perfection and we still fall short in many ways, but if we know God, we are on a long road to becoming like Him in character. **We become like the God we worship.**

And one of the attributes of God that we do slowly take on is that God is a just God and is making us into just people.

**Deuteronomy 32:4 [4] "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.**

**Psalm 33:4–5 [4] For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. [5] He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.**

**Deuteronomy 10:17–18 [17] For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. [18] He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.**

And we are made in God's image, so his requirement for us is that we do justice:

## **Proverbs 21:3 - To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.**

So doing righteousness and justice - two almost interchangeable concepts in scripture - are more acceptable to God than any sacrifice we could make. So today we'll talk about what it means that we do justice in the book of Proverbs, and where we get the strength to carry it out.

It might be easy to tune this out if we think that justice is just what happens in court. If that's all it is, most of us spend very little time in the court system over the course of our lives, so this won't often apply to us. Also, justice is one of those terms co-opted by the culture around us and redefined, so we might think that justice is everything we are told it is within the social justice movement, or just something that activists do. (Some of that is justice, some of it isn't.)

Doing justice, or doing righteousness, in the Bible and Proverbs specifically is actually for all of us.

CS Lewis is helpful here. He says that *"Justice means much more than the sort of thing that goes on in law courts. It is the old name for everything we should now call 'fairness'; it includes honesty, give and take, truthfulness, [and] keeping promises."*<sup>1</sup>

What we think of as "fairness" sums up a lot of what Proverbs says about justice. Not everything - there's more to it than that - and we'll show how Proverbs says there is more to it.

But when we think of justice mainly as "fairness" - then we see how it applies to all of us.

Parents have to act in fairness with their children, friends have to be fair with each other, managers have to be fair with employees, we have to be fair when we're helping people sort out conflict, elders and spiritual leaders have to apply the principles of justice and fairness, and we want to be part of a society that is fair and just.

So we'll start with the Proverbs that talk about justice as fairness, and then

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Touchstone: New York, 1996, pp. 75

we'll look at the ones that show that it's more than that, and then how we can get the strength to do justly.

### **1) We are called to fairness in our dealings:**

**Proverbs 11:1 [1] A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.**

So someone in their day would go to the marketplace to buy some grain to make bread for their family. And the way they determined the price was by weighing it, like at the bulk section at Wegmans. So they would weigh it, and pay accordingly.

And it says that God hates a false balance. Because they used balances where they put stones of a certain weight on one side and the grain on the other, it would be easy to have stones that were marked as weighing a "pound" but had some shaved off so they only weighed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a pound, but the buyer would have to pay what the weight said. So maybe a merchant would have one stone for his friends and another for his enemies. Different stones, different weights, a double standard. And Proverbs 11:1 says that kind of dealing is an abomination, a hateful thing to God. He echoes what he says in Micah 6:11:

**Micah 6:11 [11] Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?**

God is very concerned about that practice. He hates a false balance, and delights in a just weight. God loves true and accurate measures. God cannot lie, God is true, and He wants those who are made in His image to be true like He is.

The principal here is that God's people should not rip people off. They shouldn't deceive others to gain for themselves. They shouldn't have two sets of standards. They should tell the truth. If the stone says "1 pound" ("0.8 mina"), then that was what it should weigh.

And this is how we want to be treated. We just take for granted that the scales at Wegmans are accurate, that the meter on the gas pump is accurate, that the odometer on the car we buy is accurate.

And we can often take it for granted because of the effect that widespread Christianity has had on our thinking in our country. (There are cultures where it is considered a positive good to rip people off. If you are the shrewd one who deceived with a dishonest set of weights, well-played!) If people deceive to rip someone off in places that have historically been influenced by the Gospel, they may very well brag to some equally unjust friends, but society as a whole would frown upon it.

I knew of a car dealer in the 80s who bragged about clocking back odometers on the cars he sold to rip people off. And you can always find unjust people to applaud your shadiness. But society as a whole still says, "That's bad." And society says that because of influence by God's moral law.

I once knew of a pastor who I knew had a bachelor's degree, but almost overnight started calling himself "doctor." And sure enough, he had a doctor's degree now. But when he described what he had to do to earn it, he described the work load of a typical 3 credit hour class in a Master's program. He had earned a doctorate from a degree mill - why? Maybe to get a raise from his church. Maybe to gain unearned clout and faux credibility. Meanwhile others take many years of intense study to earn a degree by the same name. It was an unjust weight or measure - a way of gaining by deceiving.

*Doing justice and righteousness means we don't try to gain for ourselves by deceiving others. God really cares that we don't rip people off or gain from another's losing. And God delights in it when we are true.*

We don't have a just weight and an unjust weight to use if we need it. We don't have double standards.

And maybe you're not clocking back odometers or recalibrating the scales at your grocery store. Maybe you don't want false degrees and a false reputation. Maybe you don't rip people off.

But when Jesus talked about justice in how we measure, he applied this idea in a surprising way - He applied it to how we assess people - how we measure others:

**Matthew 7:1–5 [1] "Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the**

**judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.**

Jesus took this concept - one set of stones - one set of weights, and he applied it to how we assess others and ourselves.

And while we may not rip people off in the marketplace, according to this standard of living justly, we use false weights and measures all the time.

If you do something evil, I assess you one way. But if I do the same evil, I give myself a break. I have my reasons. I mean well. But that's just having two sets of weights.

We judge others by a standard we aren't keeping. We want justice for you but mercy for me. No patience with you, but I cut myself some slack. I want you to be punished but me to be forgiven. I want to assume the worst about you, but I want you to give me the benefit of the doubt. I want to hold you to a standard that I could never meet.

Or, I expect love and concern from you when I'm going through a hard time. But when you go through a hard time, I don't give the kind of effort I expect from you.

We tend not to weigh ourselves fairly. We step on the bathroom scale, we don't like what we see, so we press down on the towel rack a little bit to make that measure a little bit better. (Don't say you haven't done that. "I'm doing pretty well, I can have the cheesecake.") We do that for ourselves when we assess our own morality all the time.

We have two sets of weights. One to weigh you, and the other, with some shaved off, to weigh me. It's all unjust weights and measures.

God delights in a just weight. Justice requires equal weights and measures. In our business dealings, in our sales and purchases, and in our measurements of others.

And remember, this is because we are reflecting God. God is just and will judge by one standard - "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

So we are called to fairness in our dealings and measurements.

**2) And another big facet of justice in Proverbs is fairness in the midst of conflict and disagreement.**

It's inevitable that we will get involved in interpersonal disputes, situations where we might have to decide who is right or wrong in a dispute, situations where we learn that someone is accusing another of some bad behavior, and we could even get involved in situations where it seems like we have a real enemy on the other side of the dispute.

One way we are to be just in those situations is to not be partial, to not engage in favoritism or partiality:

**Proverbs 18:5 - It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous of justice.**

**Proverbs 24:23 - These also are sayings of the wise. Partiality in judging is not good.**

**Proverbs 28:21 - To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong.**

Often in a dispute, we side with those we like, or we side with those we agree with on other issues, or we side with people who are against someone we're against, "the enemy of the enemy is my friend."

But Christians are supposed to be on the side of what's true.

When we are trying to settle some conflict or get to the bottom of issues, we don't:

Favor based on race, favor based on socio-economic status, favor based on a friend group, favor women over men or men over women. We favor the truth.

It's easy to decide who we are partial to, and take their side no matter what. I remember in my youth ministry days, there were times I'd have to talk to a parent about a disciplinary issue with their kid. And most received that well, but some, no matter what, would deny that their kid did anything wrong.

A wise parent would say, "The youth pastor says one thing. My kid says

another.”

The youth pastor could be lying. My kid could be lying. So now let’s hear the evidence. It’s not a rush to judgment or taking the side of the one we are partial to.

Another temptation is to take the side of the one who can do the most for us. Here’s a person who is in a dispute, and if I take her side, she’ll accept me into her friend circle, she’ll praise me to really important people. But when we are calculating like that, we’re really taking bribes, sometime Proverbs says alot about:

**Proverbs 17:23 - The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice.**

When trying to do what’s just in the midst of a dispute, you can’t ask first “what would be the most advantageous thing for me to do here?” Ask what is true? What is right? What is just? What is fair?

Lady Justice is depicted wearing a blindfold and holding a scale - because there shouldn’t be different standards of justice for different people.

Also, when we’re trying to sort out a dispute, it’s important to remember that there are two sides to the story - and if we are going to render some kind of verdict, we are obligated to seek out both sides:

**Proverbs 18:13 - if one gives an answer before he hears it is his folly and shame**

**Proverbs 18:17 The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.**

Parents of multiple children become very familiar with this concept very quickly. “She hit me.” Then the other comes along and examines her: “She hit me first.”

We are unwise to only hear one side of a story and to act like we are getting nothing but the truth. We are behaving unjustly if we only hear one side of a dispute and take their side and act like we know the situation perfectly. If we are going to render any verdict, not just in court, but if we are going to treat

someone like what their opponent said about them is true, we are obligated to seek out the other side of the matter. And be blind in our meeting our justice.

We are always telling people who come in to bring us issues in their marriage that we can't do marriage counseling with one person. We can say, "That's hard" and pray for you, we can help you get safe if you say you're not, we can give advice based on what one person says, but we know there's another side to the story and our advice can easily be faulty if we're not hearing both sides.

Another facet of doing justice in the midst of conflicts and disagreements is always only telling the truth, without exaggeration, about our opponents. And this concept is repeated a lot in proverbs:

**Proverbs 14:25 - A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.**

**Proverbs 24:28 - Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips.**

**Proverbs 12:17 "Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit."**

He says tell only the truth, bring honest evidence. This means don't exaggerate, say what's true, don't destroy a reputation falsely, don't attempt to deceive. Speak truth.

But here's what makes this difficult. When you are in a bitter dispute with a real enemy, and that person really is wicked, you are going to be constrained by only telling the truth. And they aren't. If they really are as wicked as you think, they can lie to hurt you or lie to win. They can slander you to ruin your credibility. They can recruit false witnesses. But you can't do any of those things.

And imagine what would happen in a football game if one team was allowed to cheat, and refs through the flag on the slightest violation from the other team? The cheating team would dominate. (Look at the Patriots last decade) (joke.)



But if you're in a dispute and you play fair, you're just, but your opponent isn't, then what?

They might win.

But remember that God really is there, He really is just, and He really hates injustice.

**Proverbs 19:5 [5] A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.**

You may think your enemy wins and gets away with things because they can lie and you can't. But nobody ever gets away with anything. God does judge.

And keep in mind also that Jesus won by losing. Wicked people did the greatest possible injustice against Jesus - they killed the only truly innocent person. They stirred up false witnesses, Judas accepted a bribe to pervert justice, it would be easy to look at Jesus on the cross and think that wicked people won. If Jesus had just played dirty, he would have won.

But Jesus rose again. The wicked didn't win. Jesus did win.

So God does sort things out. Jesus won by losing, so if doing right constrains you so much that you lose, trust that that's the best outcome for now.

And also, something else to remember, is that Satan is not loyal to the people he uses. Satan filled the heart of Judas, used Judas to accept a bribe and pervert justice and get Jesus arrested. And then when Satan was done with Judas and Judas realized what he had done and went to look for a rope to hang himself, Satan wasn't there to stop him. Satan got what he wanted out of Judas, and then went right back to destroying him.

And if you feel like your opponent couldn't be more wicked - it's almost like he's being used by the enemy - that may be the case. And when the enemy is done using him for his purposes, he will turn on him. Satan is not loyal.

So we are called to fairness in our dealings, fairness in the midst of conflict.

**3) And we are also called, if we are going to do justice, to strive for**

**fairness for the disadvantaged around us.**

**Proverbs 31:9 - Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.**

**Proverbs 29:7 [7] A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.**

So a righteous man, someone who is just, is someone who knows about the rights of the poor and defends the poor and the needy.

In most societies, the poor and needy can be oppressed because they can't afford to go to court, they don't have access to justice. So it creates a society where the rich can get away with things and the poor are oppressed.

But just people speak for those that can't speak for themselves.

The weakest and most helpless get the special concern of the just.

Just people defend those that can't defend themselves.

This is why just people care for the rights of the poor, of the sick, of the elderly, and of the absolute weakest among us who could never defend themselves, in the unborn. Doing justly means providing a voice to the voiceless so that everybody in society has the same opportunities.

We aren't trying to get the same outcomes in life for everybody - that's a secular concept of justice and equity that isn't biblical. In Proverbs, people who work harder and work more can expect to earn more, those who work less can expect less, and that isn't an injustice. But both should have the same shot at it - the same opportunity.

So we advocate to give the unborn a shot at life. The poor a shot at going to a good school. The weak victim a shot at justice over their oppressors. We take up their good causes when they can't do it alone.

We don't just want fairness in our dealings and in our conflicts, we want it in our culture.

So much of justice is just fairness.

But justice or righteousness in Proverbs actually goes further.

In a section of Proverbs about God's blessing on the house of the righteous or the just, there's a passage that says this:

**Proverbs 3:27–29 [27] Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. [28] Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with you [29] Do not plan evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly beside you.**

So this passage, and others, call righteous people to not withhold good from others. Someone comes to borrow something they need, and you could give it to them, he says don't make them wait for tomorrow. Don't withhold the good you could do.

But that sounds costly. That could actually be unfair - it would mean more for you and less for me.

And that's right.

Bruce Waltke says it this way:

“The wicked advantage themselves by disadvantaging others, but the righteous disadvantage themselves to advantage others.”

This fits what Proverbs says: wicked people are stealing from the poor, taking without giving, consuming without working, taking without contributing, speaking not what's true but what serves them best, even if it steals a reputation or steals justice from another.

But the righteous, the just, are willing to be disadvantaged to advantage others. They give to the poor. They give to the one who is in need and can't pay back. They give their energies to speak for the poor and the weak, those who can't give back. They accept less for themselves so others can have more. They are devoted to the truth, even if it costs them.

Truly just people do good for others even when it means there is less for themselves.

God commands that kind of living as part of doing the justice that he requires.

Considering others before ourselves.

This flies in the face of some of the popular pseudo-psychological pop wisdom that says that everyone should be willing to disadvantage others for the sake of my own health and boundaries. What matters most is me - and if anyone isn't going along with that project, they are haters and to be discarded.

I had a conversation with my dentist this week. She said she keeps hiring people, signing

them to contracts to work for her, and then they aren't showing up for work, they demand a month off right after being hired, they said they would work and don't mind inconveniencing everyone else in the office and all of the patients because they want to do what seems best for them. (Which she says is going to the lake instead.)

We are fed a doctrine that we should be willing to bring any inconvenience necessary to others so we can be fulfilled, and that that is healthy.

But the just disadvantage themselves so they can provide an advantage to others.

They care for their neighbors, not just themselves.

Here's a hard thing about the commands of God: how we respond to God's commands is how we respond to God.

So there's no such thing as someone defrauding his neighbor actively who is also warm and cozy with God. There's no such thing as someone who is not accepting some degree of difficulty for the good of others who is living a just life and is doing well in their God. How we respond to God's commands is how we respond to Him.

OK, so how do I change?

A difficulty is that Proverbs also teaches that only those who are just can do justice, and those who are evil can't.

**Proverbs 28:5 - Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.**

**Proverbs 12:5 - The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.**

How can we do justice from the heart?

Only if our hearts are changed.

And they are only changed by looking to the Savior, the only just one.

And only if we see ourselves as the helpless ones who needed Him to disadvantage Himself to provide righteousness for us.

We were spiritually poor. We were enemies of God. We had nothing to offer him. We had no access to His favor.

And we certainly didn't deserve it. We deserved his wrath. The fact that God is just is no great comfort to sinners like us. The fact that nobody gets away with anything is bad news for us.

So Jesus saw us in our need, and He came and satisfied the justice of God. At great cost to Himself. He died the death we deserved and gave us, if we have believed in Him, completely undeserved forgiveness and salvation. He paid the price that justice demanded, so He could give us mercy.

And when we believe that - when we believe we were wicked and in need of forgiveness, we were needy and couldn't do it on our own, we brought only need, and still He blessed us, then that changes how we look at others:

- 1) How we look at our enemies in conflicts, because we were the enemies of God and He showed us mercy.
- 2) How we look at people in need, because we were in need and He didn't trample us, He gave His life for us.
- 3) How we look at the opportunities we might have to deceive and gain by someone else's losing. Because in the gospel, Jesus lost so we could gain.

And if we worship that kind of God, and we are becoming like the God we worship, and we are gazing at the Gospel, then we can't keep being people who are out only for ourselves. We pursue fairness and beyond, we pursue the good of others as Jesus pursued the good for us.

### **Prayer of Confession**

*Father,*

*We marvel today that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We were poor, we were unjust, and you took up our cause. You paid our debts, you satisfied justice, you did not withhold from us the good you were able to do for us, even when it cost the life of your son.*

*Love like that should surely make us just, and give us compassion for other people who are sinners like us. Yet we have to confess that we still find ourselves posturing, taking the side of the ones who have the most to offer us, wanting justice for others and mercy for ourselves, and hoarding our resources rather than do the good that we could do for others. Forgive us.*

*Jesus we thank you that in going to the cross, you made sure divine justice was done. You made sure no sins were gotten away with - you paid for all the sins of all those who would believe. You gave us your just-ness, your righteousness - which we couldn't*

*achieve for ourselves.*

*Spirit, melt our hearts with this truth until we become just in all of our dealings - being fair, wanting fairness for others, but more than that, being willing to disadvantage ourselves so others can find an advantage.*

**Assurance:**

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” – Ephesians 2:8