

Sermon Topic | Godly Justice for All in All Aspects of Life

Proverbs: The Wisdom of God as a Way of Life

Zionsville Fellowship | March 22nd, 2026. | Edgar J. Momoh

Introduction |

As we approach the end of our series in Proverbs, we are reminded again that the entire book is about character formation. In other words, it is God's curriculum for character formation.

We have walked through the different sections of the book - starting with beginning wisdom, chs. 1-9, elementary wisdom, chs. 10-15, intermediate wisdom, chs. 16-22, vocational wisdom, 24, advanced wisdom, chs. 25-29. We are now in the last chapter of advanced wisdom this morning. The final two chapters, 30 & 31, will cover applied wisdom.

Last week, Drew laid the foundation of this chapter 29 in his teaching on chapter 28. The emphasis of both chapters is on how to gain wealth and use power and authority wisely. He harped on the word "justice" quite a lot in the context of leadership and governance.

This morning, we shall dig a little deeper into that word from the context of chapter 29. My aim this morning, therefore, *is to show us that true wisdom entails the application of justice for all people in all things, especially in the use of power, authority, and relationships.* It is a very common word in our daily language. In fact, according to Merriam-Webster, "justice" was named Word of the Year in 2018.

Broadly speaking, justice is perceived as “the moral and legal principle of fairness, ensuring individuals receive their due, acting as a cornerstone for societal order. Key types include [distributive](#) (fair resource distribution), [procedural](#) (fair processes), [retributive](#) (just punishment), and [restorative](#) (repairing harm).”¹

However, my former OT theology professor in seminary, identified six concepts of justice through the lens of the scriptures, which I will briefly state without explanation:

- Forensic justice – the act by which God declared all of humanity guilty by the fall of Adam. Hence, justification by Christ is made possible
- Standard – compliance with God’s declared law or norms.
- Conduct – Obedience to the standard or conforming to the right norms.
- Retribution – God’s act of punishment for every act of injustice or sin. By forensic justice, we are found guilty, and retributive justice carries out the punishment.
- Distributive – God’s act of restoration or lifting up of the oppressed. Salvation!

¹ Google search on the term justice

- Fairness – the administration of all aspects of justice without partiality. In other words, doing justice, justly. ²

However, you may have observed that in our society today, the concept of justice has been semantically watered down to fit only a certain narrative. For example, the argument in favor of the legalization of abortion as women’s “reproductive rights,” without a recognition of the rights of the unborn, is a glaring transgression of fairness, which is one of the core tenets of justice. Or in the process of agitating for justice in a given situation, an entire community or city pays the price.

This is largely because when people speak about justice, it is often not viewed through the biblical lens of the word. I hope that, through our text this morning, you will notice how God’s view of justice applies to all aspects of life and across the different spheres of our human interactions.

We will explore this text under the topic “**Godly Justice for All in All Aspects of Life**”

in three movements:

- I. Domestic Justice – Discipline & Instruction (29:1, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23-24)
- II. Political Justice – Leadership & Governance (29:2, 4, 12-14, 25-26)
- III. Personal Justice – Wise & Foolish (29:3, 8-9; 11, 18, 20)
- IV. Divine Justice – Righteous & Wicked (29:5-7; 10, 16, 22, 27)

As we read this text, pay attention to the stark contrasts between some recurring and emerging themes in the book of Proverbs. You may notice the contrast between wisdom and foolishness, righteousness and wickedness, especially in personal conduct and the use of power and authority.

It also underscores how wise and just rulers bring about joy and stability to a nation or community, while corrupt leaders cause suffering and decay.

Under wise and righteous leadership, society flourishes, and the rights of the vulnerable and poor are not overlooked. Finally, the text also warns against stubbornness and flattery. And lastly, it emphasizes the need for moral discipline and instruction. ³

Now let’s read the text:

² OT theology notes by Chester Wood, NEGST, 2001. Prof Wood asserts that justice is the key foundation of God’s dealing with humanity. He traces the concept of justice throughout the OT scriptures to arrive at that conclusion.

³ Google search on the summary of Proverbs 29.

I. Domestic Justice – Discipline & Instruction | (29:1, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23-24)

The first verse, “He who is often reprov’d, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing”, somewhat sets the tone of the entire chapter. It shows us that God does not arbitrarily mete out justice without first providing ample warnings.

In other words, “fairness” is at the heart of divine justice. Despite his supreme sovereignty over all things, God rules and judges the world on the principles of justice and righteousness (Ps. 9:7-8). Put differently, he administers “justice, justly” without partiality.

Even where he disciplines us, he does not do so out of sheer delight to cause us pain and affliction. Jeremiah reminds us of this in Lamentations 3: 32-33, that:

“Though he brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.

For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to anyone.”

This shows us two things:

- i. That God gives fair warning – these warnings may come in various forms. It may come directly from his word. Through a sermon, a rebuke from a friend, parents, or a boss. Or most of all, our consciences. Yet still, the laws of the land.

These warnings and rebukes, whether they come through some outside means or a direct appeal to our consciences by means of the Holy Spirit, are acts of God’s grace. They call us to repentance, rather than face the consequences of our actions.

But it appears from this verse that, although ample warnings are provided to the one who is being reprov’d but remains stiff-necked, no means of enforcement is provided. One commentator puts it that because God wants repentance and obedience to be freely given, otherwise the phrase ‘yet stiffens his neck’, would have no meaning.⁴

- ii. God’s justice entails his decisive action against rebellion – God is just, and a just God would not let unabated rebellion or unrepentant sin go unpunished. So, the stiff-necked, habitual sinner and the rebellious will come to a justified end. Hence, the phrase, “will suddenly be broken beyond healing”.

This appears to mean not only a well-deserved final and everlasting judgment that the Lord will meet on the unregenerate, but even those who, at this moment, fail to heed correction. For example, imagine you are driving on State Road 89A from Sedona to Flagstaff, Arizona, for the first time. It is considered one of the most scenic roads in the country. It has sudden cliff drops of over 5,000 feet, hairpin turns, and elevation changes that make even the bravest driver

⁴ Lane, Eric. Proverbs: Everyday wisdom for everyone (2000) p. 367

nervous. There are, for obvious reasons, road signs for almost every bend that warn you of the approaching terrain. Imagine what your fate would be if you chose to ignore all those road signs and drove on like you would on a normal road. The outcome will be sudden and decisive.

There was a saying around our home when our kids were growing up. It says, “When instructions fail, destruction prevails”. We got that after studying the book of Proverbs verse by verse for 1.5 years.

Verses 15, 17, 19, 21 – also make the same emphasis on the necessity of discipline and instructions as an act of justice. For example, verses 15 and 17 in particular, focus on the need for discipline in the home or family setting.

*15 The rod and reproof give wisdom,
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother
17 Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;
he will give delight to your heart.*

It is clear that every admonition in Proverbs is more than just a cause-and-effect entailment. They are driven by both positive and negative motivational outcomes. For instance, the positive motivation for disciplining a child is in the interest of both the child and the one administering the discipline.

The child who is appropriately reprovved with the rod of correction stands to gain wisdom or character formation. On the contrary, a child left to himself will bring shame to his mother. In other words, parents, especially mothers, if you do not want your heart to be broken in the future, then you must discipline and instruct your child, no matter how much it may hurt you now.

I know many parents whose hearts have been broken, not because of failure in providing appropriate discipline at the appropriate time when raising their children. It just happens that the enemy has succeeded in leading them astray for the time being.

And if you are that mother or parent here this morning, who is struggling with a prodigal, take heart and do not give up loving and praying for them. Our heavenly Father will one day turn their hearts to himself and bring them back home and perhaps into your arms again.

On the other hand, I have seen parents who failed to provide discipline and instructions for their children while raising them, and today, their hearts are torn into many pieces with shame. Failure to raise our children as Christian parents, according to the scriptural dictate in Proverbs 22:6, is an indictment.

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.
It is an act of injustice to that child because you not only destroy the child, but also your peace. In fact, verse 17 makes it perfectly clear when it says:

*Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;
he will give delight to your heart.*

The motivation of this verse is clear. Its emphasis is not primarily on the child's best interests in this context. Rather, it is in the interest of the parents. If you want to have a good rest in your later years, when your work of child-rearing is done, then fathers discipline your children. Raise them up with diligence and hope that they will bring you delight.

I strongly believe that if all fathers in our society today would rise up and treat the raising of the next generation of men seriously, like an investment to bring them rest and delight in their later years, we would solve a large proportion of crime and many other ills in our society.

Similarly, verses 19 & 21 present the same argument: discipline and instruction as a means of justice for a servant. Or for some of you, your employees. In the original context, slaves were meant to be given a clear cause for duty. This did not come with mere verbal instructions but with high expectations.

However, given the depravity of the human heart, which is more prone to wrong than right, the slaves tended to abdicate their duties. Therefore, it took some discipline to comply with their expectation.

In our context, this might take some nudging or scolding – be it setting clear expectations, requiring deadlines, implementing queries, imposing financial penalties, applying negative reinforcement (the removal of incentives that promote bad behavior), or reproof.

Verse 21 brings us to another critical aspect of discipline. It says:

Whoever pampers his servant from childhood will, in the end, find him his heir

The implication of this verse is similar to verse 15: providing correction and instruction to a child brings wisdom, but an undisciplined child is the recipe for shame and heartbreak.

In this context, Solomon suggests that if a servant is pampered in their trainable years, as with a child during the prime years of child-rearing, that servant will end up irresponsible, contemptuous, and arrogant. Although some commentators suggest that such a servant would end feeling entitled to his master's estate.

This is practically a call to draw boundaries in situations that need them. Dare I say that for some of us, it is a case of drawing that boundary of authority in a parent-child relationship? The Bible calls us to love our children and not discourage them. However, it is always sad to see parents who treat their kids more like friends than their parents.

As Drew would say, “don't hear what I am not saying”. I don't mean being an authoritarian parent to your child. Rather, you must authoritatively assume your role as parent over being your child's friend. If you pamper them when you should be providing them with corrections and instructions, you fail to treat them justly.

As an employer, a boss, a teacher, a coach, or anyone in a position of authority, when you fail to set clear boundaries and expectations, you risk making those you lead ungovernable.

II. Political Justice – Leadership & Governance (29:2, 4, 12-14, 25-26)

Fresh out of seminary, where I was tremendously influenced by the teachings of my former OT & NT theology professor, Chester Wood, whom I mentioned earlier, I worked in civil society advocacy at a Christian non-profit organization. Prof Wood drilled into his students that the plotline of the entire Bible is a case of biblical justice. In other words, the Acts of God from pre-fall Eden to the restoration of the new Eden to its original and better state at the return of Christ all point to the justice of God.

Therefore, as disciples of Christ, our work is not only cut out to be saved, but to act as agents or bringers of justice in every sphere of our lives as we await Christ, the Great Bringer of justice, in the end.

So, in my advocacy role, I frequently interfaced with the country's political leadership as we sought to serve as a prophetic voice for the governed. Serving in this role and my keen awareness that governments exist to uphold justice opened my eyes to the effects of poor leadership on the plight of the people.

Verse 2 clearly speaks to that effect -

*When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*

This verse and others, such as 4, 12-14, 16a, 18, and 25-26, show two important aspects of political leadership and governance.

First, they show us the results of good political leadership – Verse 2 begins with "when the righteous increase, the people rejoice..." This implies that a nation's happiness index is largely influenced by its political leadership. Of course, there are other factors that influence the peace and happiness of a society or nation.

However, if the leadership seeks to work in the interest of its people and not merely use their political offices as means to enrich themselves and the people themselves abide by a collective moral code of doing what is right, i.e., act civilly toward one another, don't give bribes to get ahead or access favor, don't embezzle public funds, milk a broken system or engage in other forms of corruption, there will be flourishing and happiness in the land. But when the wicked rule, there is often groaning.

Verses 4a and 14 say,

By justice, a king builds up the land... If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever.

This clearly expresses the need for political justice to ensure stability in the land. Those in power should not abuse their authority over the governed. They should not make laws that disproportionately favor those who finance their political campaigns or enrich themselves.

The courts should apply the law to all justly, without regard to race, economic status, or the political side you belong to. "Justice for all is the way to the stability of a country and the security of the throne." ⁵

Second, verses 4b, 12, 16a, and 18 show us the impact of poor political leadership.

Because of the places I have lived and the work I have done, I have seen and experienced the impact of poor political leadership. Let us explore some of those impacts according to our text:

i. Poor political leadership breeds instability. Verse 4b says, "but he who exacts gifts tears it down". Tear what down, you may ask? The land that a just king builds. The phrase, "exactes gifts", probably refers to bribes and other corrupt practices. In other words, a king who rules by allowing corruption to thrive under their reign destroys his kingdom and the social cohesiveness of his people.

ii. Poor political leadership breeds deception. The verse says, "If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked." Falsehood or deception is the root cause of many leadership failures. When the people around a leader stop telling the leader the honest truth, or as they say, stop "speaking truth to power", the decline of that leadership may be slow but certain. This has been proven throughout history and around the world. Usually, bad leaders develop an insatiable desire for sycophancy and for listening only to what sounds pleasant to their ears. Sadly, even his officials become complicit in that behavior.

In that respect, I agree with Lindsay Wilson's comment that, "There is great power in modelling... The negative example of a king's behavior... results in all the lower officials becoming wicked."⁶ For instance, Hitler was not the lone villain during the Holocaust.

iii. Poor political leadership is a breeding ground for all forms of vices. Under the atmosphere of bad governance, wickedness and transgression become the staple of the day.

iv. Poor political leadership breeds anarchy. This verse is often cited by many people, to erroneously imply a personal lack of vision or a spontaneous insight of a leader. It says,

*Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint,
but blessed is he who keeps the law.*

You may have even heard of it in team-building activities or strategic planning events: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). However, this verse was a proverb describing the consequences for the state of Israel in the absence of abiding by the revealed laws of God.

⁵ Lane, Eric. Proverbs: Everyday wisdom for everyone (2000) p. 370

⁶ Waltke, B.K. & De Silva, V. (2021) Proverbs: A shorter commentary. p. 405

For example, in Exod. 32:25 When Moses had gone to Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments from the Lord, the people coerced Aaron into making them a god to worship. Aaron's poor leadership led the people to go wild in their idolatrous desires. In other words, they cast off restraint. Hence, the whole camp resulted in anarchy.

Similarly, poor political leadership that undermines the rule of law and impartial justice for all often leads to anarchy.

III. Personal Justice – Wise & Foolish (29:3, 8-9; 11, 18, 20)

Much has already been said about wisdom and folly throughout this series. Therefore, I will be brief on this. Verse 3, yet again, presents a contrast between the wise and the foolish son. It says –

He who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

This verse is consistent with verses 15 and 17, which show the benefits of disciplining a child versus being left to himself. A wise son brings his parents justified pride and happiness, regardless of their age. But a foolish son is not only a misery to himself but also brings great grief to his parents.

Let me speak to the young people here. Remember that your actions, good or bad, will always impact your parents. Even when you grow into adulthood, have your own family, and move away, the emotional ties that bring them satisfaction or displeasure over your choices do not cease to exist. They will rejoice when good things happen to you and grieve when things don't seem to be going well.

Verses 8 & 9 present a sharp contrast between the 'scoffer' and the 'wise'. Let me quote what Bruce Waltke and Ivan De Silva say about scoffers and see if you can resonate with it.

They say, scoffers, are the kind of people who seek to "*inflame a community's latent resentments against one another to a boiling point by scoffing at the moral order, distorting truth, and inciting people's passions through heated rhetoric... They are those who take a bad situation and intensify it into riots*".⁷

Doesn't this fit the activities of some of our politicians and mainstream media? They would not miss a single opportunity to take a touchy issue like race relations in our nation and fan it into flames. Who would forget the nightmare our nation experienced during the George Floyd riots in 2020? This turned out to be the costliest civil unrest in America's history (1-2 billion dollars).

Who were largely responsible for that? In my opinion, it was the media and some of our politicians who pit one group of people against another. Well, that is the act of scoffers. On the contrary, see what the text says of the wise. They turn away wrath. I guess the easiest

⁷ Waltke, B.K. & De Silva, V. (2021) Proverbs: A shorter commentary. p. 404

comparison was seen during Charlie Kirk's assassination. Calling people to pray and worship in the midst of their grief was a clear act of the wise, according to this verse.

Verses 11 & 20 similarly contrast the attitude of a fool with the actions of a wise person. While a fool goes full throttle in venting their fury, the wise person quietly holds back their opinion. This is where many of us might need some character formation. Here are some litmus tests:

- Are you quick to make your opinion known, even to the chagrin of others?
- Do you take pride in yourself for being brutally honest in showing people their faults?
- Have you noticed or has someone told you that it is hard for people to have a meaningful conversation with you?
- Do you often have a need to apologize for your words to someone?
- And lastly, do you easily get angry, emotionally hypersensitive around others?

If you said yes to more than two of any of these options, then you need a self-examination in light of the text and ask the Lord to grow you in those areas in your character formation.

IV. Divine Justice – Righteous and Wicked (29:5-7; 10, 16, 22, 27)

Our final section brings us back to what I set out to accomplish with this text. *That true wisdom entails the application of justice for all people in all things, especially in the use of power, authority, and relationships.*

God's original plan for humanity was for Adam & Eve and their offspring to dwell in a just environment of everlasting bliss. However, sin entered the world and marred that original plan. But God did not give up on his creation. That is why he sent Jesus to become the restorer, the ultimate bringer of justice for all the redeemed in the new Eden, where righteousness and justice will reign forever.

As we look forward to that eternal rest for the saints of God, we are called to dwell with one another justly in all things on this side of Eden.

That is why verses like Proverbs 29:5-7 exist. It says:

5 A man who flatters his neighbor
spreads a net for his feet.

6 An evil man is ensnared in his transgression,
but a righteous man sings and rejoices.

7 A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

A man who flatters his neighbor is not acting justly or in their interest. His goal is to take advantage of his neighbor by seducing them with false affirmation. While such deception is

intended to ensnare the unsuspecting neighbor, verse 6 says, the evil man will end up in his own snare. And do you notice the ultimate twist in all of this? The righteous will sing and rejoice.

This is particularly encouraging to remember that the Lord himself is the one who fights for his own. No wonder Paul admonishes us in Romans 12:19, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

That is why verse 7 draws attention to the sharp distinction between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous man does not turn a blind eye to the cause of the oppressed. They seek the interest of the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the poor.

The famous text in Micah 6:8 gives a clear description of the way of the righteous.

"He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?"

Meanwhile, the wicked person's ignorance of the plight of the oppressed is deliberate and not due to a lack of intellectual knowledge. And do you think a righteous and just God will overlook such acts forever? Definitely, no!

Verses 16 & 27 provide us with two outstanding ends to the wicked and the triumph of the righteous. Verse 16a alludes to the multiplication of the transgression when the wicked increase. For a moment, this could be frustrating for the righteous to see the wicked increase in number.

However, the second half of the verse says, the righteous have the last laugh because they will "look upon their downfall". In other words, the wicked will not see the eternal just order that will be established at the return of the Lord. So, do not be discouraged if, for a little while, you are faced with injustice in the hands of the wicked. The Lord will one day end their reign and torment them forever.

Verse 27 closes the chapter with a description of the antipathy between the righteous and the wicked.

*An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous,
but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.*

Here is a litmus test to indicate whether one is walking in the way of the righteous or the wicked. Have you lately become completely impervious or apathetic to all the evil that goes on around you?

I mean all societal ills, including but not limited to lawlessness, violence, corruption, crime, moral decadence, abortion, social and cultural divisiveness, partiality, flagrant acts of discrimination

based on race, violation of the rights of the poor, and the like. If your honest answer is yes, you need to ask the Lord to work on your heart. Otherwise, you will soon begin to loathe the "one whose way is straight".

How does this passage point to Christ?

1. Growing up in Africa, we always admired the American system of governance and democracy. We saw it as perfect, probably in comparison to some of the despotic and authoritarian governments we were familiar with.

But having been exposed to the flaws in our governmental systems in America, despite it still being a shining city on the hill, you may agree with me that the fulfillment of the first line of verse 2, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice." could only point to when the righteous reign of Jesus is fully manifest on earth in his glory. When the magnitude of the reign of Christ is fully established, then will the people fully rejoice.

2. Verse 3a also says, "He who loves wisdom makes his father glad". Who else has ever brought complete joy to his father, as Jesus did by his own submission to the will of his father? He said to his disciples in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." And God the Father was so pleased with him that he said, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased".

3. Verse 14a is definitely the watershed of how this text points to Jesus. "If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever". Surely, Jesus is that one perfect King who judges the poor with truth and righteousness. He alone can apply the full range of justice, be it forensic, standard, conduct, distributive, retributive, and fairness in his everlasting kingdom.