

## THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF JUSTICE

### **Introduction**

Some time ago a case came to trial involving racial issues, it held the potential for being a very volatile situation. But the particular judge who was assigned to the trial was known for his fairness. When he was appointed, many in the legal profession breathed a sigh of relief and praised the choice, declaring, "He is very fair, he has a reputation for administering even-handed justice."

A Christian writer observed that we, as Christian people, should be like that judge: We must be among the first to call for justice in every area of society, not primarily for ourselves, but for others. And we must be the first to rid prejudice and unfair attitudes from the inner citadel of our hearts. (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/9/94)

In the early summer of 1994 a Presbyterian minister visited an abortion center in Pensacola, Florida. He came armed with a shotgun. He aimed that 12-gauge shotgun at the doctor and his two escorts and pulled the trigger. He killed the doctor and one of his escorts, wounding the other. In his stand against abortion, this minister went so far as to take matters into his own hands and administer justice as he saw fit.

A woman recounts an act she perpetrated some 35 years earlier in her childhood days. As a prank, she inserted pins into a bar of soap, not realizing the danger. Her mother was severely scratched while washing her hands with the pin-filled bar of soap. Her brother, who was known for his mischievousness, was blamed for the incident and it was he who suffered the punishment. He was not treated justly on that occasion, and it is safe to say there would be other occasions in his life when he would encounter a lack of justice from the very ones to whom he looked for justice. (*Our Daily Bread*, 8/30/90)

These three incidents illustrate the various aspects of the subject with which we now deal: The Do's and Don'ts of Justice.

### **I. Do Practice Justice**

**(Prov. 21:3; Prov. 16:8; Prov. 22:28; Prov. 16:11; Prov. 28:21)**

BE MOTIVATED TO PRACTICE JUSTICE BY APPRECIATING THE VALUE OF JUSTICE.

***It is more acceptable to Jehovah to practice righteousness and justice than to offer sacrifices.*** (Prov. 21:3)

The Word of God consistently confronts us with the fact that true religion is not limited to the offering of Sunday worship, but also consists in adhering to the law of God in our everyday lives.

Because He Himself is a God of justice, He requires that we as His people value justice, practice justice, and promote justice:

*“What does the multitude of your sacrifices mean to me?” declares Jehovah. “I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened beasts. I do not take pleasure in the blood of bulls or lambs or goats. ...<sup>17</sup>Learn to do what is good. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” (Isa. 1:11,17)*

Jesus testified against the Pharisees, *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and integrity. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.* (Matt. 23:23)

***It is better to have only a little with righteousness than to have great wealth gained by injustice.*** (Prov. 16:8)

It is better to stay on the course of righteousness, even if it means forfeiting great wealth and making do with a small income, than to acquire much wealth by taking the way of injustice.

Simply put, the Scripture teaches that it is better to sacrifice income than to sacrifice justice. Why? ... because in the way of righteousness there is the promise of God’s care and God’s favor:

*The eyes of Jehovah are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; <sup>16</sup>the face of Jehovah is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. <sup>17</sup>The righteous cry out, and Jehovah hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.* (Psl 34:15-17)

But, *“the income of the wicked contains trouble”* (Prov. 15:6b.) Whenever you purchase wealth at the price of righteousness and justice, you will always get more than you bargained for: thrown into the deal is the unexpected commodity of trouble. By way of illustration: It is like ordering a crate of exotic fruit from South America, and upon opening it you discover that the crate contains not only the fruit, but also disease-carrying insects, and lots of them.

PRACTICE JUSTICE TOWARDS YOUR NEIGHBOR.

***Do not move the ancient boundary stone erected by your forefathers.*** (Prov. 22:28)

The removal of the boundary stone was designed to increase one’s own land holdings or the value of one’s property, but it was done at the expense of justice and fairness. The message of this proverb is this: Avoid deceitful and

unscrupulous practices designed to take advantage of your neighbor for your own betterment, because such practices violate God's justice and shall not go unpunished: *"Do not move the ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, <sup>11</sup>because their Redeemer is strong and he will defend their case against you"* (Prov. 23:10-11.) Let us be careful to abide by the admonition of the Apostle Paul:

*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)*

Practice justice in the workplace.

***Honest scales and balances are from Jehovah; all the weights in the bag have been made by him.*** (Prov. 16:11)

Justice is something that proceeds from God, it is a part of His being and character: *"all the weights in the bag have been made by Him."*

This proverb also teaches that God's justice extends to every area and relationship of life, including the workplace and the business world. Justice must be practiced by both the Christian employer and the Christian employee:

*Masters, treat your servants with justice and equality, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Col. 4:1)*

*Teach servants to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, <sup>10</sup>and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. (Titus 2:9-10)*

PRACTICE JUSTICE AS OPPOSED TO FAVORITISM.

***It is not good to show favoritism, yet a man will do so for only a piece of bread.*** (Prov. 28:21)

The practice of partiality or favoritism is not good, it is not right, because it is not dealing with others fairly and equally, as we would want them to deal with us: *"Therefore, with regard to all things, do to others what you would want them to do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"* (Matt. 7:12.) Furthermore, the practice of partiality and favoritism is not good because it is contrary to the nature of God Himself who is no respecter of persons: *"Jehovah your God is God of*

*gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes” (Deut. 10:17.)*

Yet, as we learn from the latter half of Proverbs 28:21, favoritism is so commonly practiced and for so little gain. Men transgress against the ways of justice and equity for something as little as *“a piece of bread.”* But in contrast to the great majority of men, we are called to be like Christ our Savior. Even His enemies testified to His integrity: *“‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You are not swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are’”* (Matt. 22:16.) Let us take to heart and put into practice the admonition of the Apostle James:

*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism. <sup>2</sup>Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup>If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here is a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there.” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” <sup>4</sup>have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ... <sup>8</sup>If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. <sup>9</sup>But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. (Jam. 2:1-4,8-9)*

DO PRACTICE JUSTICE.

“[As Christians] we must be among the first to call for justice in every area of society, not primarily for ourselves but for others. And we must be the first to rid prejudice and unfair attitudes from the inner citadel of our hearts” (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/9/94.)

## **II. Don’t Take Justice into Your Own Hands (Proverbs 24:29; Proverbs 20:22)**

RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO GET EVEN WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN WRONGFULLY TREATED.

*Do not say, “I will do to him as he has done to me, I will repay the man according to his deed.”* (Prov. 24:29)

Can you identify yourself with David in the situation described in 1 Samuel 25:2-17?

*A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. <sup>3</sup>His name was Nabal and his wife’s name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, from the family of Caleb, was surly and mean in his dealings. <sup>4</sup>While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. <sup>5</sup>So he sent ten young men and said to them, “Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. <sup>6</sup>Say to him: Long life to*

*you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! <sup>7</sup>Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. <sup>8</sup>Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.” <sup>9</sup>When David’s men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David’s name. Then they waited. <sup>10</sup>Nabal answered David’s servants, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. <sup>11</sup>Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?” <sup>12</sup>David’s men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. <sup>13</sup>David said to his men, “Put on your swords!” So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. <sup>14</sup>One of the servants told Nabal’s wife Abigail, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. <sup>15</sup>Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. <sup>16</sup>Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. <sup>17</sup>Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a worthless man that no one can talk with him.” (1 Sam. 25:2-17)*

David’s good deed was spurned and he received evil in return for the good that he had done. But take note of Abigail’s appeal to David as she intervenes to prevent him from taking vengeance against her husband, Nabal: *“When Jehovah has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, <sup>31</sup>my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself”* (1 Sam. 25:30-31a.)

Consider how, *“I will do to him as he has done to me* —although it is the natural response of the human heart—is the opposite of the divine commandment: *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”* (Matt. 7:12.) Rather than being vengeful, we must be proactive in showing mercy and practicing righteousness:

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ...<sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Rom. 12:17,21)

*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.* (Lk. 6:27-28)

REMEMBER THAT THE ADMINISTERING OF JUSTICE IS GOD'S PREROGATIVE.

***Do not say, "I will repay evil." Wait for Jehovah and he will save you.*** (Prov. 20:22)

When we engage in acts of personal retribution (be they to avenge personal injury or societal evil), we are usurping a prerogative God has reserved for Himself (Romans 12:19,) and which He has delegated to His appointed authority, the civil government (Romans 13:4b):

*Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but allow God to express his wrath, for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the LORD.* (Rom. 12:19)

speaking of the civil authority, the apostle Paul writes, *he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.* (Rom. 13:4)

What are we instructed to do? Proverbs 20:22 exhorts us, *"Wait for Jehovah."* We may do so with confidence—note Genesis 18:25b, *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

Consider the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. His desire was to extend forgiveness to those who wronged Him and to seek their restoration. From the cross His prayer was, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Lk. 23:34.) Rather than take justice into His own hands, He committed Himself and His cause into the hands of His heavenly Father, the One who judges justly: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk. 23:46.) Note the Apostle Peter's counsel to those who were suffering unjust treatment:

*... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example with the intention that you should follow in his footsteps... <sup>23</sup>When they insulted him, he did not insult them; when he suffered, he did not threaten; rather, he committed himself to him who judges righteously.* (1 Pet. 2:21,23)

DON'T TAKE JUSTICE INTO YOUR OWN HANDS.

We are to stand up for justice:

*Rescue those who are being led away to death and hold back those who are ready to be killed. <sup>12</sup>If you say, "Look! We knew nothing about this!" does not he who evaluates the hearts observe it? Does not he who preserves your soul know it? Will he not repay every man according to what he has done?* (Prov. 24:11-12)

But we must leave it to God to administer justice:

*O Jehovah, God of vengeance; God of vengeance, shine forth! <sup>2</sup>Rise up. O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. (Psl. 94:1-2)*

### **III. Do Look to God, Not Man, for Justice (Proverbs 13:23; Proverbs 29:26; Proverbs 23:10-11)**

DON'T SET YOUR HOPE ON RECEIVING JUSTICE FROM MAN.

***A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away.***  
(Prov. 13:23)

*"A poor man's field may produce abundant food;"* but, as the latter half of the proverb testifies, injustice destroys it. This proverb is bearing testimony to the injustice and lack of mercy that are present in the world and that often times characterize sinful man's dealings with his fellow man: *"[Jehovah] looked for justice, but he found oppression; he expected righteousness, but he heard the cries of distress [from the victims of injustice] (Isa. 5:7b.)*

REMEMBER WHO IS THE TRUE SOURCE AND ADMINISTRATOR OF JUSTICE.

***Many seek an audience with the ruler, but it is from Jehovah that a man receives justice.*** (Prov. 29:26)

Many people who appeal to the judge and civil authorities for justice—and rightly so because they are supposed to administer justice—are disappointed, because sinful men pervert justice. We are reminded that our justice ultimately and surely comes from the LORD: *"surely the justice I deserve is with Jehovah, and my reward is with my God"* (Isa. 49:4b.)

BE ASSURED THAT THE LORD IS ABLE AND FAITHFUL TO ADMINISTER JUSTICE.

***Do not move the ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, <sup>11</sup>because their Redeemer is strong and he will defend their case against you.*** (Prov. 23:10-11)

We must not lose sight of the fact that our Redeemer is strong; His present silence must not be mistaken as a sign of impotence or neglect. Note Isaiah 42:14-15, *"For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and restrained myself. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. <sup>15</sup>I will devastate the mountains and the hills, I will dry up all their vegetation. I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools [of water]"* (Isa. 42:14-15.) After relatively long periods of silence, the LORD suddenly and dramatically rises up to administer His justice, the ultimate administration of that divine justice will be that of the Final Judgment itself.

We may be assured that the LORD will plead our case: *“God is just; He will pay back affliction to those who afflict you <sup>7</sup>and give relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels”* (2 Thess. 1:6-7.)

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the proof and testimony of God’s justice: *“[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31.)

DO LOOK TO GOD, NOT TO MAN, FOR JUSTICE.

When that little boy mentioned in our introduction was falsely accused and punished for an act of mischief he did not commit, he was not treated justly. It is safe to say that there were other occasions in his life when he failed to receive justice from the very ones to whom he had a right to appeal for justice and expect justice. The Scriptures exhort us to look to God and hope in Him as the true and final Administrator of justice.

## **Conclusion**

As we study the subject of justice as it is presented to us in the Book of Proverbs, we are confronted with these three lessons: 1) Do Practice Justice; 2) Don’t Take Justice into Your Own Hands; and 3) Do Look to God, Not Man, as the Final Administrator of Justice. Relying upon the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we live by these great truths of Scripture with regard to justice.