



Justice

Proverbs 2-31

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- Justice is giving someone what is due, both good and bad.
- The Bible commands us to “do justice” (Micah 6:8).
- God is a God of justice (Deuteronomy 16:19–20; Proverbs 2:6–9).
- But there’s a lot of discussion about what that means because the term also has secular and political meanings.
- What does the Bible say about justice?

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- The Hebrew word for justice is *mishpat*, which means “to treat someone with equity.”
- Equity is often used in current secular and political arenas referring to the equality of economic outcomes.
- But biblically, equity refers to giving an individual what he or she deserves judicially, despite social status.

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- Treating people equitably means both not letting a criminal's punishment slide because he is rich or powerful as well as not denying equal rights to someone of lower status or honor.
- Equity refers to ignoring social status when punishing the wicked and honoring those who deserve to be honored.
- By knowing God and His wisdom we can understand what is good, right, and equitable (Proverbs 2:6–9)

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when you can do it (3:27–28).
- Do not plan evil against your neighbor who trusts you (3:29).
- Be honest and fair in all your business dealings (16:11).
- Do not let the wicked get away with wrong or deprive the righteous of justice (18:5).

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- These are all connected to the overall idea of justice – giving people their due regardless of race, social status or other traits.
- It goes deeper than bringing criminals to justice; it extends to ensuring justice (what is right in God’s eyes) is done in all areas of your own life, work and personal relationships.
- It’s more than just not mistreating people; it’s doing good for them whenever you can.

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- God's laws of justice make generosity a command, not just a nice thing to do.
- It's making sure you act justly, rightly and equitably yourself and making sure others do – fighting against injustice whenever you see it in other people, places and businesses.
- Fighting injustice isn't just an optional extra thing you can do; it's a command for every believer.

Proverbs 2:6–9; 3:27–30; 16:11; and 18:5

- The word translated “not good” in 18:5 has a much stronger meaning in Hebrew.
- It is not just “not good” to show partiality; it is “reprehensible, vile and wrong.”
- A call to biblical justice requires Christians to take honest inventory in their hearts and immediate spheres of influence and act accordingly with God’s understanding of justice.

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- Don't show partiality to the rich and powerful.
- Deuteronomy 10:17–19 - “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. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- Many of the proverbs talk about justice focus on justice specifically for the poor and vulnerable.
- This isn't because the poor deserve justice more than everyone else but because they are the ones who most often are in danger of being deprived of justice or treated unjustly.
- Because they don't have the social status or economic power that the rich or even the middle class do.

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- Of course, God cares about everyone getting justice.
- But those who have money, status or power can typically get justice on their own.
- It's the vulnerable who need someone else to seek justice for them (Proverbs 31:8–9).

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- When God described Himself in Deuteronomy 10:17–19, He said that He is the “great and mighty,” and that He “does not show partiality or take a bribe.”
- This is the God we serve and the character we should reflect.
- He commanded them to give generously to the poor, to “not harden your heart or shut your hand” against them, to “give to them freely” (Deuteronomy 15:1–11).

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- The way we care for the poor is a response to the way God has cared for us.
- Proverbs tells us that most people treat the poor with contempt but try to befriend the rich and powerful (14:20–21).
- Jesus treated the poor and the outcast with respect, dignity, and as having equal value as the rich and powerful.
- We are to do the same (James 2).

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- Proverbs tells us that because the poor are created in God's image, when we show contempt for the poor, we are actually mocking God (14:31; 17:5).
- Just as Jesus will say when He separates the sheep from the goats on Judgment Day, our true faith is revealed by how we treat "the least of these" (Matthew 25:31–46).

Proverbs 14:20–21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 31:8–9

- Those who know and love God will love people the way He does.
- This includes having a heart of generosity to the poor and fighting for justice for the vulnerable.
- Speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.
- Fighting for justice for those who are oppressed is the very core of who God is.

Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; 21:15; 22:16, 22

- Don't be dishonest or oppress the poor to gain wealth or power.
- These proverbs discuss those who cheat anyone for financial gain.
- It was common in the ancient world to have two sets of scales and measures, one that was accurate and one that was heavier or lighter so they could trick their customers into thinking they were getting more for their money than they really were.

Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; 21:15; 22:16, 22

- This is an issue of personal justice, and it can be applied to much more than scales and measures.
- Justice is being fair and honest in all your practices.
- It can be integrity in business.
- It may mean asking a friend to volunteer in your organization but being deceitful about how much time it will take from them.

Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; 21:15; 22:16, 22

- In general, don't take advantage of people.
- Don't cheat anyone out of time or money in any way.
- Practice justice in everything you do.
- The strong contrasting language and synonymous parallelism in Proverbs points to that: "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight" (11:1).

Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; 21:15; 22:16, 22

- Proverbs 21:15 tells us that “when justice is done, it’s a joy to the righteous but terror to the evildoers.”
- Scripture uses similar language to talk about the Day of the Lord, that it will be a day of terror and for judgment the wicked but vindication for the righteous.
- The only people who are upset when justice is done are the ones who benefit from the injustice.

Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; 21:15; 22:16, 22

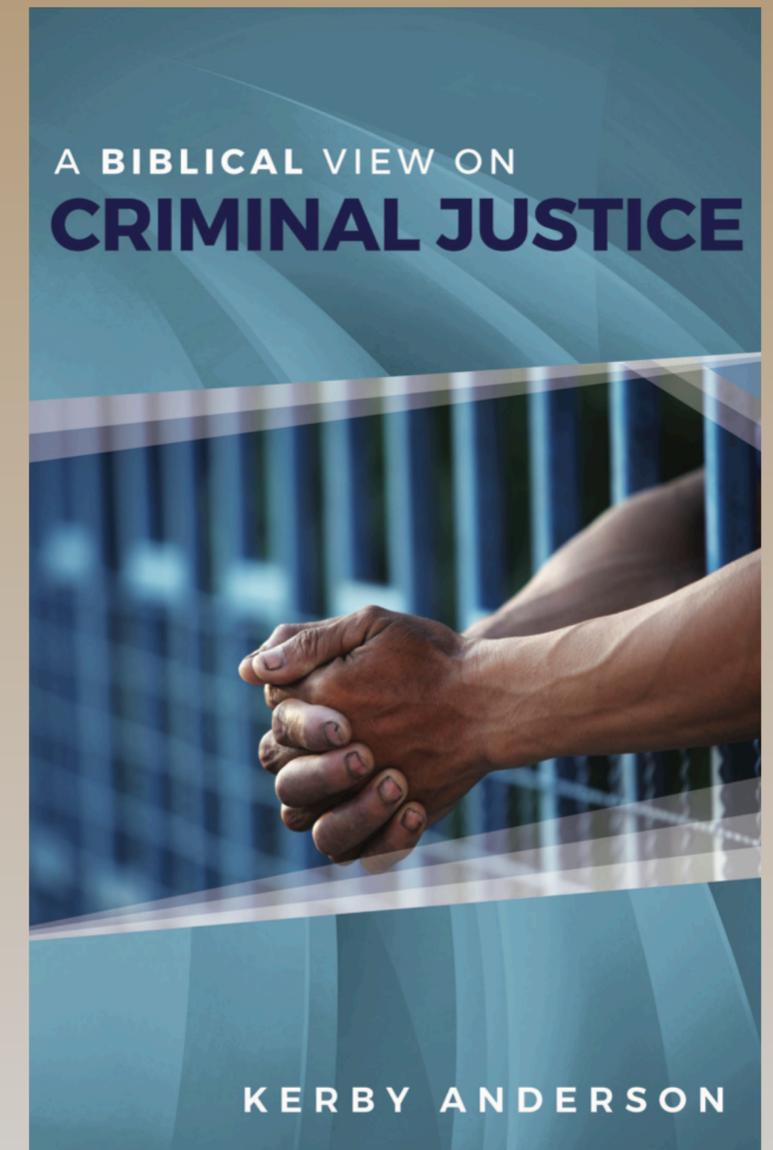
- The righteous should always rejoice when justice is done or an injustice is corrected, even if it doesn't personally affect them, simply because things are being made right, the way they should be.
- Think about how you might feel when a well-known criminal is finally found guilty. You would rejoice for the families of their victims because, even though it will never bring their loved ones back, they finally received justice.

Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; 21:15; 22:16, 22

- The only ones who might be upset in that courtroom would be the criminal and maybe his lawyer.
- We should feel the same way any time an injustice is righted anywhere in the world.
- We, as God's people, should fight so hard for justice for those who cannot fight for themselves.

Criminal Justice

- Crime and the criminal justice system are fundamental issues in society, and certainly ones that Christians must address.
- What are some of the myths about crime?
- How can we fight crime?
- What does the Bible say about crime and punishment?



Criminal Justice

- Many attempts to reform the criminal justice system are bound to fail because they are based upon misinformation about crime.
- One significant distortion is the tendency for society to normalize criminal behavior.
- That is why Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote his influential essay on, “Defining Deviancy Down.”

Criminal Justice

- He described how society was willing to redefine deviant behavior as normal.
- He noted, “In 1929 in Chicago during Prohibition, four gangsters killed seven gangsters on February 14.”
- The nation was shocked. The event became legend.
- It merited two entries in the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

Criminal Justice

- Americans today have “normalized” crime. In many cases, they have accepted the decriminalization of all sorts of criminal behavior.
- They lock their doors and windows, install burglar alarms, and live in gated communities. They try not to think of crime, accepting assurances from politicians that the problem is getting better. In essence, people are willing to “define deviancy down.”

Criminal Justice

- Another myth is the belief that “crime doesn’t pay.” Unfortunately, it pays fairly well for many criminals who are never caught and convicted.
- Crime is not always an irrational act. Some crimes are irrational, such as crimes of passion and drug-induced crimes, but not all.
- Many crimes are actually calculated decisions based on cost/benefit.

Criminal Justice

- If the expected punishment is low, potential criminals commit a crime. If the expected punishment is high, many potential criminals are deterred.
- Expected punishment can be calculated by multiplying four probabilities: the probability of being arrested for a crime, the probability of being prosecuted, the probability of being convicted, and the probability of going to prison.

Criminal Justice

- Morgan Reynolds of Texas A&M University compiled interesting facts regarding expected punishment for burglary.
- He concluded that a potential criminal might expect to spend only 4.8 days in prison for each act of burglary.
- Put another way, stealing is profitable as long as the object stolen is worth more than five days behind bars.

Fighting Crime

- Focus on habitual criminals. One study found people already in the criminal justice system commit most of the violent crimes.
- This statistic included those who have been arrested, convicted, or imprisoned, or who are on probation or parole.
- The chronic offender has been arrested at least five times before his eighteenth birthday, and has avoided arrest for dozens of other crimes.

Fighting Crime

- Fix broken windows. James Q. Wilson and George Kelling first introduced the broken windows theory in *The Atlantic Monthly*.
- “Consider a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to break a few more windows. Eventually, they may even break into the building, and if it’s unoccupied, perhaps become squatters or light fires inside.”

Biblical Principles

- Two key biblical principles concerning crime and punishment are retribution and restitution.
- Retribution is the act of punishing a criminal.
- This concept can be seen in the *lex talionis* principle found in such passages as Exodus 21:23–25 and Leviticus 24:17–21, and in other regulations in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 19:16–21; 22:24; 25:11–12).

Biblical Principles

- A second key principle is restitution, repaying to the victim what was lost or stolen.
- The numerous fines described in Exodus 21:18–22:17 were not paid to the government.
- The offender paid the victim.

Biblical Principles

- We should also support prison ministries and programs to help those who commit crimes.
- Faith-based organizations and people of faith can make a profound impact on the crime rate and the recidivism rate in our prisons.
- Criminologist Byron Johnson provides excellent documentation for this in his book, *More God, Less Crime*.

Resources

