

HOW TO BE SMART

A STUDY OF PROVERBS



Discussion Guide Week 9 “Wisdom and Justice”

- 1. What is justice?** Most of us have an innate sense that there is such a thing as justice, but its contours can be difficult to define. Is justice simply obeying the law? Does justice mean, as Roman philosopher Cicero wrote, rendering to everyone his due? Is justice merely another word for equality?
- Greek philosopher Plato – certainly not a Christian – identified justice as one of the cardinal virtues along with wisdom, moderation and courage. **What does the fact that people from non-Christian backgrounds also identify justice as something good and worthy tell you about justice?**
- Proverbs 11:1 reads, “Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight.” What does this verse mean to you? When a merchant sells you less than that for which you paid have you been denied justice? Consider this: the statue of Justice outside the United States Supreme Court Building depicts a blindfolded justice carrying a scale. **Does justice involve making certain that scales are honest? How does that apply in your life?** Do you treat others with dishonest scales? Do you treat others before you equally or unequally? Do you remember what others have done to you and treat them differently as a result?
- During the early days of his ministry, Billy Graham was urged to hold separate rallies for blacks and whites when in the South. Billy Graham prayerfully responded, “The ground at the foot of the Cross is level.” Discuss.**
- Proverbs repeatedly encourages us to help the poor. For examples, read Proverbs 14:20-21, 14:31, 19:17. **Have you personally done something to help the poor? Outside of church do you give to those less fortunate in either time or money?** In Micah 6, the Bible asks, “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. “ How do you react to the idea that acting justly (which includes specially reaching out to the poor) is what God *requires* of you?
- It has been said that the last thing that we should really want is God’s justice because if God were to give each one of us what we deserve, i.e., justice, we would all lose. G.K. Chesterson noted, “Children are innocent and love justice, while most adults are wicked and prefer mercy.” **Mercy and justice go hand in hand, and being Christian is recognizing that there are times and purposes for both. Can you share an example of a time where you chose to grant mercy rather than demand justice?**
- We commonly think about Justice in terms of how we treat others. We are largely acting justly towards others if we treat others equally, do not cheat them and give to them their due. But can we be unjust even when we are alone? Could Adam, before the arrival of Eve, be just or unjust?
- Plato noted that justice has an inward component. Justice, he noted, comes from a person whose soul is guided by a vision of the Good, and whose soul effectively balances his passions. Plato wrote,

“Justice implies superior character and intelligence while injustice means deficiency in both respects. Therefore, just men are superior in character and intelligence and are more effective in action. As injustice implies ignorance,

stupidity and badness, It cannot be superior in character and intelligence. A just man is wiser because he acknowledges the principle of limit."

In other words, the ability of a person to act justly depends, first and foremost, on their character. If a person's life is in balance with her eyes focused on "the Good" and a willingness to set aside one's own will, then that person (and only that person) can be expected to act justly. If one substitutes "God" for "the Good", how do Plato's ideas about justice compare with your understanding of the Bible's ideas about justice?