

Proverbs 28-29 conclude the Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah copied (chapters 25-29).

There is an overarching structure to these two chapters – which you can see in the outline in your bulletin.

There are six statements contrasting the righteous and the wicked, which serve to stitch the whole section together.

Let me read those proverbs in order:

28:1 – The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

28:12 – When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,  
but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.

28:28 – When the wicked rise, people hide themselves,  
but when they perish, the righteous increase.

29:2 – When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,  
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.

29:16 – When the wicked increase, transgression increases,  
but the righteous will look on their downfall.

29:27 – An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous,  
but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.

In between these six statements are four sections.

Last we looked at the first two sections:

the discerning ruler and the discerning son (28:2-11),  
and the pattern of walking and working in 28:13-27.

This week we will look at sections three and four (29:3-15 and 17-26) –  
but at the very heart of the whole passage is a single verse:

29:1 – “He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck,  
will suddenly be broken beyond healing.”

This is the central question for *you*.

Will you be stubborn?

Will you stiffen your neck and refuse to hear?

Or will you listen to the voice of Wisdom –  
and heed her call?!

1. **The Wicked Flee, but the Righteous Are Bold (28:1)**
  - a. **A Discerning Ruler Will Keep the Law, Seek the LORD, and Maintain Integrity (v2-6)**
  - b. **A Discerning Son Will Be Generous, Blameless, and Humble (v7-11)**

2. **The Triumph of the Righteous (Glory) vs. the Rise of the Wicked (People Hide) (28:12)**
  - a. **Confess Your Sins, Fear the LORD, and Walk in Integrity (v13-18)**
  - b. **Work Hard, Be Faithful, and Don't Show Partiality (v19-24)**
  - c. **Trust in the LORD, Walk in Wisdom, and Give to the Poor (v25-27)**
3. **The Rise of the Wicked (People Hide) vs. the Death of the Wicked (the Righteous Increase) (28:28)**

**Center: The One Who Refuses to Heed Reproof Will Be Broken (29:1)**

Verse 1 is very much the center of chapters 28-29.

*He who is often reproofed, yet stiffens his neck,  
will suddenly be broken beyond healing.*

Notice the way the surrounding verses hold this one together:

“When the wicked rise, people hide themselves,  
but when they perish the righteous increase.” (28:28)  
“When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,  
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.” (29:2)

The first line of verse 28 parallels the last line of verse 2.

The second line of verse 28 parallels the first line of verse 2.

Which puts the focus on verse 1.

How do you respond to reproof?  
Do you humble yourself?  
Quickly?

Or do you stiffen your neck?

Humility is at the heart of the Christian life.

Are we so proud that we cannot admit our faults?

Are we so sure that we alone are right – that we cannot hear the rebukes of others?

Humility is the way that the righteous increase –  
and thus humility is the way to joy.

We shouldn't be surprised: this is what Jesus taught us!

4. **When the Righteous Increase the People Rejoice, When the Wicked Rule, the People Groan (29:2)**

<sup>2</sup> *When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,  
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*

**a. Joy and Stability through Righteousness (v3-6)**

<sup>3</sup> *He who loves wisdom makes his father glad,  
but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.*

<sup>4</sup> *By justice a king builds up the land,  
but he who exacts gifts<sup>[e]</sup> tears it down.*

Verses 3-15 have a chiastic frame.

In the outer frame you have the reference to the father in verse 3 and the mother in v15,  
highlighting parental instruction.

Verses 4 and 14 highlights the king's treatment of the poor.

This suggests that rearing and righteous ruling go together.

Verse 3 talks about the outcome:

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

Jesus plainly builds off this in his story of the prodigal son.

But then verse 15 talks more about the process.

“the rod and reproof give wisdom,  
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”

And think about the framing around this:

v2 – when the righteous increase, the people rejoice,  
but when the wicked rule, the people groan –  
and v16 – When the wicked increase, transgression increases,  
but the righteous will look upon their downfall

Do you want to live in a world where the wicked rule and people groan?

Or do you want to live in a world where the righteous increase and the people rejoice?

Your parenting plays a key role in this.

But your parenting is not determinative.

Sure, verse 15 speak of the rod and reproof giving wisdom,  
but the child also has to take hold of wisdom!

And when parents are teaching wisdom well –

and when children are learning wisdom well –

then “by justice a king builds up the land.”

Especially for us,

we live in a republic – so we have the responsibility of electing our rulers.

But a republic is just as prone to corruption –

“but he who exacts gifts tears it down.”

There is no way to successfully legislate against this.

Today there are many politicians who use their time in office  
to make contacts that get them hired by lobbying groups –  
or who parlay their reputation into speaking tours and book deals.  
It's all legal.

What's wrong with using your political position to become wealthy?

As long as you're not hurting anyone...

Ah – but that's the problem!

“By justice a king builds up the land.”

But the one who seeks gifts (the word does not mean “bribe” –  
it just means gifts) –  
tears it down,

just as surely as the companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

It's the same problem we face in the corporate world.

CEOs are being paid exorbitant amounts of money for doing important jobs.

It is very difficult to see how to fix all this by legislation.

The left thinks that we can fix this by passing laws.

The right thinks that we can just let the “free market” take care of it.

If we had wisdom, either approach would work.

Without wisdom, neither approach will work.

And so verse 5 warns us:

<sup>5</sup> *A man who flatters his neighbor  
spreads a net for his feet.*

Flattery spreads a net –

for whom?

Well, supposedly, the flatterer *thinks* that he spreads a net for others.

You butter them up in order to devour them.

But as verse 6 points out:

<sup>6</sup> *An evil man is ensnared in his transgression,  
but a righteous man sings and rejoices.*

The evil man sought to ensnare others –

but he will fall into his own trap.

The righteous man, however, sings and shouts for joy,

because he has escaped the snare of the flatterer.

And part of the reason for escaping the snare is because of verse 7:

**b. The Righteous Man Knows the Rights of the Poor – Not So the Wicked (v7)**

<sup>7</sup> *A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;  
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.*

The wicked man will accept the flattery.

The wicked man will seek out gifts –  
he is willing to advance his own interests at the expense of others.

So – for instance – if a CEO accepts a massive salary  
at the expense of his workers  
(thereby prompting other companies to pay massive salaries to executives),  
that is an indication that he does not understand the rights of the poor.

The current practice of many businesses to rely on part-time workers –  
so that they can avoid paying benefits –  
allows them to pay their laborers less – and depress the market for labor –  
while increasing the wealth of their executives and stockholders.

The righteous man knows that this is wrong.

The phrase “rights of the poor” refers to the legal judgments passed in their favor.

This is referring to the commonly known information  
about how we protect the poor in our society.  
It will differ from place to place – and from time to time –  
but it’s not just talking about abstract ‘rights.’  
It’s talking about concrete information that anyone in the society *should know*.

The righteous man knows – and therefore acts to help the poor.

The wicked man does not understand –  
he ignores the plight of the poor and blithely pursues his own interests.

And all of this is given application in verses 8-15:

**c. Peace through Righteousness (v8-15)**

<sup>8</sup> *Scoffers set a city aflame,  
but the wise turn away wrath.*

<sup>9</sup> *If a wise man has an argument with a fool,  
the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet.*

Verses 8-9 focus on the impossibility of convincing a fool.

Scoffers set a city aflame.

Many cities can testify to this!

Protests are appropriate!  
And the wise will protest in a way that turns aside wrath.  
But scoffers... only stoke the fires hotter...

And if a wise man would try to argue with the scoffers,  
well, the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet.

Lord, have mercy upon us – and grant us wisdom!!

And then in verse 10:

<sup>10</sup> *Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless  
and seek the life of the upright.*<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *A fool gives full vent to his spirit,  
but a wise man quietly holds it back.*

Now we have upgraded from scoffing and folly to murder.  
But that's where folly goes.

This is why the righteous must often lay low and not try to intervene.  
I think of Obadiah – the steward of Ahab in 1 Kings.  
Obadiah was the steward of the worst king in Israel's history.  
But Obadiah feared the LORD.

How can a Yahweh-worshiper serve as steward for a Baal-worshipping king of Israel?  
By keeping his head down.

Ahab and Jezebel tried to kill the prophets of the LORD.  
Obadiah was steward of the king.  
So he knew the king's plans.  
And he protected the prophets by hiding two groups of 50 each in caves,  
giving them bread and water  
(presumably from the king's own supplies!).

He was a wise man who quietly held back –  
who did not “give full vent to his spirit.”  
If he had spouted off – if he had rebuked Ahab –  
he would have died – and so would 100 more prophets of Yahweh!

Sometimes, the way of wisdom is to keep your mouth shut.

But Elijah, on the other hand, was called to rebuke Ahab to his face.  
For Elijah, therefore, the way of wisdom was to answer the fool according to his folly.  
For Obadiah, the way of wisdom was to not answer the fool.

You need wisdom to know what *you* are called to do in *your* situation.

Verses 12-14 then focus again on the court:

<sup>12</sup> *If a ruler listens to falsehood,  
all his officials will be wicked.*

The ruler who listens to deceptive words  
encourages lies and falsehoods –  
with the result that all his officials will be wicked –  
because they will keep spreading lies in order to win his favor.

It may seem at times as though our situation is hopeless.  
We are surrounded by scoffers, deceivers, fools.  
Our politicians seem to thrive and flourish amid the foul and noisome stench  
of the political swamp.

But verse 13 is supposed to encourage us in this!

<sup>13</sup> *The poor man and the oppressor meet together;  
the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.*

At first that may not sound encouraging.  
If the LORD gives light to the eyes of the oppressor,  
then doesn't that mean that he is a neutral party?!!!

No.  
It does level the playing field.  
But think about the implications of a level playing field!

The oppressor has all the power.  
The poor has none.

In the eyes of man, there is no level playing field!  
But before God the oppressor is just another man.

He will get no special treatment.

Remember that!  
Because in human affairs fortunes often reverse!  
Right now, you may be the poor one.  
But then things come full circle –  
and God shows mercy and restores your fortunes...  
And if you are not careful, then you may wind up as the oppressor!

That is why verse 14 is so important:

<sup>14</sup> *If a king faithfully judges the poor,*

*his throne will be established forever.*

The king cannot be indifferent to the oppression of the powerless (W 442).

In verse 12 we saw the ruler who listened to lies.

In verse 14 we see the king who faithfully judges the poor.

Only in our Lord Jesus do we find a king who faithfully judges the poor –  
and so his throne will be established forever!

And *because* King Jesus sits upon his throne –  
therefore, if you claim to be a citizen of the kingdom of Christ,  
then you must be characterized by his sense of justice for the oppressed!

Don't be swayed by the scoffers who set cities aflame!

Don't be turned aside by fools who vent their lies.

As you have opportunity – follow the way of Jesus in defending the oppressed!

Verse 15 then applies this to parenting:

<sup>15</sup> *The rod and reproof give wisdom,  
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*

This concludes the inclusio started in verse 3.

There it was only the father that was mentioned –  
here it is only the mother.

Discipline is important.

Discipline includes both the rod and reproof.

Spanking alone does not communicate well.

But neither does reproof alone.

Word and deed go together.

We need bodily correction as well as verbal correction.

The alternative is to leave the child to himself.

And no child is prepared to figure out the path of life alone!

We'll hear more about the need for discipline in just a moment...

## **5. When the Wicked Increase, So Does Transgression; But Not for Long! (29:16)**

Our fifth contrast is seen in verse 16

<sup>16</sup> *When the wicked increase, transgression increases,  
but the righteous will look upon their downfall.*



Don't worry, the father says, the prosperity of the wicked cannot last forever!  
And so we need to prepare for the day of their downfall.  
If we are proud and arrogant in our opposition the wicked –  
then when they come tumbling down,  
we are likely to replace them – and power will go to our heads,  
and we will oppress them the way they oppressed us!

We need to walk by faith – to heed reproof – and to be slow to anger – slow to speak.

In other words, we need discipline:

**a. The Need for Discipline (v17-21)**

<sup>17</sup> *Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;  
he will give delight to your heart.*

What does discipline look like?

<sup>18</sup> *Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint,<sup>[g]</sup>  
but blessed is he who keeps the law.*

Discipline starts by paying attention to what God has said.

“People are only truly happy when they earnestly and willingly subordinate themselves  
to the word of God which they possess and have the opportunity of hearing.”  
(Delitzsch in W 447)

The term “cast off restraint” was used in Exodus 32 to refer to Israel’s rebellion.  
They refused to hear and keep the Law.  
And the result was God’s curse upon the wilderness generation.

But blessed is he who keeps the law.

The Law is not a bad thing.

Paul speaks of the Law as a paedagogue.

The paedagogue was a servant whose task was to discipline the children.  
The Law’s purpose was to discipline us – to train us in righteousness.

And the Law was a faithful servant.

The Law disciplined us well and properly!

The problem was not with the Law.

I actually suspect that Paul’s discussion of the Law in Galatians 3-4  
was rooted in his reflection on Proverbs 29.

<sup>19</sup> *By mere words a servant is not disciplined,  
for though he understands, he will not respond.*

<sup>20</sup> *Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?  
There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

<sup>21</sup> *Whoever pampers his servant from childhood  
will in the end find him his heir.<sup>[h]</sup>*

Verses 19 and 21 frame verse 20.

Discipline requires more than mere words.  
You can teach someone with words.  
But the foolish slave – like the foolish child –  
will only learn wisdom through discipline.

This is rooted in the idea that we learn best when our bodies and our minds are both engaged.  
For most of human history, bodily discipline was seen as a necessary part of life.  
When you did something wrong, you could get beaten for it.  
Nowadays people call it barbaric –  
but we have replaced physical punishment  
with all sorts of emotional and psychological punishments.

Which is worse: beat someone, tell them “don’t do it again,” and let them go home –  
or lock them up, and only refer to them as a number for seven years?  
(thereby allowing them to stew in their bitterness and hate...)

Which is more barbaric?

Verse 21 is hard to translate –  
but however you translate it suggests that it’s a bad idea to pamper your servant.

Clear discipline is good for those under your care.

And at the heart of this section – in verse 20 – is the man who is hasty in his words.  
Words are insufficient for discipline.  
But hasty words will only get you in trouble!  
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

And this theme then continues in our final section:

**b. Wrath, Pride, Fear of Man vs. the One Who Trusts in the LORD (v22-26)**

<sup>22</sup> *A man of wrath stirs up strife,  
and one given to anger causes much transgression.*

Verse 22 warns against being given over to wrath and anger.  
If you control your anger – you can use it well in working for change.  
That’s called “righteous anger.”  
But to be a “man of wrath” – to be one “given to anger” –

means that wrath and anger is in charge – you are just going along for the ride...

and the ride will end in destruction.

<sup>23</sup> *One's pride will bring him low,  
but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.*

Again – humility is at the heart of the life of wisdom.

Aristotle thought that being “great-souled” was a good thing –  
but this is precisely the attitude that Proverbs says will bring you low.  
But the one who is lowly in spirit –  
the one who is humble and does not put himself forward –  
will obtain honor.

When the world is functioning properly –  
you do not put yourself forward –  
because I am looking out for you –  
and so I seek to honor *you*!  
Why do we feel the need to put ourselves forward?  
Because we feel like no one has our interests in view...

The best way to start working on this  
is to start looking around you for who else deserves honor –  
and honor them.

Verse 24 then speaks of the one who encourages a thief:

<sup>24</sup> *The partner of a thief hates his own life;  
he hears the curse, but discloses nothing.*

The curse referred to here is the divine curse against thieves.  
If you know that God forbids what someone else wants to do –  
and you don't say it –  
then you hate your own life,  
because by your silence you are approving of sin.

And hence:

<sup>25</sup> *The fear of man lays a snare,  
but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.*

After all, why do we remain silent?  
Why do we not rebuke the one who rebels against God?

Because we fear man.

We are afraid of what they will say or do.  
We must fear the LORD.  
We must trust him – and then simply do what it is right –  
and say what is right.

If they refuse to hear the rebuke – that’s on them!  
If they refuse to heed reproof – they will have to deal with that before God.

And so we come back to the ruler:  
<sup>26</sup> *Many seek the face of a ruler,  
but it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.*

Do not fear man.  
Do not seek the face of the ruler in order to get justice.  
Seek the face of the LORD!  
This is not saying that you should never seek justice in human courts!  
Rather, it is saying that your *hope* is not in human courts.

God is sovereign over all the affairs of man.  
Therefore, if you obtain justice in the human courts  
it is *because* you obtained justice from the LORD.

## **6. The Mutual Abomination of the Righteous and the Wicked (29:27)**

The final statement in this section reminds us of what life is like in this age:

<sup>27</sup> *An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous,  
but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.*

There is an unrelenting war between the righteous and the wicked.  
The wicked abhor the one whose way is straight.  
Crooked eyes think that the straight way is bent.

But also the righteous see that the unjust man is an abomination.  
It’s because we love God – and we love the unjust man.

How do you love a thief?  
Do you say, “Oh, you’re a thief? – please steal some more!!”

No!

That’s not love.

Love says, “stop it – that’s wrong!”

We love God with all our heart – and because we love God, we love all that God made –  
and we love all that reminds us of the God whom we love.

This is why we love all people – because all people were made in the image of God.  
But this is also why we find the unjust man to be an abomination.

Because in his injustice he has warped the image of God.  
We don't recognize *God* in his unjust actions!  
He is twisting and distorting the image of God.

And so we hate him for twisting and distorting the image of the one we love.

Of course, if we are truly humble before God,  
then we will admit that we also have twisted and distorted the image of God.

And so we will hate and despise ourselves!

But remember the heart of our passage.  
29:1 – he who is often reprov'd, yet stiffens his neck,  
will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

The one who confesses and forsakes his sin (28:13) will obtain mercy.  
If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins  
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.