

Family Worship Preparation: The Foundations of Righteous Government

Deuteronomy 16:18–20

As we prepare our hearts for the preaching of the Word this Lord's Day, we are turning our attention to Deuteronomy 16. In this passage, God lays out the foundation for civil government, instructing His people on how to appoint rulers and how those rulers must conduct themselves. While this text specifically addresses judges and officers in the gates of Israel, the underlying theology of authority applies to every sphere of life—including our own home.

God established government for our advantage. Civil government, church government, and family government are all divine institutions meant to protect the righteous, punish evil, and create an environment where we can live quiet, peaceable, and godly lives. The moral foundation for all of this is the Fifth Commandment: honoring father and mother teaches us how to submit to all God-ordained authority. As a family, we must understand that authority is never a license for absolute domination; it is a sacred office of service that is strictly accountable to God's law.

When we read this passage together, we are looking at the highest standard of justice ever given to a nation. It is a standard that points out the deep corruption of our own modern society, but it also reveals the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate King and perfect Judge.

The Duty to Choose Wisely and Rule Justly

When God commanded the people of Israel to appoint judges in all their gates, He was giving them a grave responsibility. They were not to choose leaders based on popularity or power, but based on character. They were to select wise men, men of understanding, and men who feared God and hated covetousness. How a people choose their leaders will determine whether government is a profound blessing or a terrible curse.

God gave these rulers four emphatic commands. First, they must never, never, never corrupt their office by bending justice for their own selfish gain. Second, they must not "respect persons," which literally means they must not pay attention to the faces of the people before them. True justice is blind to whether a person is rich or poor, a friend or a stranger. Third, they must never take a bribe, because bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and turns justice upside down. Finally, they are commanded to zealously pursue pure justice. The text literally says, "Justice, justice shalt thou follow." They are to chase after righteous rule with all their strength.

This exact same standard applies to the family. Fathers and mothers hold an office appointed by God. We are commanded not to pervert that office through selfishness, harshness, or favoritism. Parents must zealously pursue pure manhood and womanhood, governing the home with the straight standard of God's Word. When a family pursues justice and righteousness within its own walls, God promises a rich blessing: that we may live fully and enjoy the inheritance He has given us.

Questions for Family Discussion

To help us apply this passage to our own hearts and prepare our minds for the upcoming sermon, take time as a family to discuss the questions below.

1. What does it mean that justice should be "blind" to faces, and how does this apply to how parents treat their children and how siblings treat one another?
2. Why is it dangerous to give someone absolute authority without holding them accountable to the Word of God?
3. In what ways can we practice the Fifth Commandment in our home so that we are prepared to honor authority in the church and in our community?
4. When we see corruption and injustice in the world's governments, how does it make us long for the perfect rule of Jesus Christ?

Having discussed these things, remember that none of us rules perfectly, and none of us submits perfectly. The breakdown of society begins with the breakdown of self-government and family government. This should drive us to our knees in repentance and draw us to the cross, where Christ paid for our failures and established His eternal, righteous kingdom.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your Word and the beautiful picture of godly government You have given us. We confess that our society has turned its back on Your law, and we pray for a massive renewal of Christ-exalting Christianity, beginning right here in our own home. Help the parents in this home to rule justly, to show no favoritism, and to lovingly shepherd the children You have given us. Help the children to honor authority with a right spirit. We thank You that Jesus Christ is our perfect Judge and King. Prepare our hearts to hear Your Word preached this Sunday, and use it to conform us to Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ListenVoice Settings

This looks good. Can you add some scripture references where the people of God did not obey these instructions and the consequences that followed?

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The Tragic Consequences of Perverted Justice

When we look through the history of Israel, we see the tragic reality of what happens when men ignore God's clear commands for governing. God ordained these offices for the good of His people, but the story is not simply one of obedience; it is often a story of deep corruption and severe consequences.

Consider the sons of Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:1–5. Samuel was a righteous judge, but his sons, Joel and Abijah, "walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." Because they loved money more than true justice, the entire nation was grieved. The consequence was catastrophic: the people used this corruption as an excuse to reject God's order and demand a king like all the other nations. The perversion of justice in the leadership led to the spiritual rebellion of the whole nation.

We see this same spirit in the days of the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 1:21–23, the Lord brings a devastating indictment against the rulers of Judah. He says, "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them." Because the leaders respected the faces of the rich and took bribes, God brought the terrifying judgment of exile upon them. The land that was meant to be a beacon of righteousness became a place of oppression, and God removed His protective hand.

Even in the days of Micah, the prophet cries out against heads who "judge for reward" and priests who "teach for hire" (Micah 3:11). The consequence declared in the very next verse is that Zion would be "plowed as a field" and Jerusalem would become "heaps." When the justice of God is abandoned by those in authority, the inevitable result is the collapse of society and the judgment of God. This reminds us how desperately we need the perfect rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone judges in absolute righteousness.

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