

**With Authority and Justice for All**  
**Deuteronomy 16:18-17:20**

**Intro:**

- **Pray**
- [Illst: In college: arrested, going to court in college, today we will be looking at authority and justice]

In Deuteronomy, Moses is teaching through The Ten Commandments. Remember the Ten Commandments fit under the two great commandments: (1) Commandments 1-4 are the first great commandment, which is to love the LORD with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and (2) the second great commandment, love your neighbor as yourself, deals with commandments six through ten.

This morning's text covers the fifth commandment (**Deuteronomy 5:16**), "*Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*" The larger context for the fifth command taught Israel more than just about the parent-child relationship. The larger context teaches how proper respect for authority and pursuing justice was a display of love for their neighbors.

In ancient Israel, parents were the primary holders of authority in the family and because of their position they warranted honor and respect.

- This honor and respect was to carry over into the larger community.
- It also taught that those who possess authority had great responsibility. [Illst: *Spiderman's Uncle Ben Parker must have read Deuteronomy because proverb is the theme of the series, "With great power comes great responsibility."*]

**Here is the main point: How you honor father and mother is connected to how you honor all authority: authority in the church and civil authority. The love justice and righteousness begins at home.**

When you grow up not honoring your mother and father and reinterpreting what your mother and father teach you about God, His word, His justice and rules then you are not going to know what it is to honor a teacher, a judge, a legal system, a police officer and church leaders. Then it becomes easy to dishonor and reject authority and pervert justice.

**Quick application for moms and dads:** we need to know that our children are learning how to respect authority and practice justice by how we lead at home. What is learned at the dinner table in regard to respect of authority is carried out on the playground, is revealed in the classroom, spills onto the streets, into the work place and eventually into our courts and government.

**Quick application for those preparing for marriage.** Here is what I have always counseled young men and young women as they look for someone to marry. If you really want to know the character of person you are dating listen to how they talk about their parents and to their parents. Watch how they treat them. This is a good indicator of how they will treat you if you marry that person.

**I. Authorities are to Render Justice for All (Deuteronomy 16:18-17:13)**

In Deuteronomy 16:18, Israel was to choose judges and officers at the local levels. They needed a judge who would hear the case and render the verdict. Then they needed a clerk with a file cabinet to record the verdict and make sure it got executed. **The temptation with this kind of system would be to abuse authority and pervert justice because they** lived with the people administering justice.

**In v. 19, the judges must render just judgments.** They were to not pervert justice by being partial, twisted or bought. Yahweh linked Israel's pursuit of justice with their inheritance of the land. When justice was corrupted Israel's handle on the land was loosened. This eventually happened in Israel and both Judah and Israel lost their inheritance.

**First: Justice was not to be turned, bent, twisted, perverted or mangled. Leviticus 19:15, do no unrighteousness in judgment. Do not respect the poor or the wealthy, the weak or the mighty.** [Illst] Have you seen the statue of Lady Justice? It is a lady standing with balances in one hand and a sword in the other. This was to portray that justice was blind and therefore did not favor anyone according to color, age, income, status, power or anything.

**Second: In v. 19, justice was to be impartial.** The literal translation is that "*judges were to not regard faces.*" If you lived in the village or town with the people you judged eventually a judge would come across someone he knew and the temptation would have been to regard faces.

- You weren't to let your fishing buddy off the hook and then throw the book at the next guy for the same offense. [Illst: Getting caught by the Game Warden's on the lake late at night in high school.]
- Nor were they to look at someone and go, "*Oh man I know you and I know your reputation. Your family offended our family a few years back, its pay back time.*"

**Third: Verse 19 says that justice was to not be bought.** This would have been like the *good ole boy network* kicking into to grease the palm of his buddy, the judge.

**In summary,** the judicial system was to love justice but because the world is broken by sin the temptation for the judge will be to pervert justice so the judge must not redefine justice, regard faces (play favorites) nor take a bribe. Verse 20 gave Israel the goal. It is literally translated, "*Justice, justice you shall pursue. You shall be hot for justice.*"

**Application:** Justice in the land begins with father and mother. If you will not respect your father and mother's authority then you will not respect God's authority. If you will not respect God's authority then you will not respect any authority. If we are able to submit to God's sovereign authority then we will have trouble with suffering, government, any other kind of circumstance that works itself out sovereignly in our lives because we will not see God's sovereign hand working through governmental systems, even corrupt governmental systems.

**When we hear a text like this we cannot help but think of our own judicial system.** While is it better than most it is still marred with corruption and shameful miscarriages of justice. The poor are abused, judges play favorites and verdicts are bought. People are set free that should pay a fine or be put in prison and then people are wrongly convicted.

**Just because you and I may not work in the justice system does not mean we do not have responsibility.** Respect for authority and justice begins in the home, as does proper submission to it. We teach it whether we know it or not. For example:

- How do you talk to your kids' about their schoolteachers or coaches?
- How do you talk about the president of the United States around your kids?
- College student how do you talk about your professors to your fellow students?
- How do you talk to others about anyone who is in authority over you?
- When you **vote** are you trying to see if the candidates are men and women who are concerned with justice and righteousness?
- **We need to remember that God is sovereign over all. He is King of kings and LORD of lords. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."** God is not just sovereign over the president's heart but he governs the flight of the sparrow and numbers the hairs on our heads.

If we are trusting in Him, then when leaders do not do what we think they ought to do we can disagree with them respectfully but trust the in the end the final court of appeal is in God's court. We may have to wait until that day but until then

we must submit as much as we can to the authorities over us and if we are in authority we must lead with integrity and honor serving those we are over.

- **We are all influencers.** How we model our respect and submission to authority and love for justice in our conversations will influence someone else. Let's be people who talk about these things as if we love, respect and submit to the sovereign authority of God and know that He is the God of true justice.

## **II. Justice is Built on What You Worship as Authoritative (Deuteronomy 16:21-17:1)**

These verses seem to be out of place and do not flow with how Moses was presenting the message. *In reality these verses get to the heart of how authority and justice work in the covenant community.* So how do these verses fit? Context? (Read the text)

**In short, right worship is connected to authority and justice.** Different gods had different laws and if you have competing laws then you will have differing views of justice because you have differing sources of authority. Multiple justices from multiple authorities ultimately means rampant injustice.

To place Asherah beside Yahweh's altar meant Israel would be accepting a rival source of authority and justice. They were to utterly reject pagan worship nor try to blend them (syncretism). To blend them also meant to reject Yahweh's word, authority and justice.

Scholars also tell us that one of the epithets applied to the pagan goddess, Asherah was "*Asherah of deposits, goddess of oracles.*" To proclaim oracles was to be a source of authority and so people would use this pagan deity to resolve disputes and issues so she was considered a source of truth, wisdom, authority and justice.

**The main point is that the issue of authority and justice is an issue of worship and not just private worship but Israel's corporate worship because this involved the altar and sacrifices.** What you worship is your source of authority; your source of wisdom and your source of truth.

**In Deuteronomy 17:1 we find one more verse that seems to be out of place.** Remember context, context, context always helps us interpret Scripture.

- **So what is the context? Moses was still talking about authority and justice.** In this context, what was Moses saying when he said, "*You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God.*"
- **Why would a person give a blemished offering?** It was because they did not respect Yahweh's authority and held Him in contempt. *It was an improper form of worship that rejected Yahweh's authority.*

**Application: We need to look at this from the New Covenant perspective.** We don't offer animals but we offer a sacrifice of praise to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **Right worship** shapes our hearts and minds. **It** shapes our view of God. **Right worship** strengthens our wisdom in the practical realities of life. **Right worship** helps us see God rightly, ourselves rightly and make decisions based on the fact that Yahweh deserves our best.

**One of the ways to apply this is that we ought to be preparing our hearts for worship of our King in our context.** On Saturday we ought to be thinking about worshiping with the church on Sunday morning. Too often we don't come into God's presence prepared. We take it too lightly. We come in not knowing what is going on and unprepared. This is why we often do not experience the gravity and gladness of corporate worship.

**We think worship is a fire to be lit by the music or the music leader or the preacher and the preaching. *In reality if we have not put any of the wood of worship in the fireplace of our hearts during the week how can we expect right worship to be produced on Sunday morning?***

This is why many churches approach a worship service as the time to **gen** up the people with **rah-rah** worship into an emotional state with music so people will think they have experienced worship. When this happens right worship of God begins to get blended with entertainment and emotionalism and all other sorts of stuff. It becomes syncretism. We must be careful.

**I want to be encouraging at this point because this is tough application for us in our culture.** We are children of our culture and it is easy to bring the wrong aspects of our culture into what ought to be a biblical corporate worship service.

**Here is my encouragement.** So let's be followers of Christ who make time to properly prepare for corporate worship. I say corporate worship because this text is talking about corporate worship. Let's be a church that bases our worship on the authority of God's word and the glory of His Son and preparation of worship does not begin on Sunday morning but on Saturday night. Through the week let's let our private worship be the fuel of preparation for corporate worship on Sunday morning. Let's come in desiring the gravity and gladness of the gospel prayed, sung, read and preached. Let's glory in the cross of Christ.

**I must confess I do not know how God does this but** many, many times through a corporate worship service God has reoriented my heart and life through the right preaching of His word, the songs that were sung and the prayers that were prayed. I do not know how God does it except it is by His Spirit, by the authority of His word and by being with the church that God renews, refreshed, reorients, realigns and causes me to recommit my love for His afresh. [Illst: JP's sermon three years ago]

### **III. How to Administer Justice in the Covenant Community (Deuteronomy 17:2-7)**

**Verses 2-7 say you are to put to death someone who is guilty of idolatry.** You might wonder why this is found here and not under one of the first two commandments.

This text is dealing with the procedural administration of justice and how its proper administration guarantees justice in the covenant community. It is a text that lays out the process to follow.

It says if anyone is found to be guilty of idolatry then the case was to be investigated carefully by the judges and priests so that justice would be administered properly. It did not matter whether it is a man or a woman justice was to be administered impartially. Since this was a capital offense it was important to have two or three witnesses in order to establish the guilt of the accused. Finally the witnesses must participate in the execution. So in case they lied about their statement it would make them liable for the death of that person.

**Application:** **Since we do not live in the same kind of society as ancient Israel we must look to see how this applies to the New Covenant community.** In this text we find the seeds for the process of *corrective church discipline*.

**There are two types of church discipline: formative** (discipleship) and **corrective** (where the church applies justice within the covenant community). This text plants the seeds for corrective church discipline.

An example of corrective church discipline in the New Testament is seen in **1 Corinthians 5** where the Apostle Paul severely rebuked the church for their slowness to act on a case of incest and adultery. He told them that when the majority (the church members) were gathered to put the man out of the fellowship so that the man would repent and return to the Lord and thus to the church.

Then in **Matthew 18:15-20** and **1 Timothy 5:19-20** we hear the language of **Deuteronomy 17:2-7**. **Matthew 18:15-17**, "*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*"

<sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

The reason we have two or three witnesses deal with the sin before the church hears the charge is to make sure the charge is legitimate or fits the need for church discipline. An issue that makes it all the way for the church to hear needs to be a serious issue. **Matthew 18** and **1 Timothy 5** are not weaponized for every little offense. Neither are they to be used to threaten people within the church. If it is not a very grave and serious issue then the latter half of **Matthew 18** is what needs to be applied, which calls us to forgive or release debts because we have been forgiven great debts.

**Seminary professor and missionary, Ajith Fernando**, says in regards to how **Matthew 18, 1 Timothy 5** are connected to **Deuteronomy 17**, “*Most of us have seen angry people who are always finding fault with others and always looking to see where there is sin in the body and pursuing the wrongdoer until he or she is punished. We usually are repelled by such behavior. Our primary focus is always on grace, for ultimately it is the availability of grace that enables us to be obedient to God. But when serious sins such as idolatry and adultery surface in the body, we must act decisively against that.*”

**Illst: Releasing the stone: Matthew 18:21-35**, releasing grudges is releasing grace, the goal of corrective church discipline is to release grace into the person’s life. Corrective church discipline is not for just run of the mill sin or when someone offends you because they don’t do things like you do. It is for idolatry, adultery, murder, gossip/divisiveness and big sins and even then it is where a person is unrepentant. If the person repents then we forgive and go on, we release the stone in order to release grace. Neither do we try to manage the repentance of a person.

#### **IV. How to Respond to Limitations of Human Authority and Justice (Deuteronomy 17:8-13)**

In vv. 8-13 we find that life is complicated and things get messy. What we have here in Moses’ Israel is the judge scratching his head and asking for help at the next level. In ancient Israel, it was the judge that requested the supreme court to view the case and not the disputants.

- **Verse 9:** In Israel the Levitical priests and judge sorted out the case together.
- **Verses 10-11:** Then when the matter is settled they were to not just render a verdict but to also teach in the decision that they rendered. Furthermore, discipleship flowed from the verdict so that it would go into the hearts of the people.
- **Verses 12-13:** Finally if the man who has received the decision of the higher court responded *presumptuously*, essentially saying, “no” I won’t abide by the decision then this was considered the act of a traitor. Because he would not abide by the decision he had broken covenant with God’s people. A *presumptuous* response was to be dealt with by capital punishment so that, as v. 13 says, all of the people would to fear the decision and the rule of law.

**Application:** **Verses 12-13** are a picture of rough justice. It is far better to fear, love and respect Yahweh and so have the desire to honor Yahweh’s authority and justice control our hearts. However, if the fear of God will not be our joy to help us fight sin then the warning or the fear of punishment must rule.

#### **Conclusion:**

Israel practiced capital punishment and what it teaches us is the seriousness of sin. When the text says, “. . . you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

When we hear a passage like what we have just been through this morning we all ought to be convicted for all of our hearts are idol factories and we will worship something or someone.

- We have all perverted justice and rejected God's authority in our lives.
- Who has not responded to God's sovereign authority in our lives by saying to Him, "Why are You doing this to me? You do not know what you are doing?"
- We have all at one time or another held God in contempt and responded to Him presumptuously. We have all been idol worshippers and deserve the death penalty.
- We are the evil one who needs to be purged.
- We are the ones who deserve justice from the One True Judge who has the authority to administer it rightly.
- After I studied this text I was cut to the heart at my sin and offense against God. It struck proper fear in my heart and drove me to the cross of Christ.

Because here is what we know from God's word: Yahweh, the True Righteous Judge, will not overlook sin. For Him to remain Just and Righteous, He must punish sinners for their sin because He will not allow justice to be perverted. He will investigate the case accurately. He will administer justice in righteousness because He is the only One who has ever hotly pursued righteousness.

It is in the heart of God to pursue justice and justice only. Do you know what this means for us? It means we are in trouble because Yahweh the righteous Judge will investigate our hearts and lives accurately will render a verdict. Here is the verdict—guilty. We are guilty and we are the evil that needs to be purged.

**Is there any hope? Is there any good news? Where is the redemption I need?** The good news is in **Romans 5:8-10** says, ". . . but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

For God to remain Just and the Justifier of the ungodly then someone must pay for our sin of breaking the fifth commandment. The good news is Jesus Christ received our capital punishment for us on the cross.

It was God's plan all along to send Jesus to pay for our sin and to honor and glorify the name of His Father. **Isaiah 53:10-11** says, "<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus is our only hope.

#### **Benediction Blessing:**

"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Jud 24–25.