

Follow Justice
Deuteronomy 16:18-20
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A. God's Way (v. 18):

1. Shall appoint for yourself - This is the process for permanently and decisively putting leaders in place, which should never change.
 - a) In the wilderness Moses at first had been the only judge of the people. But when the judicial burden became too great for him he appointed "leading men" of the tribes as military leaders ("commanders"), officials, and judges (1:15–18; cf. Ex. 18). Probably these men were the chief elders in each tribe. So the judges appointed in each city were probably taken from that city's council of elders (the elders functioned as a judicial body; cf. Deut. 19:12).^[1]

2. Shall appoint for yourself - The people put in places of authority need to be carefully instituted because they would rule over those who appoint them, not God.
 - a) There was no king at this point because the Lord was their King.

3. Shall appoint for yourself - Being a part of the voting process is a Biblical responsibility, not just a civil one.

a) The foundation for the establishment of the Israelite monarchy was laid (17:14–20; cf. Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17; 1 Sam. 8–10). The survival of the kingly line (Deut. 17:18–20) would become a parallel theme to the survival of the nation as a whole. Kingly survival would become the backbone of the books of Kings and Chronicles and the foundation for Israel’s messianic hope. Marriage into the royalty of foreign powers was used by pagan kings as a means of strengthening their treaties. But Israel’s king was to depend on the Lord rather than on military strength, political alliances, or personal wealth, and he was not to take many wives, or his heart would be led astray from the Lord (17:16–20).^[2]

4. Judge – It is essential to determine who governs and arbitrates cases while providing leadership over the issues because they are required to execute the rights of the people justly, no matter who the people are.

a) The implementation of the demands of the covenant on the part of the community required political and religious officials who, under God, could ensure stability and obedience. The first group consisted of “judges and officials.” Their task was to apply fair administration of justice without resorting to pagan means. In the interest of justice, Deuteronomy 17:2–7 provides guidelines for admissible evidence. Matters too difficult for resolution at the local level were to be decided by a high court of priests and judges at a central sanctuary, with punishment appropriate to the crime.^[3]

5. Judge – In order for a community to function justly, it needs men and women who know the law, like in the case of Deborah, and they must possess the judicial ability to arbitrate it accurately.

a) In each town, judges and officers were to be appointed. The officers, or officials, were probably not dissimilar to policemen in some of their functions. Possibly they would ensure that people came to the judges, and also that judgments were carried out. These judges and officers were local men, hence they were respected in their communities, but they also had a wide knowledge of the people for whom they gave judgment. They were not, it appears, under any direct external authority, but had to judge according to the law that Moses was giving.^[4]

6. Officers – They also needed leaders to function among them so that what was litigated was faithfully executed into the community's life .

a) The “officials” were probably assistants to the judges, probably functioning as clerks. These leaders were to judge the people fairly (lit., “righteously”; cf. 1:17; Prov. 18:5; 24:23). Their verdicts were to conform to the righteous standards set forth in the Word of God (which meant at that time the five books of Moses). They were not to pervert justice. This implies that God had given them a heavenly pattern for their actions toward each other. If their actions did not conform to this pattern, those actions were to be changed or punished. Any nonconformity to the pattern of justice was a perversion.^[5]

7. Which the Lord your God is giving you – The Word of God was provided by the One who has all authority and power and rules as the supreme, sovereign King. His authority and sovereign power are permanently put in place through these leaders. God’s purpose is to institute His Word into the day-to-day life of His people. These leaders are only in place and given His authority to do it .

8. Which the Lord your God is giving you – The New Testament church community establishes His principles into the life of the people (Ephesians 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 3:15). The people who oversee this are the pastor (1 Timothy 4:11-13; Titus 2:13-15), elders,

and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Acts 6:1-6). This is because God executes His agenda for the world through the church (Ephesians 1:22-23), which is the restraining force against the attacks of Satan (Ephesians 3:8-12). This is why we have chaos on earth; when the church fails in Revelation. We hold the keys to lock and unlock the gates of Hades (Matthew 16:13-20).

9. They shall judge the people – The Lord God provides the authority to these individuals to arbitrate and administer justice based on His Word, even if it means being heroic against their enemies, which can include but is not limited to, delivering the poor and the oppressed.

a) How the community works outside of the elders as guided by Jethro's advice to Moses (Ex. 18); there must be another leadership body that serves the community so that it functions under the Lord's Word to the last person, even the children (Deut. 6:1-9).

10. Righteous judgment – These leaders must have an unwavering, 'unswerving adherence to the standards of God' and committed to living out the very principles they hold everyone accountable to live by (Habakkuk 2:4).

a) Morrow has presented a convincing argument, however, that we are not dealing here with a "class of professional judges," but rather with the sort of legal community "in the gate" to which every fully enfranchised Israelite belonged (*Scribing the Center*, 167–69), which community M. Noth has described (*Exodus*, tr. J. Bowden, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962] 188–89; idem, *Leviticus*, tr. J. E. Anderson, OTL, 2nd ed [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977] 141). Morrow translates the phrase מִשְׁפָּט צָדִיק in an emphatic sense as "totally correct judgment" (p. 170). As was the case in 1:13–15, "wise and understanding" men were selected for the task of exercising "righteous judgment." These men are urged not to "pervert judgment," nor to "show

partiality,” nor to “take a bribe [ἄδωκον], for the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and twists the words of the righteous.”^[6]

11. Righteous judgment – It is essential for these leaders to have unwavering, adherence to God’s standards, and live by them because it is due to them that believers in the Christian community are encouraged to execute God’s principles in their lives and the life of the community (1 Timothy 4:15-16; Hebrews 13:7-8). As a result, the government structure that leads the Lord’s community leads first by example.

B. Without Partiality (v. 19):

1. You shall not distort justice – No one should emphatically negate any part of the law by willfully or inadvertently assembling a group of people who seek to change the laws or to distort or interrupt the execution of God’s laws.

a) These words imply that impartial justice could be an elusive goal because of the weakness of human nature. Therefore, it was absolutely essential that the standard set forth in the Law be followed precisely. Their lives and prosperity (Deut. 16:20) depended on their establishing impartial justice in the Promised Land.^[7]

2. You shall not distort justice – No one in a position of authority, for the execution of the law, must ever execute the laws of God in a biased manner even in the case of leaders (1 Timothy 5:21-22).

3. You shall not take a bribe – These must not take a payment to release someone from punishment so that the laws of the Lord God are not executed justly.

a) Taking bribes becomes almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations as competing parties attempt to outmaneuver each other (see Mic 3:11; Ezra 4:4–5). However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties are imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus Hammurabi’s code places harsh penalties on any judge who alters one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench. Exodus 23:8 forbids the taking of bribes and the perversion of justice as an offense against God, the weak and innocent, and the entire community (see Is 5:23; Amos 5:12).^[8]

4. The bride blinds the eyes – When the laws of the Lord are not implemented correctly, they corrupt the character of those responsible for executing them and eventually blind their judgment (2 Peter 1:3-11). The Word of God is a light when it is purely interpreted (Psalm 119:105; 1 John 1:5-7).

a) A major part of the king’s mission was to establish justice and to liberate the oppressed—a high calling. Nevertheless, justice was elusive and almost inaccessible to the lower classes. The idea of the king remained.^[9]

5. The bride blinds the eyes of the wise – Even those who are efficient in practically applying the Word of God to day-to-day life would become corrupt in how they implement the laws of God into the Lord’s community.

6. Perverts the words of the righteous – Corrupting the implementation of the laws of God into the life of the community overthrows the righteous implementation of the law and, therefore, creates an ‘intense state of destruction and ruin to the life’ of the community (Proverb 13:6).

C. Experience God's Protection (v. 20):

1. Justice, and only justice – There is no other way for the Lord's Word to live powerfully in the life of His community if His standards do not reign above everyone's ideologies, feelings, or biases. His standards must be held without bias. Those who execute it must learn to live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4).

2. You shall pursue - The leaders must have one state of mind, practice the Word of God personally and with purpose and determination to execute the Word of God into the community's life .

a) The king was to be a native Israelite chosen by the Lord Himself. He was to adopt a humble and dependent lifestyle contrary to that of neighboring kings. This would preclude the amassing of horses as a sign of military might and the multiplication of wives as a sign of entangling international political alliances. Finally, he was to trust in the Lord and seek to live by the principles outlined in the very book of the covenant, the Book of Deuteronomy.^[10]

3. You may live and possess - When the community functions under the authority of the Lord God, there is no way they would not experience His protection and blessings each day of their lives. If they encounter difficulties, the Lord God will restore, preserve, and establish them so that they are dominant in the land.

a) If the judges freed the guilty at the expense of the innocent, the land would be defiled and God would eventually remove the nation from the land. Unfortunately, that's exactly what happened during the years that preceded the fall of Israel and Judah. The courts became corrupt and allowed the rich to rob the poor and needy, and the wealthy soon owned great estates and controlled the economy. Because the leaders didn't obey the laws about the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee, the

economy got out of balance and the land was stolen from its rightful owners. God couldn't permit such flagrant disobedience to His law, so He punished His people severely by sending them into Captivity.^[11]

4. The Lord your God is giving you – Possessing the land is dictated by their commitment to justice, but gaining access to the land is determined by the Lord, who has all the authority and power to overcome every obstacle. All of this is executed based on the sovereign will of God. The Lord God is the generous provider of the land; without Him, they lack the ability to overcome all obstacles to gain it.

a) Living justly and executing God's justice righteously is the only way the Lord would empower us to possess what He had decided to provide to us.

5. The Lord, your God, is giving you – Our impact on the world, so that we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37), is determined by being salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Once we are committed in this manner, we restrain Satan's influence (Matthew 16:13-20; Ephesians 3:8-10), allowing the church to set the Lord's agenda to the world (Ephesians 1:22-23).

^[1] Deere, J. S. (1985). Deuteronomy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 293). Victor Books.

^[2] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). Tyndale concise Bible commentary (p. 75). Tyndale House Publishers.

^[3] Merrill, E. H. (1998). The Pentateuch. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (p. 67). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[4] Brown, P. E. (2008). *Deuteronomy: An expositional commentary* (pp. 142–143). Day One Publications.

^[5] Deere, J. S. (1985). *Deuteronomy*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 293). Victor Books.

^[6] Christensen, D. L. (2001). *Deuteronomy 1–21:9, Revised* (Vol. 6A, p. 363). Thomas Nelson.

^[7] Deere, J. S. (1985). *Deuteronomy*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 293–294). Victor Books.

^[8] Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed., Dt 16:19). InterVarsity Press.

^[9] Walton, J. H. (2009). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Vol. 1, p. 480). Zondervan.

^[10] Merrill, E. H. (1998). *The Pentateuch*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (p. 67). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[11] Wiersbe, W. W. (1999). *Be equipped* (p. 115). Chariot Victor Pub.