

Timeless Voice: The 2 virtues of godly government

Commentary by Greg Baker

“King David reigned over all Israel, doing what is right and just for all his people.” – 2 Samuel 8:15

King David was God’s chosen governing authority over Israel, and he did what was right in God’s eyes, because David was able to fulfill government’s God-given purpose: justice.

Government is an institution of God’s with the purpose to punish evil and reward good (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). Government is also a gift from God. When sin entered the world, God could have easily left us to our own vices, but in His mercy He gave us government. He gave us a unique institution designed to give fallen people law, order, and stability in a world being destroyed by the chaos of sin. It is our great protector. That is why God calls all governing authorities His “ministers.”

Administering justice, however, can be very tricky. You must understand who God is to administer true justice, for justice is part of God’s character. God loves justice (Isaiah 61:8); He requires justice; and yet ... He is also God of mercy and compassion. These two virtues – justice and mercy – are somehow woven simultaneously into the character of God. And for government to reflect God’s design, it must also reflect His character – and that means ruling with both virtues, justice and mercy.

The Cross is a beautiful symbol that reveals the God of grace, mercy, compassion, and justice. God offered people grace, mercy, and compassion by offering a payment for sins, yet He still had to carry out justice on His Son.

“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.’” – Zechariah 7:9

On one hand, administering justice includes both punishing the evil and rewarding the good. Rewarding the good incentivizes and elevates good behavior. Government is not only a discourager, but also an encourager. Commend the good.

Yet punishment is still necessary: “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them” (Proverbs 13:24). Punishment is a form of discipline. God disciplines those He loves. Discipline teaches us a lesson and guides us to the correct path: “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). True justice will always include discipline.

All justice must be fair, blind, and applied equally. God demands it: “Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD” (Proverbs 20:10). That means justice cannot favor a race, ethnicity, sex, social-economic status, or any other way the world divides us. It must be fair for all people.

But even then, government must also never forget mercy. Laws must embody both God’s heart for justice and His heart for mercy. Throughout the Scriptures, for example, we see a pattern of extending mercy to the repentant. Not removing all consequences, God nonetheless offers mercy to the humble and broken-hearted. It is the heart of the 2 Chronicles 7:14 message: To those who are willing to repent and return to the ways of the Lord, God was willing to show mercy. David also received mercy after repenting of his sins with Bathsheba. If we are to see true biblical justice today, our laws must reflect God’s heart of mercy for the humble and broken-

hearted. Parole is an excellent example: It does not remove consequences, but does offer mercy.

We need to recognize, however, that **the right weights of justice and mercy are impossible for people to decipher on their own**. David was able to administer justice and righteousness for his people only because he had a relationship with God, the source of justice: "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do" (Acts 13:22).

David was also willing to listen to counsel from the Lord's shepherds. Though David was not perfect, he ultimately submitted to the counsel of both Samuel and Nathan. If governments are going to reflect this tricky balance, governing authorities must walk with the Lord their God and listen to the timeless voice of the Church: "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers" (Proverbs 11:14).

This incredible balance will also require a great amount of wisdom. When Solomon became king, God told him that he could ask for anything in the world, and God would give it to him. Solomon asked for wisdom: "Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (2 Chronicles 1:10). Solomon knew if he was going to administer true justice and show mercy, he needed wisdom from above.

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." – Micah 6:8

If the kings of today are to administer justice, as God has called them to, they must walk with the Lord their God, seek counsel and guidance from His Church, and call to Him for the wisdom they need to administer both justice and mercy. If they do this, then their government will be a blessing to its

people, and will lead them in the way of righteousness:
“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12).

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