

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 129-g

God's Ministers of Justice

Halifax, 24 April 2011

Introduction

For the past several weeks, we have been looking at the duty that God has given to superiors who are under their care.

- The duty of superiors is outlined for us in Question 129 of the Larger Catechism which says:

Q. 129 What is required of superiors toward their inferiors?

- A. It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel, and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproof, and chastising such as do ill; protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body: and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honour to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God has put upon them.**

We are currently looking in particular at that part of their duty that has to do with correcting those under their care for their disobedience...

- This is contained in that part of their duty where it says:
 - **countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproof, and chastising such as do ill.**
- We have found it especially necessary to distinguish between different kinds of authority when looking at this subject.
 - The authority that God has given to the elders is not the same as the authority He has given to parents.
 - Each is limited to the authority that God has given to them.
 - For example,
 - the elders can rebuke members who sin, but they cannot impose a fine on them.
 - they can remove impenitent members from the Lord's Supper and even from membership in the church of Jesus Christ,
 - but they do not have the authority to use the rod or the scourge to discipline members, nor do they have authority to execute them.
 - It should also be noted that individual elders do not have the authority to excommunicate—the elders can only do this as a collective body.

- Limitations apply to parents as well.
 - They are given the authority to rebuke their children and to use the rod on them when they sin,
 - but they are not given the authority to execute them or torture them.
 - They can disinherit them, but they cannot put them out of the church.
- It is very important for us to maintain these limitations.
 - Those in authority sometimes want to exercise more authority than God has given them...
 - And so you have popes imposing fines and sentencing people to death.
 - And you have parents acting with violence toward their children.

Today we are going to look at a type of authority that very often oversteps its bounds—it takes too much to itself.

- We are going to look at the duty that God has given to the civil magistrate to administer His justice—to punish wrong-doing.
 - We will see that while they are not given the authority to remove someone from the Lord’s Supper or from the membership of the church,
 - they are given the authority to impose fines, to administer corporeal punishment, and even to execute certain types of offenders.
 - And as we look at this, I also want to show you that this particular aspect of administering justice is the primary responsibility that God has given to them.
 - They have taken on many other roles that God never gave to them and in this way they have not keep to the limitations imposed on them by their creator.

Now you may wonder why we would even bother to look at this subject when we have no members in our congregation who are in civil office.

- There are several reasons.
 - First, it is important to know what God has authorised our leaders to do in order that you may know when your obedience to them is a matter of your duty to God and when it is not.
 - Secondly, it is important to know what God has called them to do so that you will be able to vote for those whose policies and agenda is most in accord with God’s calling.
 - Thirdly, it is important to know so that you, as you have opportunity can explain to others what God has appointed and so spread the truth of God within the society.

- And finally, it is important to know what the role of the civil magistrate is so that you can pray more effectively for them, give thanks for them, and assist them for the glory of God.

So let's get on to our subject.

- I will begin with a scripture reading from Romans 13.
- READ Romans 13.

TRANS> See first of all from our text that...

I. The civil magistrate is the minister of God's justice.

- This is made very clear in our text.

A. First, in that he is said to be God's minister.

1. This is expressly stated in verse 4:

- Two times it says of the magistrate, "He is God's minister."
- This is repeated again in verse 6 when we are commanded to pay taxes to the magistracy because "they are God's ministers."
- God has ordained that we should support them by means of taxes that they impose on us because they are His ministers.

2. But what is a minister?

- A minister is a servant (διακονος) who is sent to do the work of His master.
 - There are obedient servants and disobedient servants,
 - But that does not change the fact that every governor and ruler and king and prime minister and elected official is God's servant.
- If they misrepresent their master, they do not cease to be His ministers.
 - They are still His ministers and it is all the worse for them that they are!
 - Because He will judge them as those who were appointed by Him to do His will and who are instead doing their own thing!
 - They have their authority from Him and it is His authority they are supposed to exercise—but instead they are abusing their position!
- In Psalm 82, the Lord calls them gods (eloheem), but He warns them that they will all die like men—so they had better watch what they do!
 - We will look more at Psalm 82 later...
 - But just understand that even if the magistrate does not acknowledge God, He is still God's minister!
 - When Paul wrote Romans 13, the Romans were in power and they did not acknowledge the true God.

- But they are still His ministers and so are to be obeyed as such and will be judged as such.

B. See secondly what kind of ministers they are—ministers of justice!

1. Verse 3 & 4 shows that their task is to praise good conduct and punish evil.
 - **Rom 13:3-4: For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.**
- a. When Paul says that you will have their praise when you do what is right,
 - he does not mean that they will come and give you are reward or pat you on the back for good citizenship.
 - Of course there may be occasions when such commendation is appropriate,
 - but Paul simply means that they will approve of you if you do what is right.
 - This is, of course, a generalisation, but it is a true one.
 - As a general rule, you will be like Daniel in Babylon so that the king will not be able to find any wrong in you unless it has to do with your service to God...
 - It won’t be for embezzling funds, for breaking and entering, for tax evasion, for violence or murder, perverse behaviour, for false advertising, for insurrection, oppression, rape, adultery, or such things.
 - If you do what is good, they will approve of you, and that is what they are supposed to do.
- b. But the primary activity that belongs to civil rulers lies in punishing the sort of wicked behaviour I just spoke about—
 - embezzlement, breaking and entering, tax evasion, violence or murder, perverse behaviour, false advertising, insurrection, oppression, rape, adultery, and a thousand other such things.
 - That is clearly presented as their task at the end of verse 4 where it says that the civil ruler is: **“God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”**
- 1) This is how he is a minister of justice.
 - He carries out God’s vengeance.
 - As God’s servant, he punishes those who break the law.
 - That’s what it means when it says that He executes God’s wrath on the one who practices evil.

- Of course this does not mean that he does so exhaustively!
 - Only the Lord Himself will carry out final judgement.
 - And when He does,
 - all those who are outside of Christ will be cast into the lake of fire where they will be punished forever without intermission.
 - This is why you need to turn to Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins before that great and dreadful day!
 - In His mercy, He died on the cross to release sinners from both the bondage and the penalty of sin.
 - If you will come to Him and believe, you will not have to bear this ultimate justice!
 - But the civil magistrate is given authority to exercise God's vengeance in a limited way—in this world...
 - within the bounds that God has appointed and according to the directives in the word.
 - It is not the magistrate's own wrath or vengeance that is in view here, but God's.

2) That it is *God's* justice is clearly seen in the context.

- Back at the end of chapter 12, individuals are commanded not to repay evil because vengeance belongs to God.
 - We are to love our enemy and do good to him because God will repay the wrong.
 - And then, you see, in chapter 13, the magistrates are said to be God's ministers who avenge wrong in God's name.
 - This is by no means the only way that God avenges wrong.
 - As I mentioned already, there is the final judgement.
 - And even in this world, He has many other ways of avenging wrongs that are done—sickness, injury, set-backs, men getting caught in their own nets that they have set for others...
 - But one of the chief ways that He avenges wrong is through the agency of these ministers of justice—the civil magistrate.
- Understanding this answers an objection that is often raised by sceptics...
 - The question is often asked how the LORD can command us to love our enemies, and then order that transgressors be executed!

- How can David be commended for slaying so many Philistines if he was supposed to love his enemies?
 - The answer is that the civil rulers are carrying out God's wrath as ministers of His justice...
 - Individuals, on the other hand, are not to take justice into their own hands.
 - They are, as Romans 12:19, to give place to wrath and let God repay their enemies,
 - either through the hands of His ministers of justice in the civil magistrate,
 - or through His providence and final judgement.
2. And look at the instrument that God has put into the hands of the civil magistrate!
- a. In Romans 13:4, it says, of the civil magistrate, that he does not bear the sword in vain!
 - *The sword* is used to kill people!
 - The civil magistrate, in administering God's justice, has the authority to execute those who are worthy of death for their civil disobedience.
 - Those who are worthy of death are to be executed.
 - b. God expressed this very clearly when He first instituted capital punishment.
 - It was just after the flood.
 - Before the flood, violence and immorality were allowed to spread with very little restraint in the world.
 - The result was that the whole world was filled with violence.
 - But as soon as Noah and his family came out of the ark, the Lord instituted capital punishment for anyone who took his neighbour's life unjustly.
 - In Genesis 9:5-6 it says:
 - **Gen 9:5-6: Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.**
 - Justice is done by the civil magistrate when murderers are executed.
 - This is their duty as God's ministers of justice.
 - Not only are they *permitted* to use the sword in such cases, but they are *expected* to use it to see that justice is done.
 - c. It is very striking to observe that in Israel, there were executions authorised for violations of all ten of the commandments.

- Obviously, for murder as we just read about in Genesis 9.
- 1) But consider some of the other commandments...
 - a) For violation of the first commandment, we have Deut 13:6 says:
 - **Deut 13:6-9: If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which *are* all around you, near to you or far off from you, from *one* end of the earth to the *other* end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him...**
 - b) For the violation of the second commandment, we have the slaying of those who refused to repent when the golden calf was worshipped recorded in Exodus 32.
 - c) And for violation of the third commandment, there is the instance of the young man who cursed God in Leviticus 24:
 - Lev 24:23 summarises what was done:
 - **Le 24:23 Then Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and they took outside the camp him who had cursed, and stoned him with stones. So the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses.**
 - d) For the violation of the Sabbath, there is the execution of the man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath in defiance of God's command to rest and keep the day holy.
 - This incident is described in Numbers 15.
 - e) For the violation of the fifth commandment, we have Lev 20:9 which says
 - **Lev 20:9: 'For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him.**
 - f) For the violation of the sixth commandment against murder, we have already seen the penalty in Genesis 9.
 - g) For the violation of the seventh commandment, God appoints execution for quite a number of offences:
 - Lev 20:10-15 gives a few examples:
 - **Lev 20:10-15: 'The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. 'The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death.**

Their blood shall be upon them. ‘If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. They have committed perversion. Their blood shall be upon them. ‘If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. ‘If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you. ‘If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal.

- h) Even for stealing there is capital punishment—in the case of man-stealing or kidnapping.
 - **De 24:7 If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you.**
- i) And for bearing false witness, the penalty is described in Deuteronomy 19:18-19 where it says:
 - **Deut 19:18-19: And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.**
 - That means that if the false witness accused someone of a capital offense, the accusation was considered a capital offense.
- j) But what about the tenth commandment—covetousness?
 - Surely there is no capital penalty for this...
 - But actually there is...
 - There is the case of Achan in Joshua 7 when he coveted the things that were under the ban and hid them in his tent.
 - He was executed for this.

TRANS> So you see that God give civil rulers the authority to execute certain types of offenses.

- 2) Seeing this does not mean that all of Israel’s judicial laws should be carbon copied as our laws.
 - They had laws that pertained especially to their particular worship and to the land of promise.
 - But when we are told that the civil magistrate is God’s minister, an “avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil,”
 - and that he “bears not the sword in vain,”
 - this clearly teaches us that the sword is meant to be used against wickedness according to God’s system of justice.

- And the truth is that in a godly society,
 - the magistrate would use the sword a lot more and the people would use it a lot less against each other.
- The fact that we are shocked and horrified by the very thought of such an idea shows how lightly we take our sin and how little love we have for justice.
 - Is it any wonder that in such a foppish society, there are many who do not believe in Hell?

TRANS> So you see clearly that God has appointed the civil magistrate to act as His minister of justice in avenging wrong.

II. I want you to consider that God been very merciful to give us ministers of justice.

A. In Romans 13:4, they are said to be God's ministers to you for good!

1. God has appointed them and given them the sword for our good!

- It is not bad to have justice done in our land!
 - It is a good thing!
 - It does much to restrain wickedness in our land.
 - Even the very effeminate system of justice that we have in our land is far better than anarchy—than no justice at all!

2. Just a moment ago, we saw that God laid the foundation for the civil magistrate right after the flood when He instituted capital punishment...

a. Before that, He allowed violence to spread unchecked in the world!

- His institution of capital punishment was a part of His promise with the rainbow that He would preserve the world.
- It was a way of putting restraint on the wickedness of men who do not fear God.
 - Even though they don't fear God, they fear the courts and the law enforcement officers who bear the sword as God's ministers.
 - Without this restraint, we would have destroyed ourselves long ago.
 - What a great mercy it is to have wickedness restrained in our streets by police officers and judges!

b. And the magistrate is not only authorised to bear the sword at home,

- but it is also their duty to guard their people from the attack of enemy nations.
- What a great mercy this is to us!

- c. Furthermore, we saw recently in Isaiah 60 that one of the principle roles of kings and governors is to defend the church.
 - **Isa 60:10: The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, And their kings shall minister to you;**
 - When nations turn to the LORD,
 - their rulers take it upon themselves to defend the church from her enemies—to surround the church with a wall of protection.
 - This is part of their duty in using the sword— and this also is a great mercy to the church and to the world for whom the church is a light and a restraining influence.
 - Even when there is persecution, as their was from Rome,
 - the civil rulers are still used, despite themselves, to preserve peace in the society as a whole which facilitates the spread of the gospel.
- B. How you ought to show your gratitude for the civil magistrate!
- There are a number of ways to do this...
1. First, you ought to treat them as God’s ministers by subjecting yourself to them as it says in Romans 13:1:
 - **Rom 13:1: Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.**
 - Treat them as those who represent the Lord—we saw this before when we looked at the duty of inferiors, but it is worthy of being repeated.
 - Romans 13:5 points out that as Christians, our submission should go beyond mere fear of punishment from their hand...
 - We ought also to submit to them because of our conscience, knowing that they are God’s ministers for our good.
 2. Second, you show your gratitude by cheerfully paying your taxes to support them.
 - This is what it says in Romans 13:6-7:
 - **Rom 13:6-7: “For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”**
 - God is telling you to provide for them because they are His ministers who are there for your good.
 3. And finally, you show your gratitude for the magistrate by praying for them.
 - Pray that they would be ministers to you for good and give thanks for them!
 - This is called for in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 where it says:

- **2 Tim 2:1-2: Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.**

TRANS> The civil magistrate is God's gift to us and we need to treat it as such!

- But let the magistrate see that it is indeed a good gift!
- It is their duty to good by promoting justice.
 - Let the civil magistrate be careful to serve us according to God's will!
 - And this is the third thing I want to look at today:

III. The civil magistracy ought to submit to God as the one who appointed them.

A. It is wrong for them to think that someone else has appointed them!

1. It was wrong for the civil magistrate to suppose, as they so often have, that they were a law unto themselves.
 - In many times and places, kings and emperors have received worship as if they were gods.
 - And rather than submitting themselves to God's law, they have been a law unto themselves—
 - The notion is that the king is law rather than an upholder of God's law!
 - He can do whatever he wants because he is boss!
 - Such kings become oppressors—more and more as the years go by.
 - Samuel warned the people of Israel about this when they demanded a king like the other nations.
 - **1 Sam 8:11-18: And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day."**
 - And as you know, this is exactly what happened!
 - If was only by the fourth generation that King Rehoboam, Solomon's son came to the throne...
 - And because of his oppression,

- the kingdom was divided and the ten tribes of Israel rebelled under the leadership of Jeroboam.
 - And this oppression arose under kings who were constantly reminded that they had been sent by God as His anointed!
 - And they continued to forget this even after the division until at last God's judgement fell and the house of David was brought to ruin.
 - They forgot that they were God's ministers for good!
2. But there is also another error—and that is to suppose that the civil magistrate has its authority from the pope.
- There was often a struggle between the pope and the king during the middle ages,
 - but what destruction came when kings answered to the pope instead of to Jesus Christ and when the pope was allowed to raise himself about the law!
 - This was just another way of the magistrate's forgetting that they were the *LORD's* ministers for good to the people.
 - The church became luxurious and immoral and criminal and almost forgot that it was supposed to serve God.
 - Paul does not say that the civil magistrate is the *church's* minister sent by the church...
 - It is God's minister to and for the church, but not by the church.
 - The church was well nigh ruined by seeking to take the place of Christ Himself, in this way, and in many other ways.
 - The reformation was very much needed.

TRANS> But then democracy came on the scene, and it is no better.

3. Democracy is wrong because it supposes that the civil rulers have their sanction to rule from the people (instead of from God).
- We are seeing the bad fruits of such a notion worked out over time in our day.
 - The people choose rulers who will give them more and more of what they want and when they don't get it, they riot and make demands.
 - And there is no end to their demands—
 - such that the civil magistrate has begun to steal resources from our own children to meet all of our demands!
 - And the day will soon come when the whole society implodes because there will be no more resources from which to draw.

- Such a course would never have been taken if only we had remembered that it is God, not the people, who appointed the magistrate.
- They are to be led by His principles, not by the peoples!

TRANS> So let the civil magistrate remember that they are *God's* ministers and let us remember it too before we destroy ourselves.

B. But not only that, let them also remember that they are God's ministers of justice!

1. In almost every age, the civil rulers have had a hard time limiting themselves to their proper role as a minister of justice.

- They want to get their hand into all sorts of other venues that God never authorised them to govern.
 - Has the US government really gone into the business of selling cars?
- Even if the magistracy remembers that they are God's ministers, it is a violation for them to take on ministries that He has not given them...
 - Even if they suppose that they are running these other ministries for Him, it is still wrong because they have taken work to themselves that He did not give to them.

2. What are some of those things?

a. The civil magistrate is not called to provide for the poor and needy

- They are to defend the poor and needy to be sure!
 - They are to punish those who oppress the poor and needy, but the civil magistrate is not authorised to tax citizens to provide for them.
 - There is even warrant for them to insist upon a fair wage if workers are being oppressed,
 - but they do not have authority to impose taxation upon the members of the society for the redistribution of wealth.
- Instead, each family is to take care of its own—
 - Parents are to provide for their children, and children are to provide for their parents when they get old.
 - If the civil magistrate has any role in this, it would be to punish those who refuse to provide for their own parents!
 - They are also to punish those who destroy the family by sexual abuse, adultery, divorce, rebellion, and other violations of civil law.
 - If this were done, it would be quite easy for the church (not the civil magistrate) to help out those few who have no family to take care of them.

- God has appointed the deaconate to look after the true poor.

TRANS> Of course the point is not that we can suddenly impose all this on our society.

- This is simply what will be done in a godly society.
 - And it is what we ought to pray for and work toward, aiming high and looking long as we seek to spread the gospel and follow Jesus.
- b. Secondly, the civil magistrate is not called to run health care
 - They are certainly called to punish those who sell health products or services that are not honest or that are harmful to the people,
 - But it is not theirs to run the system with tax money.
 - God has not given them this responsibility.
 - They are ministers of justice.
 - Health care is the role of business.
 - In a godly society, the poor would be assisted in the ways already spoken about—
 - first through families and for those who are without resources, through charitable donations.
 - The funny thing in our society is that we have bought into the foolish notion that the people could not afford to pay for their health care,
 - but the truth is that there is no one else who can pay for it!
 - The government has no money except what they collect from the people,
 - and much of that money is lost through the collection process.

TRANS> However, once again, it is not that our system is all evil and that we should have nothing to do with it.

- We have what we have and it is right to give thanks while praying that we would turn back to Jesus Christ as a nation.
 - Then we would seek to see the civil magistrate return to its proper role.
 - In the meantime, we must work with what we have.
- c. Thirdly, the civil magistrate is not called to provide education for children.
 - The civil magistrate is no safe or suitable agent for this task because God has not given them this responsibility.
 - All the promises of a utopian society made a hundred and twenty years ago when mandatory public education was instituted have failed.
 - The education of children is the responsibility of the family,

- not of the civil magistrate.
- That does not mean that there is no place for schools—what we call private schools, but what could more accurately be called non-government public schools.
 - Such schools are businesses that provide the service of education to their clients.
 - Their services should be paid for by parents who wish to use their services for their children.
 - Funding can also come from donations.
 - Training can also provided by businesses and trades who wish to train persons to work for their agencies.
 - But once again, the Lord has not put the responsibility of education in the hands of the magistrate.
- d. Fourthly, the civil magistrate is not called to rule over the church
 - This is the Erastian form of church government in which the king becomes the head of the church.
 - The Bible teaches rather that Christ is the head of the church—and the Head of the king!
 - The church is not the head of the state, and the state is not the head of the church,
 - but Christ is the head of both.
 - The civil magistrate takes too much to itself when it presumes to rule over the church.
 - Christ is the head and He has appointed a plurality of elders to govern the church—
 - There is much more that could be said about that, but the main point is that it is not the role of the civil magistrate to rule over the church.

TRANS> So let the civil magistrate stick to its calling as a minister of Justice appointed by God—nothing more than that, nothing less than that—but fully that!

C. Psalm 82 gives a solemn warning to remind the civil magistrate to remember its place!

- It is a very high place indeed, but a place under God and limited to the functions that God has given to it.
 - The Psalm calls upon the civil magistrate to use all that authority that God has given to it to administer justice—for everyone!

- Here, let me conclude by reading this Psalm with a few comments interspersed.
- **Psalm 82:1-8:**
 - **1 God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.**
 - They are called gods (eloheem) because they represent God in avenging wrongs that are done in the civil realm.
 - **2 How long will you judge unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked?**
 - God is unhappy with them for not operating in justice—for not punishing those who deserve to be punished according to His precepts.
 - **3 Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy.**
 - **4 Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked.**
 - They were not looking after those who were in the greatest need of God's protection.
 - Instead of seeking to please God, they seek to please those who can put them into office.
 - **5 They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable.**
 - These men who are supposed to operate on the basis of God's wisdom, administering His justice, instead are clueless—
 - They do not understand the moral issues or the moral order that God's rule would sustain.
 - When such men are the ministers and guardians of justice, the very foundation of society crumbles.
 - **6 ¶ I said, "You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High.**
 - As we saw, their authority is from God and they rule as His representatives even when they do not obey Him or acknowledge Him.
 - **7 But you shall die like men, And fall like one of the princes."**
 - But they will soon discover that they are not gods apart from God.
 - They will die as all men and princes do.
 - Then they will know their place!
 - Then they will know how foolish they were to ignore the One who sent them and whom they represented.
 - **8 Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations.**
 - Jesus Christ has been given all the nations as His inheritance.
 - The day is coming when they will all acknowledge Him!
 - May it be so to the glory of God and to the good of His people!