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In common parlance, “rights” can be understood to describe all kinds of legal protections afforded to individuals. “Rights” can mean political participation in democratic governance, i.e. “voting rights.” “Rights” can also mean protections granted by positive law to citizens because of their equal status under the law, i.e. “civil rights.” But sometimes, “rights” are based on higher, more authoritative philosophical considerations, i.e. “inalienable rights.”

For instance, the philosopher John Locke [argued](#) that “property rights” must be recognized by the government because just claims of land ownership are inherent in the laws of nature. Shelter is essential to survival, and the ability of the individual to freely tender their land and develop their abode is essential to human flourishing.

“Parental rights” are different. They do not belong to all individuals by virtue of their status as individuals. Rather, parental rights are only active in certain conditions and result from an *authority* granted by a superior. In the [Book of Exodus](#), God inscribes the authority of parents to direct the upbringing of their children in the Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Moreover, [Proverbs 22:6](#) instructs parents to “[t]rain up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” The New Testament affirms parental authority in the apostle Paul’s letter to the [Ephesians](#): “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Scripture speaks strongly about parents who abuse or neglect their authority as the caretakers of their children in [1 Timothy](#): “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” **Parents have the right to direct their children’s upbringing because of the authority granted to them by God. However, Scripture is clear that parents who neglect or abuse their authority deny their faith.**

Because Scripture makes clear that parents possess the **authority** to raise their children, and thus the right to direct their child’s upbringing in accordance with Scripture, the State ultimately lacks that same authority. The U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed that authority on numerous occasions.

In the 1972 case *Stanley v. Illinois*, the Court [held](#) that “the custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder.” That principle only reaffirmed what the Court ruled fifty years prior in [Pierce v. Society of Sisters](#): “The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. **The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.**”

At a basic level, this means that parents must be empowered with “school choice,” the right to choose alternative education for their children over public education. This includes homeschooling, private school, religious schooling, and the like. In fact, the U.S. Supreme Court has [made clear](#) that affording this choice to non-religious parents while denying it to others solely because of their religion violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.



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Parental authority does not only encompass where and how they choose to educate their children. Today, public schools are enacting policies to [hide information from parents](#) about their children's schooling, including teachings associated with critical theory and gender identity politics. Perhaps even most shocking, some school district policies include shielding information about a child's "chosen gender identity" from parents. These policies and programs fly in the face of scripture's grant of parental authority. Indeed, in the words of [ADF Ministry Alliance](#), "parents have a God-given and constitutionally-protected right to know this information as they seek to direct the upbringing of their children."

As parents become more aware of the sinister overreach of government authority in the realm of the instruction and upbringing of their children, some are speaking out in an effort to "reclaim" their parental rights. As a result, local law enforcement has allegedly [used its authority to target Christians and parents attending school board meetings](#). This begs the question, where are the checks and balances to limit government's encroachment on the God-given authority parents have over the nurture and admonition of their own offspring?

As we think critically about the created order, parental authority must be maintained in order to preserve America's scheme of ordered liberty, not only because it is the moral prerequisite to our nation's system of self-government, but because we are commanded to build the Earth in accordance with God's design.

