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Qualifications for Godly Officials

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It is very important who we choose to govern us. When the righteous rule the people will rejoice, but when the wicked govern they will groan (Proverbs 29:2). Life is like a beautiful day when those who fear God rule, as 2 Samuel 23:3-4 states:

The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, He who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.

Our nation's welfare and stability — our continuance as a nation of liberty, justice, and prosperity — will be greatly affected by whom we choose to lead us in the legislative, judicial, and executive departments of state. The qualifications of those who rule is of utmost importance. In choosing those who govern, we must compare their qualifications to those that the Bible says are of most importance.

How Can We Know Who Will Govern Righteously?

If you could ask one question of a candidate for office to help you decide if you would vote for him, what would that question be?

Many people would seek an answer to the question: What are you going to do for me if you are elected? The first time I voted in a presidential election was in 1972. This was before I became a Christian (in heart or head). I voted for the liberal losing candidate George McGovern because I thought his election would more en-

able me to live the immoral lifestyle that I pursued at that time. This is a typical motivation for many as they vote for those who govern.

Having put aside immorality, some Christians would ask candidates: Are you a Christian? Are you born again? Do you believe the Bible is the inspired word of God? Or any similar religious question. The answers to such questions are important; however, the answer can be positive but the person not be an effective ruler at all. By the 1976 election I had become a believer, though I lacked a Biblical governmental worldview, and I considered this type of question to be most important. As I read about Jimmy Carter, the answer seemed "yes" for the questions above. He unashamedly spoke of being born again in *Time Magazine* and I thought it would be great to have a Christian as President. While having some good qualities, Carter was not a good President. He did not govern in a Biblical manner. He did not have the qualifications necessary to be a Godly civil leader.

In the years following the 1976 election I began to grow in Biblical knowledge and began to learn how to think governmentally. Now, in attempting to discern if a candidate is qualified to govern Biblically, one question I would ask is: What is your philosophy of government? How a ruler governs is as important as the faith they proclaim. True Biblical faith requires a Biblical worldview.

Jimmy Carter may have been sincere in his claim as a born again

Christian, but he was sincerely ignorant of Biblical principles of government. His worldview, which affected his actions and policies, was more humanistic than Biblical. That, coupled with a congress with the same worldview, produced the misery index, America held hostage (444 days), increased size and scope of civil government, and a movement of our nation toward more statism. His pagan philosophy of government did not help to bring liberty, justice and rejoicing by the people — the nation was not becoming more like "the light of the morning when the sun rises."

Biblical Qualifications for Governing Officials

When Moses told the children of Israel to select from among them those who would govern them, he set forth a number of Biblical qualifications. He said: "You shall select out of all the people, able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain" (Ex. 18:21). "Choose wise and discerning and experienced men" (Deut. 1:13). He put forth three general qualifications for governing officials.

1. Knowledge — "men of truth", "wise," "discerning"

As Matthias Burnet stated in an Election Sermon before the Connecticut Assembly in 1803, we should choose "men of good natural understanding and competent acquired knowledge."¹ Knowledge is more important than belief for daily living out your life. Many people say, "I believe

in Christ,” but this means different things for different people. Your knowledge determines your actions and belief, for as a man “thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).

A few years ago I ruptured my achilles tendon playing basketball. The first question I asked my family doctor about the various specialists who could perform surgery was, “who is best able to repair it?”, not “which, if any, doctor is a Christian?”. Now, if two were equally skilled, I would certainly choose the Christian.

The same concept applies to rulers. We want those who best know how to govern Biblically — those who have a Biblical philosophy of government. Some non-Christians’ governmental philosophy is more Biblical than some Christians’. Most rulers will not have all Biblical qualifications, so we must weigh all factors. Mature Christians should have mature Biblical knowledge. Unfortunately, many Christians never develop mature Biblical knowledge. I would rather elect an unregenerate man with a Biblical view of governance than a believer who thinks like a pagan, for your knowledge determines your actions.

Some people say that having a good heart and right intentions is of first importance. “If he means well, that is of most importance.” Yet, if a man cannot discern the proper actions he is to take, he will always be in danger of being influenced by those who claim to be lovers of liberty and country, but are really more concerned with SELF and private interest; or he may be misguided in how to do good.

As an example, the Bible says we are to help the poor. To some Christians that means using the force of government to make everyone fulfill this duty. Those with this philosophy would tax all citizens and take this money to give to others. This is really socialism, justified under the guise of fulfilling our Biblical duty. History

has shown socialism does not work, and I believe that a study of the Scriptures reveals our duty to the poor must be fulfilled voluntarily by individual choice, and in a Biblical manner. Considering that one third of our tax dollars is spent on social programs, the governmental philosophy of our rulers matters greatly.

The qualification of knowledge is not as the world sees knowledge. In the last presidential election one media leader was arguing that Al Gore was the better candidate because he had more knowledge — he went to Harvard, had a high IQ, and read a lot. Just being a knowledgeable person is not enough though. A ruler must have appropriate knowledge, related to fulfilling his duties. First, he must have a Biblical philosophy of government.

Biblical Philosophy of Government

The first aspect of a Biblical philosophy of government that a Godly ruler must understand is the purpose of government.

(1) The purpose of government

The Biblical purpose of government and civil law is to restrain the evil action of men in society (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2). True law reveals what is right and wrong, and hence, exposes law-breakers. But law in itself cannot produce what is right, therefore, you cannot legislate good. However, you can legislate morality for, in fact, all law legislates morality. Some people declare “you can’t legislate morality,” which is true if they mean you cannot make people moral by passing laws. If we could make people moral by law alone, then law makers could simply enact legislation to produce a perfect society. They could bring salvation by law. However, every law reflects someone’s morality. All laws everywhere are based upon the moral presuppositions of the law makers. Laws against murder reflect a moral belief. Laws against theft are based upon the command to not steal. All

law has a moral concern. The important question is whose morality does it legislate.

From a humanistic perspective, the attempt is made to regulate and provide all things through government and law. Humanists believe that it is through the force of law that evil will be eliminated and utopia established on earth. Judges, legislators, and others have attacked and struck down Biblical law, saying morality cannot be legislated, but have themselves legislated morality — a new morality based on men’s selfish desires. But even worse, they have attempted to bring salvation by law, which is contrary to Christian belief. The law cannot save us; it is not the purpose of the law to do so.

The law cannot change or reform man; this is a spiritual matter. Man can only be changed by the grace of God. He cannot be legislated into a new morality. From a pagan perspective there is no hope of internal regeneration to save man, therefore, a pagan view attempts to bring salvation to man and society through the instrument of law. Humanists cry out the loudest about not legislating morality, but they are the ones trying to save mankind through law and government.

The goal of many of our laws (and governmental actions) today is a “saved” society, where there is more peace and goodwill among men and that all that is negative is eliminated, such as poverty, crime, war, disease, prejudice, ignorance. Law can restrain sinful man from acting evilly, for the fear of punishment is a deterrent, but he cannot be changed by law. Unless the evil heart of man is changed, there will be no advancement toward a better society. Humanistic law seeks to save and change man internally. Since the government (and laws issued thereby) is the instrument for such change, the government becomes the savior in a humanistic society.²

We need rulers who understand the purpose of law and government so they will not try to make the law do what God never intended it to do, that is, save us.

(2) Jurisdictional authority

A second aspect of a Biblical philosophy of government is understanding jurisdictional authority. Jesus taught this in Matthew 22 when he said “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” He was saying that the state has a legitimate function, but that it is limited and should not usurp the authority He gave to individuals, the family, and the church.

In other publications we have covered the purpose and responsibilities of the individual, family, church, and state.³ It is essential that our elected officials understand to whom God has given authority to do what. The result of usurpation of authority of civil government from the family and church is tyranny.

Government is not to provide the health, education, and welfare of citizens. Government is limited in what it is to do. Today about 2/3 of money spent by civil government is outside its jurisdiction. That is why we have a 40% tax rate, encroachment by government into our lives, regulation of all kinds of things — all of which leads to lose of individual liberty. This situation is a result of having civil rulers who do not understand jurisdictional authority.

A Biblical view of jurisdictional authority and limited government was incorporated into the law of the land by the Founders of America. The men who set up this constitutional republic saw it as very limited. The national government was given only 18 enumerated powers in the Constitution—that was all the authority they had. The national government was not to be involved in anything else. Today we have this turned around, where Washington

thinks they have all power unless restricted in some way by the Constitution. A statement by James Madison, our fourth President and chief architect of the Constitution, shows how far we have gone.

In 1792 Congress considered a bill that would have given subsidies to cod fishermen in New England. Some few argued Congress had power to do so under the general welfare clause. Speaking against the bill, James Madison said first, this is a limited government with only the specified powers listed in the Constitution belonging to Congress, the executive, and judiciary, then:

If Congress can employ money indefinitely to the general welfare, and are the sole and supreme judges of the general welfare, they may take the care of religion into their own hands; they may appoint teachers in every state, county, and parish, and pay them out of their public treasury; they may take into their own hands the education of children, establishing in like manner schools throughout the Union; they may assume the provision for the poor; they may undertake the regulation of all roads other than post-roads.⁴

Imagine how the media would present Madison today if he proposed no government involvement in schools, providing for the poor, and regulation of all roads.

People for abortion will often say that they are for limited government, that government should leave a woman’s body alone and let them decide themselves what to do with their own body. But government is to be limited in its jurisdiction, and its proper jurisdiction is in the protecting of the life, liberty, and property of all the citizens, including the unborn child. Many humanistic thinkers want government to be limited in the areas where it should be acting, and acting in areas where it should be limited. For example, many want government limited in executing justice with swift and appropriate punishment for crime—e.g. no death penalty, no res-titution, letting criminals loose in

society. I am for limited government, but I am not for limiting government from appropriately punishing criminals. Many people also seek to limit the strength of the military, including having no civilian military. Knowledgeable rulers are needed to discern the proper jurisdiction of civil government.

Understanding the limited role of government is very important, because the tendency of fallen man is to centralize and increase power, and this is often done in the name of good. Most rulers in the world today are statist or socialists. Those with a statist philosophy see civil government as the primary authority in the world—the state (and its law) is the savior. In a statist world, there is no other savior; government must save man for there is no supreme God to do so.

While there is some difference in the Republican and Democratic parties, most of America’s national elected officials are socialists or statist, as evidenced by spending appropriations of tax dollars. A minority of principled representatives adhere to the limited jurisdiction of government, but most go along with uncontrolled spending (look, for example, at the pork barrel spending by recent Congresses, both Democratic and Republican). Ever increasing spending by government is done in the name of helping society and the citizens, and is considered legitimate since, to many, the law or government is savior. This often takes the form of taking from one group of citizens to give to others. This is stealing and violates the 8th command. Government is to protect its citizens, not plunder them. We can learn an important lesson regarding these matters from the life of Davy Crockett.

Davy Crockett and Governmental Usurpation

While Davy Crockett was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives a bill was presented

appropriating money for a widow of a distinguished naval officer. The officer had recently died and the widow was in financial need. A number of congressmen had spoken in support of the bill, pointing out the great service the officer had made and the need of the widow. The Speaker was about to put the bill to a vote when Crockett arose. He spoke of his respect for the deceased and his sympathy for the widow, but he said:

“We must not permit our respect for the dead or our sympathy for a part of the living to lead us into an act of injustice to the balance of the living. I will not go into an argument to prove that Congress has no power to appropriate this money as an act of charity. Every member upon this floor knows it. We have the right, as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity; but as members of Congress we have no right so to appropriate a dollar of the public money.”⁵

He pointed out how the government had met every financial obligation to the officer and owed him no debt.

“Mr. Speaker, I have said we have the right to give as much money of our own as we please. I am the poorest man on this floor. I cannot vote for this bill, but I will give one week’s pay to the object, and if every member of Congress will do the same, it will amount to more than the bill asks.”

He took his seat. Nobody replied. The bill was voted on, and instead of passing, which would have happened had Crockett not said anything, it received but few votes, and failed.

A friend later asked Crockett why he opposed the bill. He explained:

“Several years ago I was one evening standing on the steps of the Capitol with some other members of Congress, when our attention was attracted by a great light over in Georgetown. It was evidently a large fire. We jumped into a hack and drove over as fast as we could. In spite of all that could be done, many houses were burned and many families made houseless, and, besides, some of them had lost all but the

clothes they had on. The weather was very cold, and when I saw so many women and children suffering, I felt that something ought to be done for them. The next morning a bill was introduced appropriating \$20,000 for their relief. We put aside all other business and rushed it through as soon as it could be done.”

The next summer when Crockett was running for reelection he was riding around campaigning in his district. One day he came upon a farmer plowing his field and spoke to him.

“He replied politely, but, as I thought, rather coldly.

“I began: ‘Well, friend, I am one of those unfortunate beings called candidates, and . . .’

“‘Yes, I know you; you are Colonel Crockett. I have seen you once before, and voted for you the last time you were elected. I suppose you are out electioneering now, but you had better not waste your time or mine. I shall not vote for you again.’”

“This was a sockdolager [a decisive blow or answer]. . . . I begged him to tell me what was the matter.”

“Well, Colonel, it is hardly worth-while to waste time or words upon it. I do not see how it can be mended, but you gave a vote last winter which shows that either you have not capacity to understand the Constitution, or that you are wanting in the honesty and firmness to be guided by it. In either case you are not the man to represent me. But I beg your pardon for expressing it in that way. I did not intend to avail myself of the privilege of the constituent to speak plainly to a candidate for the purpose of insulting or wounding you. I intend by it only to say that your understanding of the Constitution is very different from mine; and I will say to you what, but for my rudeness, I should not have said, that I believe you to be honest. . . . But an understanding of the Constitution different from mine I cannot overlook, because the Constitution, to be worth anything, must be held sacred, and rigidly observed in all its provisions. The man who wields power and misinterprets it is the more dangerous the more honest he is.”

“I admit the truth of all you say, but there must be some mistake about it, for I do not remember that I gave any vote last winter upon any constitutional question.”

“No, Colonel, there’s no mistake. Though I live here in the backwoods and seldom go from home, I take the papers from Washington and read very carefully all the proceedings of Congress. My papers say that last winter you voted for a bill to appropriate \$20,000 to some sufferers by a fire in Georgetown. Is that true?”

“Well, my friend; I may as well own up. You have got me there. But certainly nobody will complain that a great and rich country like ours should give the insignificant sum of \$20,000 to relieve its suffering women and children, particularly with a full and overflowing Treasury, and I am sure, if you had been there, you would have done just as I did.”

“It is not the amount, Colonel, that I complain of; it is the principle. In the first place, the government ought to have in the Treasury no more than enough for its legitimate purposes. But that has nothing to do with the question. The power of collecting and disbursing money at pleasure is the most dangerous power that can be intrusted to man, particularly under our system of collecting revenue by a tariff, which reaches every man in the country, no matter how poor he may be, and the poorer he is the more he pays in proportion to his means. What is worse, it presses upon him without his knowledge where the weight centers, for there is not a man in the United States who can ever guess how much he pays to the government. So you see, that while you are contributing to relieve one, you are drawing it from thousands who are even worse off than he. If you had the right to give anything, the amount was simply a matter of discretion with you, and you had as much right to give \$20,000,000 as \$20,000. If you have the right to give to one, you have the right to give to all; and, as the Constitution neither defines charity nor stipulates the amount, you are at liberty to give to any and everything which you may believe, or profess to believe, is a charity, and to any amount you may think proper. You will very easily perceive what a wide door this would open for fraud and corruption and favoritism, on the one hand, and for robbing the people on the other. No, Colonel, Congress has no right to give charity. Individual members may give as much of their own money as they please, but they have no right to touch a dollar of the

public money for that purpose. If twice as many houses had been burned in this county as in Georgetown, neither you nor any other member of Congress would have thought of appropriating a dollar for our relief. There are about two hundred and forty members of Congress. If they had shown their sympathy for the sufferers by contributing each one weeks pay, it would have made over \$13,000. There are plenty of wealthy men in and around Washington who could have given \$20,000 without depriving themselves of even a luxury of life. The congressmen chose to keep their own money, which, if reports be true, some of them spend not very creditably; and the people about Washington, no doubt, applauded you for relieving them from the necessity of giving by giving what was not yours to give. The people have delegated to Congress, by the Constitution, the power to do certain things. To do these, it is authorized to collect and pay moneys, and for nothing else. Everything beyond this is usurpation, and a violation of the Constitution.”

“So you see, Colonel, you have violated the Constitution in what I consider a vital point. It is a precedent fraught with danger to the country, for when Congress once begins to stretch its power beyond the limits of the Constitution, there is no limit to it, and no security for the people. I have no doubt you acted honestly, but that does not make it any better, except as far as you personally are concerned, and you see that I cannot vote for you.”

Being enlightened by this farmer, Crockett replied:

“Well, my friend, you hit the nail upon the head when you said I had not sense enough to understand the Constitution. I intended to be guided by it, and thought I had studied it fully. I have heard many speeches in Congress about the powers of Congress, but what you have said here at your plow has got more hard, sound sense in it than all the fine speeches I ever heard. If I had ever taken the view of it that you have, I would have put my head into the fire before I would have given that vote; and if you will forgive me and vote for me again, if I ever vote for another unconstitutional law I wish I may be shot.”

“He laughingly replied: ‘Yes, Colonel, you have sworn to that once before, but I will trust you again upon one condition. You say that you are convinced that your vote was wrong. Your acknowledgment of it will do more good than beating you for it. If, as you go around the district, you will tell people about this vote, and that you are satisfied it was wrong, I will not only vote for you, but will do what I can to keep down opposition, and, perhaps, I may exert some little influence in that way.’”

Crockett said he would do this, and he would even come back to the area and give a speech to anybody that this man could gather together. The farmer, whose name was Horatio Bunce, said he would gather a group together in a week or so. Bunce was a Christian, and a good example of what a Christian citizen ought to be. He was a man of character and principle, and one with much knowledge who kept an eye on his elected officials.

Crockett relates:

“At the appointed time I was at his house, having told our conversation to every crowd I had met, and to every man I stayed all night with, and I found that it gave the people interest and a confidence in me stronger than I had ever seen manifested before.”

Crockett stayed the night with Bunce and was up until midnight talking “about the principles and affairs of government, and got more real, true knowledge of them than I had got all my life before.”

“I have known and seen much of him since, for I respect him — no, that is not the word — I reverence and love him more than any living man, and I go to see him two or three times every year; and I will tell you, sir, if every one who professes to be a Christian lived and acted and enjoyed it as he does, the religion of Christ would take the world by storm.”

The next morning they went to a barbecue that was attended by about 1000 men. Crockett opened his speech:

“Fellow-citizens — I present myself before you today feeling like

a new man. My eyes have lately been opened to truths which ignorance or prejudice, or both, had heretofore hidden from my view. I feel that I can today offer you the ability to render you more valuable service that I have ever been able to render before. I am here today more for the purpose of acknowledging my error than to seek your votes. That I should make this acknowledgment is due to myself as well as to you. Whether you will vote for me is a matter for your consideration only.”

“I went on to tell them about the fire and my vote for the appropriation and then told them why I was satisfied it was wrong. I closed by saying:

“And now, fellow-citizens, it remains only for me to tell you that the most of the speech you have listened to with so much interest was simply a repetition of the arguments by which your neighbor, Mr. Bunce, convinced me of my error.

“It is the best speech I ever made in my life, but he is entitled to the credit for it. And now I hope he is satisfied with his convert and that he will get up here and tell you so.’

“He came upon the stand, and said:

“Fellow-citizens — It affords, me great pleasure to comply with the request of Colonel Crockett. I have always considered him a thoroughly honest man, and I am satisfied that he will faithfully perform all that he has promised you today.’

“He went down, and there went up from that crowd such a shout for Davy Crockett as his name never called forth before.

“I am not much given to tears, but I was taken with a choking then and felt some big drops rolling down my cheeks. And I tell you now that the remembrance of those few words spoken by such a man, and the honest, hearty shout they produced, is worth more to me than all the honors I have received and all the reputation I have ever made, or ever shall make, as a member of Congress.

“Now, sir,” concluded Crockett, “you know why I made that speech yesterday.”

“There is one thing now to which I will call your attention. You remember that I proposed to give a weeks pay. There are in that House many very wealthy men — men who think nothing of spending a week’s pay, or a dozen of them, for a dinner or a wine party when they have some-

thing to accomplish by it. Some of those same men made beautiful speeches upon the great debt of gratitude which the country owed the deceased — a debt which could not be paid by money — and the insignificance and worthlessness of money, particularly so insignificant a sum as \$10,000, when weighed against the honor of the nation. Yet not one of them responded to my proposition. Money with them is nothing but trash when it is to come out of the people. But it is the one great thing for which most of them are striving, and many of them sacrifice honor, integrity, and justice to obtain it.”

Other Aspects of a Biblical Philosophy of Government

In addition to understanding the purpose of government and jurisdictional authority, there are many other aspects of a Biblical philosophy of government that Godly leaders should embrace. These include being pro-life, pro-liberty, and pro-property rights; having knowledge of inalienable rights, the laws of nature, and the laws of nature’s God; and knowing the U.S. and their state Constitutions. Today, most of our rulers have a limited knowledge of the Constitution, especially the original intent. Leaders should understand the power and form of free nations⁶ and that self-government under God is the foundation of all earthly government. Having an understanding of principles is more important than holding certain views on issues because a man trained in fundamental Biblical governmental principles and a Biblical philosophy of government will know how to reason to specific issues.

It is also important for Godly leaders to have knowledge of specific application of civil law. They should understand God’s civil laws and how they apply. For example, understanding and applying the appropriate penalties God sets forth in the Bible for violating criminal law would alleviate many of our criminal problems today. In brief, penalties for violating

the civil law were: 1) Restitution for theft. 2) Corporal punishment and/or fines for minor offenses. 3) Death for serious offenses against life or incorrigibility. 4) City of refuge for accidental death.

The governmental philosophy of officials is important. This determines their position on specific issues and on what laws they will enact, or not enact, how they will spend tax dollars, how they will protect the law-abiding citizens, etc. But knowledge in itself is not enough. They also need wisdom to apply the spirit of the law.

Wisdom to Apply Knowledge and Skill in Governing

Solomon received from God a wise and an understanding heart, which was necessary for him to be able to govern well. In general he brought much good to the nation, but he also displayed wisdom in specific judgements. Solomon’s judgement in the situation of the women arguing over the baby is an excellent example of Godly wisdom. Godly rulers need such wisdom.

Godly officials will be “able and experienced men” — they will be skillful. Effective rulers will have the specific knowledge, talents, and skills necessary to fulfill their specific governing roles. For example, a president needs executive skills, which may differ from skills needed to be a congressman or a judge.

Officials may have correct knowledge, but they need something much more to assure they will act upon what they know to be right, and that they will resist the temptations that come with power and influence. They need Godly character to assure they will govern rightly and with humility.

2. Morality or Christian Character — “men of truth,” “hate dishonest gain”

A second qualification for Godly officials is morality. They should be

“men truly honest and upright in their principles and views, not actuated and governed by the sordid motives of self interest and aggrandizement in their desire and execution of office, but by a sincere regard to the public good.”⁷

There are many examples in history where corrupt and unprincipled rulers (such as Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin) have brought on all kinds of miseries to mankind—including loss of liberty and the downfall of nations.

Chandler Robbins, in an Election Sermon in 1791, said:

Nothing will so surely, so rapidly bring on the dissolution of society, and the loss of the liberties of a people, as a want of virtue and integrity in their rulers.⁸

Some specific character qualities needed by rulers include:

1. Honesty / Integrity

Honesty is obviously important in a ruler. Proverbs 29:12 says “if a ruler pays attention to falsehood [hearkens to lies], all his ministers become wicked.” If a man cannot keep personal vows or oaths, we cannot expect him to keep national vows. We have witnessed this in recent years.

Knowledge or intelligence (as man sees it) without honesty — a good genius with a bad heart — is worse than an ignorant honest man because the evil genius could find more subtle ways to rob the people of their rights. Some have argued support for certain candidates based upon their intelligence, saying: “He’s so smart. We ought to elect him.” Yet, if a man, no matter how smart, is reasoning from wrong presuppositions, or has bad character, he will not be a good leader.

2. Just and compassionate

We need rulers with firmness and resolution, yet also with compassion, tenderness, and kindness. As a “minister of God” he should imitate the “Father of mercies,” but who is also

just and righteous. When such a ruler inflicts punishment on offenders, he “does it, not because he takes pleasure in the misery of his subjects, but to vindicate his authority and government — to preserve order in the system, and, in the end, to promote the public good.”⁹

This is the emphasis of Biblical law — restitution to the wronged and restoration of Godly order — and is in contrast to the Roman idea of law which seeks firstly the punishment of the criminal. The Roman idea is much more pronounced in our penal system today.

3. Humility

Jesus taught that leaders are to be servants (Matt. 20:25-28). George Washington understood this as evidenced by a letter he sent to all the Governors, on June 8, 1783, where he gave the following advice:

I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection . . . that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.¹⁰

Washington was a great example of a humble leader. His response to the proposition by some officers in the army to make him king is one incident showing this.¹¹

3. Faith or True Religion — “men who fear God”

The fear of God is an essential qualification for a Godly official. What are men like who fear God? “Men acting under the belief and awe of God as their inspector and judge, to whom they consider themselves accountable for their conduct and whom they fear to offend.”¹²

This is not just saying “I am a Christian,” simply going to church,

or culturally embracing Christianity, but having a reverential fear of the Almighty. Many today think that the fear of God is of no matter for our rulers, and even see it as a negative factor. Rev. Matthias Burnet said it well:

If God be such a being, as both reason and revelation declare him to be, an omniscient, holy, just and all-powerful being, whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, to punish the one and reward the other according to their character and deeds, then certainly, the fear and awe of him must operate as the greatest restraint from that which is evil, and the most powerful incentive to that which is good, and he who is truly actuated by this principle, will never give his voice or influence to pervert justice or support iniquity. But the man who does not believe in the being and providence of God, or is not actuated by the fear and awe of him, has in many cases no bond or restraint upon his conduct, and therefore is not fit to be trusted with a nation’s weal, which he will not scruple, whenever he can with impunity, to sacrifice to his lust or ambition.¹³

When the righteous rule the people rejoice (Prov. 29:2). The righteous are those in right standing with God—they fear God.

Rev. Robbins preached to the Massachusetts officials in 1791:

By a man of Religion, I mean one who fears God from the heart, with a fear founded in esteem — in a supreme love implanted in the soul, by the renovating influence of the Spirit of God — one who believes in, and honors his Son Jesus Christ, as the only mediator and Saviour; and who makes conscience of conforming his temper and life to the sacred rules of the Gospel.¹⁴

Early Americans looked for this quality in their rulers, and most rulers were men who feared God. Men of irreligion would not be tolerated.

Irreligion in a ruler counteracts the design of the office to execute justice.

A leader who does not fear God will not make an effective governor,

for if he himself disregards the laws of God, how can he effectively condemn the vice and immorality of others? If he is a slave to his lusts, how can he attempt to regulate the passions of others. In so doing, people will cry out, “Physician heal thyself.” All authority will be brought into contempt. We have seen this negative effect today, with some citizens justifying lying, and many other things, in personal actions because some officials did the same thing.

Righteous rulers are called of God and have vision.

Romans 13 tells us that civil rulers are ministers of God who hold their position by His providence. It is a ministry that God will call some people to fill. We should discern if those we seek to place in power are those that God has called and “anointed” to rule. God prepares different people to perform different things. Recognizing the call of God on a person for a specific office is important. There are many examples in history of God’s call on rulers, including David, Moses, Daniel, William Penn, and George Washington.

Having a Godly vision for administering God’s justice in the civil realm is important for effective leadership. A Godly leader will have knowledge, Christian character, and a fear of God and will be able to impart vision, hope, purpose, and direction to a nation. This is especially true for those in executive positions like presidents, governors, and mayors. Godly rulers will use the office as a “pulpit” to raise the vision of the American people, and implant noble desires and hope for the future.

Noah Webster summarized the effect of unprincipled men in office:

Let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for yourselves rulers, ‘just men who rule in the fear of God.’ The preservation of a republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their

duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good, so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizens will be violated or disregarded. If a republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the divine commands, and elect bad men to make and administer the laws.¹⁵

The election of unprincipled men produces misery and tyranny, but Godly rulers bring peace, prosperity, justice, and rejoicing. If we fulfill our duty and place Godly men in office (who have knowledge, character, and faith) our future will be bright. According to 2 Samuel 23:3-4,

The God of Israel said...He who rules...in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.

End Notes

1. Matthias Burnet, "Religion and Government the Foundations of Order, Peace, and Security, in Society," An Election Sermon Preached at a General Assembly of the State of Connecticut at Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 12, 1803.
2. Ideas on the Christian and humanistic views of law from R.J. Rushdoony, Law and Liberty, Ross House Books, Vallecito, Ca.
3. See Watchmen on the Walls and Liberating the Nations, published by the Providence Foundation.
4. "On the Cod Fishery Bill, granting Bounties," February 7, 1792, in The Debates of the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution as Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia in 1787. . . . In Five Volumes, by Jonathan Elliot, New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, Vol. IV, p. 429.
5. This and the following quotes are from The Life of Colonel David Crockett, compiled by Edward S. Ellis, Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1884.
6. See Liberating the Nations, chap. 1, by Stephen McDowell and Mark Beliles, Charlottesville, Va: Providence Foundation, 1995.
7. Matthias Burnet.
8. Chandler Robbins, "And Also in Judah Things Went Well." A Sermon Preached before His Excellency John Hancock, Governour; His Honor Samuel Adams, Lieutant-Governour; the Honourable the Council, and the Honourable the Senate and House of Representatives, of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, May 25, 1791, Being the Day of General Election.
9. Chandler Robbins.

10. Circular Letter Addressed to the Governors of all the States on Disbanding the Army, 1783. Old South Leaflets, no. 15.

11. See Stephen McDowell and Mark Beliles, In God We Trust Tour Guide, Charlottesville, Va: Providence Foundation, 1998, pp. 70-71.

12. Matthias Burnet.

13. Matthias Burnet.

14. Chandler Robbins.

15. Noah Webster, History of the United States, New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1833, pp. 307-308.

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