

Example is Leadership

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The parents of a small child wanted to find out what he was going to be when he grew up. In keeping with the local custom, the parents placed a wine bottle, a packet of money, and a Bible on a table. Which one the child chose would give insight into his future. If the child took the bottle, then he could be destined for a life devoted to the pursuit of pleasure. If he took the money, he would perhaps go into banking or finance. If he took the Bible, then he might have a career in ministry. From behind a door held ajar, they watched as the child walked into the room and surveyed his choices. He put the money in his pocket, tucked the Bible under one arm, and picked up the bottle before heading out of the room. "Good grief!" the father exclaimed, "He's going to be a politician!"

While such jokes caricature the popular interpretation of politicians, it also contains a hint of the cynicism with which many American view the political process. It comes as no surprise to some when the press reports that a local official is guilty of some breach of moral ethics. The very term politician seems to imply a person who is all too willing to bend the rules if it means getting ahead.

History is replete with anti-theistic leaders who were guilty of far worse than bribery, doing favors for friends, or catering to special interest groups. Officials during the late Roman Republic were notorious for using whatever means necessary to silence their opposition, even if it meant resorting to murder. Roman emperors such as Nero and Domitian murdered scores of people, many of whom were Christians. Other historical figures such as Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, and Saddam Hussein have written the most recent chapters in this legacy of brutality. Since none of these men believed in God, none of them felt the need for accountability to a higher standard of personal behavior.

Not all political leaders who reject God are so villainous. However, the Bible contains many examples of leaders whose people suffer because they do not respect God. Perhaps the best example is that of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Refusing to surrender after the first plague had demonstrated the power of Yahweh, he steeled himself against the suffering of the following plagues. By opposing God, he magnified the suffering not only of himself, but also of his own people. All Egypt suffered because of his arrogance.

Lest we think the example of Pharaoh to be a foreign one to God's people, we could examine other examples of failed leadership. Israelite rebels such as Korah attempted to usurp the leadership of Moses, which led to the destruction of him and his followers (Num. 16:32-33). Though he is enshrined in the "faith hall of fame" of Hebrews 11, Gideon was guilty of constructing an ephod that served as a spiritual snare for all Israel (Judg. 8:27). Saul's refusal to obey God's law led to the deaths of him and his sons (1 Sam. 31:1-6). Rehoboam's refusal to be fair led to the division of his kingdom (1 Ki. 12:16). As leaders, these men were

fundamentally successful. As believers, they had serious spiritual deficiencies that were disastrous for those under their leadership.

Believers remember King Solomon for two things: his wealth, and his wisdom. Both came by God's blessing. Solomon's request to receive wisdom in order to rule well was the reason God blessed him so richly (1 Ki. 3:5-14; 2 Chron. 1:10-



12). Like Gideon, Solomon was an effective leader. Archaeology confirms that he fortified cities, increased the wealth of Israel, and made the "mini-empire" forged by his father David, into a noticeable player on the world scene. Also like Gideon, his lack of spiritual wholeness would have grievous consequences.

The book of Deuteronomy gives three basic rules for the kings of Israel to follow (Deut. 17:16-20). The law forbade the accumulation of numbers of horses for warfare. They could not take numerous wives, nor could they accumulate large amounts of wealth. These prohibitions were to ensure that the king did not put his faith in his military or act like an arrogant Near Eastern monarch by celebrating his wives or wealth. Any of the three could easily create spiritual obstacles for king. They can do the same now.

By failing to follow these basic rules, Solomon's heart slowly turned after other gods. The man to whom God had twice appeared, followed other gods and

built shrines for his wives to offer pagan sacrifices. It was Solomon's lack of spiritual purity that led to the division of Israel (1 Ki. 11:11-13). Rehoboam's lack of fairness may have been the immediate cause, but Solomon's spiritual infidelity was the root of the problem.

While not all the leaders of God's people were bad, it is important to note that the most memorable were those who exemplified godly behavior. There is no better example than David, the greatest king in Israelite history. Like other great rulers, David demonstrated military skill and political savvy in addition to his literary and musical abilities. He was a cunning politician who rose from virtually nothing to being the king of a mini-empire carved out of the land of Syria-Palestine with military maneuvers and political alliances. Yet for all his accomplishments, the one for which he is best remembered is for being a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). David's political achievements stand in the long shadow of his spiritual greatness.

The importance of having elected officials who respect God cannot be underestimated. When choosing our leaders, it is important to remember the importance of godly principles. While many people simply vote for their favored political party, this runs afoul when the beliefs of some candidates are considered. Some politicians running for office hold beliefs that are distinctly incompatible with a true biblical worldview. For Christians, this is not acceptable. We are a different people who look for different things in our leaders.

Scripture commands Christians to obey the government (Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). Refusal to do so is resistance to God Himself (Rom. 13:1-5), unless there is a morally justifiable reason to disobey the civil government (Acts 5:29). Yet we are not at the mercy of obeying a government beyond our influence. In America, Christians can have a hand in shaping the political face of the nation. We need leaders who call our country to the highest standards rather than accommodating the lowest ones. When going to the polls, it is of paramount importance to remember the principles for godly leadership, as well as the consequences of electing leaders who fail to exhibit biblical principles. ▲