



WHEN the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. (Prov 29:2)

Any reader of this devotion with prior military experience will know, without doubt, that there is a cardinal rule of leadership that declares, "Authority can be delegated, but not responsibility." Nothing could be more oppressive than presumed authority. Authority requires a source preeminent and exact.

You will notice in the above text from Proverbs 29:2, the righteous are IN authority, but the wicked BEARETH rule. The words of the Bible are so very precise that no error can be discerned in meaning. God uses a different word for the wicked than He does for the righteous. Why is that the case? It is because the authority of the righteous will always derive from its legitimate source – GOD. Governments who do not derive their authority from God are illegitimate on the face of it. A silver dollar is imprinted with the motto of the United States, and the name of its issuing authority – the United States. But if the coin presents a different issuing authority, it is not legal tender in America. Moreover, a coin struck in the likeness of United States currency is not legal tender either if it is not authorized by the United States - it is counterfeit if not struck by the US Mint.

Our personal rights descend from God, not government. Perhaps the Declaration of Independence was the first Founding Document of a nation to stipulate that divine truth. If the laws and character of a nation are based on the Law of God, then that nation is a righteous nation. If not, that nation which does not recognize the laws of God is a counterfeit since they derive their authority from man and not from God.

Power and force alone are not tokens of legitimate authority. If we observe the despotic governments of history, some have been among the most powerful on earth. Power attempts to adjudicate its authority by means of force, but the end result will always leave a stain upon the mantle of civilization. An example could be taken from the Roman Emperor Hadrian, successor to Trajan. In many ways, Hadrian was a fair ruler, but he also owned the false religion of the Roman gods. His soul was darkened by false counsel. He prided himself for being, not only a man of great military power, but also one of letters. This false pride prompted him to correct the learned Flavorinus for employing an improper word. Although certain that he was correct, Flavorinus, deferred to the Emperor. Upon being scolded by his friends for submitting to erroneous counsel, Flavorinus responded, "Shall not I easily suffer him to be the most learned of all men who has thirty legions at his command?"

I believe we all weakly submit to unconstitutional authority, to public opinion, and to the views of society at times when we should stand up like men and women of

backbone and point out that the “*Emperor has no clothes!*” This is true of political matters but, more importantly, to matters of faith as well.

Every army, or military organization, has a ‘line of authority’ descending from the field commander to the individual soldier on the line. But forget not, the field commander derives his authority from a higher source as well such as the Army Commander who in turn derives his authority from perhaps the Chief of Staff. The Chief of Staff is granted his authority by the President of the United States. Does it end there? No, the President derives his just power from the consent of the governed who, if the nation is Godly, will vote according to a Christian conscience. Therefore, all authority – ALL – descends from God else it is not legitimate¹.

The great French Parliamentarian, Frederick Bastiat (1848), in his book, *The Law*, has this to say regarding legitimate law:

“We hold from God the gift which includes all others. This gift is life -- physical, intellectual, and moral life. But life cannot maintain itself alone. The Creator of life has entrusted us with the responsibility of preserving, developing, and perfecting it. In order that we may accomplish this, He has provided us with a collection of marvelous faculties. And He has put us in the midst of a variety of natural resources. By the application of our faculties to these natural resources we convert them into products, and use them. This process is necessary in order that life may run its appointed course.

“Life, faculties, production--in other words, individuality, liberty, property -- this is man. And in spite of the cunning of artful political leaders, these three gifts from God precede all human legislation, and are superior to it. Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place.

“What, then, is law? It is the collective organization of the individual right to lawful defense. Each of us has a natural right--from God--to defend his person, his liberty, and his property. These are the three basic requirements of life, and the preservation of any one of them is completely dependent upon the preservation of the other two. For what are our faculties but the extension of our individuality? And what is property but an extension of our faculties?” Bastiat, Frederick The Law (Kindle Locations 54-57). Misbach Enterprises. Kindle Edition

When governments opt to supersede the laws laid down by God, they will, without exception, seek to disarm the people to render them helpless to the despot’s saber. When governments cease to be guided by Godly intent, justice itself is perverted and becomes a matter of selective prosecution of political enemies.

Many years ago, I gave a sermon at St. Peter’s following which a minister came up to me and said, “Your sermon was different from many others.” I asked him how. He responded, “*You preach with authority.*” That may have been true, but WHOSE authority. If it was not based solely upon God’s Immutable Word, it was a presumed and false authority. Since I lack a sound imagination in preaching, I find that the Bible provides the most perfect outline and substance for my sermons. In that way, I do not have to make anything up, and the sermon will be Godly regardless the finesse of delivery.

There is, and always has been, a line of authority in God’s Church. The Old Testament Church of the Wilderness was headed by a man chosen of God. The High Priest began the single line of authority from God to man. Then priests and temple workers, and then the individual. But the High Priest was appointed by God. The priest served in the Temple to see that all things were done righteously and in good order. The

¹ The founding document of this country is not the Constitution as misapprehended by many, but the Declaration of Independence which draws its authority directly from Our Creator.

priest still has that obligation today. Unfortunately, many are performing according to their own pride and not in service to God.

The role of the priest has changed since the Old Testament worship. We now have a High Priest who serves directly under the Father and who is our Advocate before the Mercy Seat. He needs make no further sacrifice for that has already been made once and for all. Under the High Priest are other priests (whether called presbyters, preachers, pastors, or whatever). These have a similar responsibility to see that all things in the Church are done according to good order and true worship.

Below the priestly line are the people themselves who actually share in a different way in the priesthood. They are believers who have a royal priesthood, and authority derived from God, to keep a watchful eye on the public worship and private lives even of those appointed over them in authority. These must be fully knowledgeable of Holy Scripture – so much so that they can detect error at once when preached from the pulpit; and, if necessary, to call into question any strange or ungodly doctrine preached there from. At bottom line, the priests, bishops, deacons, and people of God derive all authority from God Himself and not from any human source. It is the WORD OF GOD that is the ultimate authority and not man's word.

Some of the readers of this devotion may be old enough to remember when school prayer was treacherously removed from public school. School prayer had been common in schools from the days of the Founders, and they even encouraged it. But a godless and maverick Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional even though no law whatsoever proscribed it. What did the churches of America have to say about that unconstitutional decision of the Supreme Court? NOTHING! Then the Bible itself and the Ten Commandments were removed, and the people said nothing. Then the murder of the most innocent of all life, babies in their mother's womb, was legalized by a rebellious court. What did the mainline churches have to say to that dastardly decision? You guessed it – NOTHING!

Edmund Burke once said: *"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."* He was not all that clever to come up with that witticism, for God has said it long ago: *"21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."* (1 Kings 18:21)

The authority we possess as believers and ministers derive directly from God's Word. God's Word, even if spoken by a little child, has all of the authority it would have if spoken by a minister. The authority is in the WORD itself; not in the one who quotes it.