

Regression from Statesman to Politician

We know very well that it is not sufficient just to begin well. If I were to ask who was the outstanding leader of all time, using external criteria of wealth, wisdom, grandeur, as well as avowed desire to obey God and to be His instrument, instinctively we would answer Solomon. And toward the beginning of his reign, this would seem to be correct. Looking at Solomon's heart attitude as he expressed to God at the beginning of his reign:

LORD my God, You have now made Your servant king in my father David's place. Yet I am just a youth with no experience in leadership. Your servant is among Your people You have chosen, a people too numerous to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an obedient heart to judge Your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours? (1 Kings 3:7-9)

Describing his intended reign, he said in the third person:

he will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper. He will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor. He will redeem them from oppression and violence for their lives are precious in his sight. (Psalms 72:12-14)

In retrospect, perhaps no leader in history had more going for him to be a great leader. However, if we take a snapshot later in his reign, we see a different picture:

King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women from the nations that the LORD had told the Israelites about, "Do not intermarry with them, and they must not intermarry with you, because they will turn you away from Me to their gods." Solomon was deeply attached to these women and loved them. He had 700 wives who were princesses and 300 concubines, and they turned his heart away from the LORD. When Solomon was old, his wives seduced him to follow other gods. His heart was not completely with the LORD his God, as his father David's heart had been. Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight, and unlike his father David, he did not completely follow the LORD. (1 Kings 11:1-6)

In Solomon's case, the temptation he gave into was satisfaction of fleshly desires. Not only did Solomon fail in his personal life, he destroyed the kingdom God had given him. It was immediately divided after his death, and then the larger of those two divisions disappeared for all time. It cannot even be traced today. The temptation Solomon gave into is just one of many possibilities available to us. Nevertheless, it presents a vivid example.

The root of Solomon's failings began at the very beginning of his reign as can be understood from these words:

Solomon loved the LORD by walking in the statutes of his father David, but he also sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. (1 Kings 3:3)

The latter was warned against and forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 12:2) and was an act of disobedience toward Him. Solomon held back part of his heart for himself rather than giving it all to his Lord. And it was this holding back from wholehearted obedience that placed him on the slippery slope to failure. I do not believe he intended to fall. However, beginning with a small step of disobedience that he allowed himself, he took one step after another that led to his complete failure.

As the Apostle Paul is about to be put to death, he wrote regarding one of his co-workers:

Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. (2 Timothy 4:10)

Demas had risked his life during the years Paul was imprisoned in Rome. He publicly identified with Paul throughout, when to do so was extremely dangerous. Finally, this devoted follower abandoned Paul and the Lord, never to be heard of again in Church history. My speculation is that he did not make a decision to turn evil, selling himself to the devil. Rather, I believe he began with one small step of disobedience in his thought life, which made it easier to take further steps in disobedience.

The exercise of office provides many temptations for us. The temptation(s) Solomon gave into are just some of the many possibilities. Our loving Father, knowing our nature warned us against this and provided an antidote.

The first step is to for our minds to be immersed in God's Law. God instructs the head of government, presumably required of everyone operating under delegated authority from the head of government:

It (God's Law) is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees ... and turn from the law to the right or to the left. (Deuteronomy 17:19-20)

The more we look into the Law of God and into God's face, the more we will recognize the temptations we may be subject to. Based upon the power of God available to us, we must actively take victory over those temptations as explained by the Apostle Paul:

for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

The source of the power for the victory in our lives is: "by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body". We cannot even achieve this victory ourselves. We need the power of God. We are to depend on the power of God's Spirit to put to death the temptations we face. We must immerse ourselves into God's Word so that we can clearly see when

temptation is luring us. Then, we must invoke the power of that same loving Father to put to death our intent to give into that temptation. We must invoke that power each moment as Paul described elsewhere:

I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:19-20)

We have been called by our Heavenly Father to be Statesmen. And we have been given the resources to succeed in that calling if we will faithfully use them. Let us not fail as Solomon did, or slip into a life without significance as Demas did, by carelessly walking away from all our Lord has for us. What Paul instructs the follower of Jesus Christ has all the more significance for the Statesman:

Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth. (Colossians 3:2)

The Government decision-maker must set his or her mind on God and His principles. The lives of too many are at stake in the decisions we make to allow one's mind to be distracted by anything less than the highest aspirations.

Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth!