

How Do You Wish to be Remembered as a Leader – as a Statesman or as a Politician?

I believe it is essential for those serving in Government (or any other field) to continually reflect on what motivates us and what we hope to achieve with our lives. Let me pose these questions: What kind of a leader do you wish to be? And how do you want to be remembered? During a debate in the European Parliament in 2015 focusing on the Greek debt crisis, Guy Verhofstadt, the former Belgian prime minister, bluntly asked the Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras: “How do you want to be remembered? As an electoral accident who made people poorer or as a revolutionary reformer?” Verhofstadt was asking the question we are asking, “What kind of a leader do you wish to be? And how do you want to be remembered?”

More than ever, people all over the world are pleading for their governing officials to be visionary leaders who care about them and use the authority of office to help them reach their God-given potential, as opposed to being politicians that care more about their own personal aspirations while in office. Instinctively, there is the conviction that they are entitled to better leadership than they are experiencing.

I am borrowing terminology used by others in the past and tightening up its definition. Hence, I am defining the kind of leadership the governed are looking for as *statesmen*, in contrast to *politicians*. Several analysts have pointed out that there is a major difference between being a political figure absorbed in personal aspirations and being a statesman who will leave our nations better than we found them. We have heard voices defining the issue as follows:

James Freeman Clarke:

A politician thinks of the next election, a statesman of the next generation. A politician looks for the success of his party; a statesman for that of his country. The statesman wishes to steer, while the politician is satisfied to drift.

Ord L. Morrow:

The difference between a politician and a statesman is that the politician sees which way the people are going and tries to stay ahead of them, whereas the statesman sees what is best and right and does that even if no one follows.

Edmund Burke, the British political figure in the late eighteenth century:

The great difference between the real statesman and the pretender is that the one sees into the future, while the other regards only the present; the one lives by the day, and acts on expediency; the other acts on enduring principles and for immortality.

Burke brought this issue to our attention in the 18th Century, Clarke in the 19th Century, Morrow in the 20th Century, and it has now been publicly asked of the Greek Prime Minister in the 21st Century. The issue is timeless and it seems destined to remain with us permanently! After one of our team addressed this topic at a gathering of 400 political and community leaders, one of the organizers of this event commented: “Everyone present was a politician. Not one was a statesman.” There are precious few statesmen. In a recent discussion on the topic with a European official, he commented that he could

not identify a single statesman within Europe today. We have since become more optimistic as we have been privileged to know and appreciate a number of leaders who have the hearts of statesmen.

At issue is the motivations/intentions on the part of governors, but, just as importantly, where they obtain their direction for their decisions. As we began to study this topic, focusing on the lives of those generally recognized as especially good leaders, we noticed one common denominator in the lives of many but not clearly all cases: faith in God, in fact a desire to be His instrument while serving in Government. As a team, we have been influenced by the philosopher of science, Karl Popper, who argued that one should state one's conclusions and hypotheses so strongly that they invite further investigation, including efforts to refute them, all in an attempt to arrive collectively at the truth. What I am sharing reflects this approach. I challenge you to explore with me the hypothesis that obedience to God is an effective step in becoming a statesman.

There is a Creator who has designed the world, plus every person who lives in it, and several institutions for the healthy running of this system. He has revealed His intents and instructions to us as a human race in the *Bible*. Even if you disagree with my understanding, I challenge you to explore the implications with me. What do you have to lose? I am convinced there is much to gain, and nothing to lose. My hope is that you will embark on this journey with me and that it will be as revolutionary for you as it has been for me.

Hence, I am convinced that understanding the concept of statesmanship requires first understanding the purpose of our Creator in designing our world. God has made it abundantly clear that He is the One who designed and created our world and superintends it. Furthermore, He has made it clear that He has established three institutions (Family, Religious Institution, Government) for the purpose of bringing well-being to each member of His creation. He has made this truth clear throughout His instruction book for us. Jesus, as God, summarized this when He said: "I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10). As a consequence, we must understand that He intends for every decision in Government to bring well-being to the people. Hence, we must understand that He intends for every decision in Government to be statesmanlike and, therefore, for every official to be a statesman as we have previously defined.

God has instructed us through His servant, the Apostle Paul:

*First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, **so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity** (1 Timothy 2:1-2).*

God is informing us here that it is His intent that governing officials at all levels will produce, as a result of their official decisions, a good quality of life — *a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*. This again defines the quality of life that our Creator desires for every man, woman and child on the earth. Further, this defines the nature of every decision to be made within government. We must recognize that the quality of life described by the Apostle Paul is identical with what would be achieved by statesmen.

And He intends for every decision on behalf of the people made by every official at every level to support this quality of life.

In summary, there are three important truths that we learn here:

1. God defines the quality of life He intends for every man, woman and child as a *tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*.
2. God defines the quality of life He intends to result from decisions made by officials, which are also those of statesmen.
3. This makes it clear that **our Creator intends for every governing official to be a statesman as we are defining here.**

This is consistent with Government being a God-ordained institution for the purpose of *providing an orderly society within which the individual can reach his/her full, God-given potential.*

Hence, if we have any sense that we must please God, our Master, while serving in Government, we must take every step to serve as a statesman.

How do you want to be remembered as a leader? As a Politician or a Statesman? And how may I help you?