

The Statesman's High Privilege to Be an Instrument in the Hands of Almighty God

President Abraham Lincoln made a thought-provoking statement while in office:

In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, as I am.

And he repeated the same idea on another occasion:

I hold myself in my present position and with the authority vested in me as an instrument of [God].

What could he possibly have meant by such statements? The idea expressed of being an instrument in the hand of Almighty God is intriguing, recognizing that Government is the idea of our Creator who cannot be seen with physical eyes. We know from His revealed instruction that He designed Government “so that [everyone] may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:2). We have the further challenge that all of this is to be implemented by human beings operating in the physical dimension. What kind of a leader can achieve this? Addressing popular governance, Michael Novak commented that it requires recognition of:

the reality of sin.... Without that [recognition], the institutions will not function or long endure. This republic was designed for sinners. There is no use trying to build a republic for saints. There are too few of them... No, if you wish to build a republic that will last, you must design it for sinners....a republic of sinners — and, therefore, a republic with checks and balances.

The irony of democratic governance is that you have human beings with a sinful nature making decisions that will allow human beings, also with a sinful nature, to experience “a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”

It takes a very special person to serve in such a capacity. God described that person through King David, who, in spite of his human imperfections, sought to be God's instrument as he governed for 40 years. At the end of his life, he summarized the lessons he had learned regarding the kind of person God would use as His instrument:

The one who rules the people with justice, who rules in the fear of God (2 Samuel 23:3).

The one who wishes to rule as God's instrument must “rule the people with justice” and must “rule in the fear of God”. Jesus described the challenge such a leader who desires to be good must consider:

What profit is there in gaining the whole world when it means forfeiting one's self? (Luke 9:25)

This is the challenge a governing official must recognize. The leader has great authority at his disposal intended to be used to achieve for the people what they are unable to achieve for themselves with their limited power. However, there is also the temptation to use that great power for personal benefit. God addressed this issue before one nation placed its first king into office:

When he is seated on his royal throne, he is to write a copy of this instruction for himself on a scroll... It is to remain with him, and he is to read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to observe all the words of this instruction, and to do these statutes. Then his heart will not be exalted above his countrymen, he will not turn from this command to the right or the left... (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

The leader is to be so immersed in God's instructions to understand his responsibility as his Master would have him. To ensure that immersion, the king, as the prototype for all governing officials, was even to write out those instructions from God using his own hand. He is required to be immersed in understanding the heart and mind of God. In the process, the expectation is that two things will happen.

Then his heart will not be exalted above his countrymen. He will not view himself as more important than his countrymen. Literally, he will view himself as servant to his fellow countrymen.

He will not turn from this command (God's instructions) to the right or the left. He will not give in to temptation to deviate. One servant of God has testified to the life that this involves:

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

One king testified to the benefit of such a work of God:

The secret counsel of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He reveals His covenant to them (Psalm 25:14).

God Himself gave this insight:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways. For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

It is not enough to want to be obedient to God. We must recognize that our well-intentioned wisdom is not adequate and we must seek His wisdom. If we operated according to these principles, who would really be making the decisions? It would be none other than Almighty God Himself. God who cannot be seen with human eyes would be operating within this physical world through us as His physical hands and feet. I believe it was considerations such as these that caused President Lincoln to express that he viewed himself as an "instrument in the hands of God". Such a statement means to view oneself as operating under God's direction, at His instruction, literally as His instrument.

APPLICATION TO THE STATESMAN. Do I view myself as operating under God's direction, and upon His instruction, literally an "instrument in the hands of God"? What may I do to better operate as an "instrument in the hands of God" as President Lincoln expressed? Reflecting that President Lincoln referred to himself not only as "an instrument in the hands of God", but as a "humble instrument", am I able to humble myself before my ultimate Master?