

## The Statesman Understands the Authority of Office

What makes Government special among the institutions our Creator established to ensure an orderly society, alongside Family and Religious Institution, is the authority Government has been given. In order to properly exercise the authority of office, it is necessary to understand the authority granted to Government and to the individual officials serving within that institution. We learn in this regard as Pilate, the Roman administrator who had responsibility for dealing with Jesus over charges that He should be put to death for claiming to be God. At one point in Pilate's questioning of Jesus, we are told:

*Jesus did not give him an answer. So Pilate said to Him, "You're not talking to me? Don't You know that I have the authority to release You and the authority to crucify You?" (John 19:9-10)*

Pilate stated that He had the authority to put Jesus to death. Jesus' answer to Pilate teaches us:

*You would have no authority over Me at all, if it hadn't been given you from above (John 19:11).*

Jesus did not dispute that Pilate had the authority to put Him to death. And Jesus, speaking as God and on behalf of the Godhead, confirmed that Pilate possessed this authority by virtue of his office. Jesus, as God, could have withdrawn that authority to Pilate in this specific case, but He chose to allow it in order to provide His payment for the penalty for our sin as the Saviour of mankind.

Elsewhere, we learn more about the authority governing officials possess, including the way it is to be viewed by both governing officials and by the people:

*Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God. So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of your conscience. And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's public servants, continually attending to these tasks (Romans 13:1-6).*

This passage supports Jesus' assertion that Government possesses authority, including the sword, making clear the authority to dispense corporal punishment and that this authority is granted to it from God. However, that authority is to be used cautiously, recognizing that:

*Government is God's servant (Romans 13:4).*

Government as an institution is designed to serve God's purpose for achieving a godly society with well-being for all:

*so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity (2 Timothy 2:2).*

And governing officials are God's servants to achieve that:

*the authorities are God's public servants, continually attending to these tasks (Romans 13:6).*

Government is established by God for the purpose of creating a just and orderly society. Hence, an important part of that authority is to encourage good behaviour:

*For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong (Romans 13:3-4).*

Government's wrath over individual wrongdoing is intended to be in harmony with God convicting the individual through his or her conscience that He has implanted within us. Thus, that threat of punishment is intended to be for the purpose of creating the society and quality of life our Creator intends. Thus, clearly, in dispensing justice within society, Government is to be an extension of our Creator's plan, with the requirement to operate under His guidance in the exercise of that authority. With the threat of punishment, there is no hint that this authority may be used for any other purpose but encouraging and enforcing good behaviour – certainly not for political power.

The people are to view governing officials as "God's public servants". And Government is intended to be God's servant. As such, the people are intended to have respect for the authority that Government holds:

*But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong (Romans 13:4).*

The purpose of Government is not to instill fear, but rather respect for the authority and to encourage healthy societal behaviour – "for your good". The lives of the people are to be measurably better because of the healthy exercise of this authority by Government and its public servants.

### **APPLICATION OF THIS TRUTH TO THE STATESMAN:**

Do I recognize that the authority I exercise in office comes from God?

Do I recognize that I exercise this authority in office as God's servant and under His guidance as His instrument?

Do the people recognize that I exercise this authority as God's servant?

If the authority available to me in my office comes from God, should I not consult Him closely in the exercise of that authority to make sure that I am exercising that authority in a way He intends and approves?