Five Definitive Characteristics of Righteous Leadership

Proverbs 14:34 contains a sound political maxim, the simplicity of which is often overlooked: Personal righteousness in the population — both in citizens and leaders — is the single most important commodity that any country can possess! This virtue, states Solomon, is preeminent to everything else, because:

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

The writer of Proverbs, King Solomon whom Scripture states was the wisest man to ever live, proclaims in this passage that personal righteousness is the most important ingredient — and should be the focus — in order to achieve the advancement of any given nation. Solomon does not say that the presence of natural resources exalts a nation, nor does he say that it is attributable to the excellence of its education system, as important as those are, among other things. Rather, personal righteousness is what is the most important!

Ralph Drollinger

Weekly Bible Studies
CABINET: 7:00 AM Wednesdays Mornings. Location Undisclosed. Light Refreshments Served.
SENATE: 8:00 AM Tuesdays, Rotating Offices of Senators. Hot Breakfast Served.
HOUSE: Capitol H324: Monday or Tuesday Evenings after First Votes Back. Dinner Served.
I. INTRODUCTION

THE FIVE TRAITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS that must characterize a nation’s leaders are the same qualities in fact, that serve to exalt a nation. The Greek word for Righteousness (dikaiosune) is used 86 times in the NT. The most simple and easy way to remember the definition of this word is “right-way-ness.” Careful observation of Proverbs 14:34 (quoted in the preambles) reveals a nationalistic summation of the cause and effect relationship between righteousness and exaltation. Great nations, great leaders, great employees, great family members are always characterized by the following definitive biblical characteristics of righteousness—that’s what makes them great! It should be noted at the outset that there are many who practice the following five characteristics of biblical righteousness, borrowing from the heavenly Author of such, but yet give no attribution to their source.

In an individual sense, when a leader lives with God’s character, he places himself in a position to be blessed by God, whereas unrighteous leaders are never in a place or position wherein God can extend them His divine favor in as gracious a proportion.

Per Proverbs 14:34, it follows that a nation’s proportion of blessing is directly related to, and tantamount to the sum total of the righteousness quotient of its individual leaders. It is only when a nation is blessed with high-principled individuals that it places itself in a position to gain God’s bestowal of blessing and favor, of overall well-being.

THE EXALTATION OF A NATION IS INTRINSICALLY INTERTWINE WITH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ITS LEADERS

Given this cut-to-the-chase analysis of a nation’s greatest need, the question quickly becomes one of how righteousness is best formed in the life of leaders. Therefore, as we will see, the critical, preeminent duty of all believers is to witness for Christ and lead others to Him; in essence it is to Christianize the citizenry. Conversion of the soul, Solomon will postulate, not moral foisting, is the only way to breed lasting, righteous individuals. Therefore in our composite nation (one composed of both Church and State but institutionally separated), the State is dependent on believers to diligently evangelize and disciple the unregenerate citizenry of the State. It follows that the degree to which believers are faithful evangelizers and disciplers is directly proportional to the health of the State. Proverbs 11:10-11; 28:12; and 29:2 serve to respectively underscore this critically important relationship:

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting. By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.

As previously evidenced in Proverbs 14:34 and the above passages, one can summarize conclude the following:
THE BOOK OF PROVERBS REPEATEDLY SCREAMS OUT ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EXISTENCE OF RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS AS THEY RELATE TO THE OVERALL HEALTH OF A CITY OR NATION

A small number of believers think that Christians should give no pause for the State; rather they should only be about focusing on advancing God’s Kingdom. But these aforementioned passages serve — in fact, they shout — about how God expects the righteous life of the believer, especially its righteous political leaders, to positively affect the cities and nations where they live and serve! The above passages are not about the heavenlies, they relate to the here and now. Given this clear and repeated cause and effect relationship between the existence of righteousness in leaders and the course a country takes, as a Public Servant how are you doing in terms of your spiritual growth, your maturation in Christ, your righteousness quotient?

II. THE GERMINATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The necessity of evangelism by the people of God so as to birth and develop righteous individuals in order to achieve an ongoing healthy, exalted nation is explicitly articulated in Proverbs 11:30:

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls.*

In beautifully imaging Solomonic prose, the picture of a *tree of life* serves to illustrate the far reaching effects of the *fruit of the righteous*. This *fruit* generally includes his influence, productivity, instruction and example. But notice specifically what is added to the definition of *fruit* in this passage: evangelism, or the *winning of souls*. Herein is yet another exclamatory underscoring of the integral relationship between the importance of evangelism, which results in the indwelling Holy Spirit, whom elsewhere in Scripture is deemed The Helper, to the outward manifestations of such in culture.

To illustrate the needed priority and fostering of the spiritual dimension in the life of the citizen and the way in which that plays out in culture, note John 4, when Jesus visited the woman at the well. He Himself was no doubt very thirsty and in need of water, but He set aside His personal desires to win the woman to salvation. He momentarily placed aside His own personal needs in order to achieve a much higher priority: the conversion of her soul, the beginning of righteous living! Her soul was the most important thing on His mind. The passage reveals that Jesus was most concerned for her personal salvation, but when He said, “Go and sin no more,” indicates there were to be cultural consequences to her conversion: adultery threatens the moral fabric of any society, more specifically the nuclear family, the very foundation of any and all nations. If only we had more believers in our various seats of government who held to such clear priorities of winning other’s souls over and above their career objectives. Solomon says that to prioritize this is wise. It is wise because it so impacts and affects the life and the culture! May we “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33) not only in our own lives, but in the lives of others. To do so is to create an evergreen *tree of life* in any given nation.

States Bridges in regard to the absence
of soul winning: “The Christian who neglects his brother’s salvation, fearfully hazards [weakens] his own. He is gone back to his native selfishness, if he does not exhibit that ‘love and kindness of God that has appeared unto men…. How poor is the mitre (head dressing) or the crown; how debasing the wisdom of the philosopher, the scholar, or the statesman, compared with this wisdom!”

The most important, the wisest use of one’s time and resources in the Capitol is that of winning the lost: creating by the imputation of the Holy Spirit men and women who will hunger and thirst after righteousness their whole life! (Cf. Mt. 5:6). Summarily:

**IT IS THE WINNING OF SOULS THAT FOSTERS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN A NATION**

How misguided and uninformed is the thinking of those who do not prioritize evangelism and discipleship: God’s means of creating righteous individuals! Rarely is that formula postulated as the solution to America’s downward trajectory; that is often defined through a political lens only. Have we not come to grips with the profundity of these passages? Do we just not believe them? Perhaps this is attributable to the famine of biblical literacy in the Capitol and the nation? If indeed it is **righteousness that exalts a nation**, is not the priority of evangelism the key to a great country more so than any other thing you might spend your time trying to accomplish? What could be a more important use of your time than soul winning?

Stemming from the conversion of the soul and regeneration in Christ, Solomon states that the five following characteristics of righteous leadership can take root and have long lasting effects; when you unpack the Book of Proverbs relative to this subject, Solomon is saying that it is these definitive aspects of **righteousness that serve to exalt a nation**:

**III. FIVE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF RIGHTEOUS LEADERSHIP**

How do you specifically define what **righteousness** looks like — what are characteristic manifestations of its presence in a Statesman? What follows are all the passages from Proverbs that have to do with **righteousness** and define what **righteous** leadership should look like. In order to **exalt a nation** a leader must be the following.

**A. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST KNOW YOUR CALLING**

In Proverbs 16:12 Solomon provides insights to his son, Rehoboam, the next leader of Israel, as to what it is that will establish, or secure his reign, his position of leadership:

*It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness.*

In the heart of a Public Servant there must a regard for others whom you serve as being more important than yourself (cf. Phil. 2:3 ff.). God requires that leaders whom He appoints to govern a country, His ordained Institution of the State (cf. Rom. 13:1) be a blessing to the people it serves — benefactors to the world in which they live. Ecclesiastes 8:9 specifically speaks to the selflessness a leader must possess in his job: **A man has exercised authority over another to his own hurt.** This is a powerful way of
If a leader is secure and settled in the fact that it is God who called him – Psalm 75:4-7 insightfully and profoundly states that in His sovereignty He puts down one and exalts another, then and only then is there no temptation to engineer your destiny; then and only then is there no temptation, then down one and exalts another statements that in His sovereignty it is God who called him – Psalm 75:4-7. If a leader is secure and settled in the fact that it is God who called him – Psalm 75:4-7 insightfully and profoundly states that in His sovereignty He puts down one and exalts another, then and only then is there no temptation to engineer your destiny; then and only then is there no temptation, then down one and exalts another statements that in His sovereignty it is God who called him – Psalm 75:4-7.

The relationship between righteousness and being established parallels the previously-seen relationship between righteousness and exaltation: righteous character and behavior lead to being established and being exalted both individually and in a national sense. In summary, righteous behavior stems from one’s calling in Christ, knowing He appointed you to office, whereas behaving wickedly will stem from thinking one is self-appointed and therefore must be self-preserving.

B. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST BE JUST

A major responsibility of civil government is the punishment of evildoers (1Peter 2:13-14). Within that realm of responsibility is the dispatch of just treatment through due process. A major responsibility of every elected official then, is to make sure the City, County, State or Nation has an excellent judicial system, especially God-fearing righteous judges. States Proverbs 20:8 in this regard: A king who sits on the throne of justice disperses all evil with his eyes.

From the time of Moses, the leaders of Israel were judges, which also meant they were chief executives (and often prophets). Then, when kings replaced the judges, Israel’s Kings would decree justice from their throne. They were to
rule in fear of God. So it should be today in our lawmaking, enforcement and adjudication. States Proverbs 24:23-25 in this regard:

These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good. He who says to the wicked, “You are righteous,” Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him; But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.

So great should be the judicial righteousness of the aforementioned that they rule with total social and economic impartiality. States Proverbs 31:8-9:

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.

It is only through righteous lawmakers, enforcers and courts that a State can have any semblance of justice. Judging righteously stems from righteous leaders for sure. But how are those righteous leaders created, raised and groomed?

HOW DOES THE STATE GAIN NOBLE LEADERS?

In God’s design, they are to be manufactured (at the risk of sounding impersonal, I like the connotations of that word) by the Institution of the Church: God-fearing individuals are created, raised and groomed by the discipleship priorities of believers in a composite nation wherein exist the co-abiding Institutions of Church and State. Wise is the State that upholds religious freedom so as to provide the Church ease in manufacturing what it most desperately requires: the next generation of righteous State leaders: leaders who uphold justice. In summary, the second of the five characteristics of righteousness is justice. Are you just? Such exalts a nation.

C. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST BE DISCERNING

If righteousness exalts a nation, then it follows that good discernment by a Public Servant — to associate with people of integrity — is a sure path to national prosperity. To do otherwise is to be unduly, continually tempted by evil. “Bad company corrupts good morals” candidly states Paul in 1Corinthians 15:33. Like begets like.

TOO OFTEN RIGHTEOUS ELECTED OFFICIALS ASSOCIATE WITH OR HIRE THE WRONG KIND OF PEOPLE WHO DO NOT REPRESENT THEIR VALUES

Don’t let that be the case with you. Your staff must represent your values in order to be effective in the long run. In Proverbs 25:5, Solomon addresses his son in regards to this issue:

Take away the wicked before the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness.

One specific form of wickedness before the King is highlighted several chapters later by Solomon: personal bribery. Bribery can undermine the best of legal constructs. Samuel’s sons took bribes, and it ruined Israel. States Solomon in this regard in Proverbs 29:4:

The king gives stability to the land by
justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it.

The wise Statesman associates with and hires people who represent his or her godly character. On the other hand, embracing wicked people will ruin your office; you are playing with fire! Far from establishing you, they will harm you, misrepresent you and may even corrupt you! In summary, the third of the five characteristics of righteousness is one’s ability to be discerning. Are you discerning? Such exalts a nation.

D. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST HAVE CONVICTIONS

Whereas convictions are more than having knowledge of scriptural truths, they are nothing less. It takes courage to implement biblical knowledge; but it is only upon implementation that knowledge can become a conviction. Proverbs 25:26 says:

Like a trampled spring and a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.

TO LACK CONVINCING AS A BELIEVER IS OFTEN AN INDICATION OF BIBLICAL ILLITERACY IF NOT COURAGE

For a Christian elected official to fall down from his principles — to compromise biblical absolutes — in his policies or interactions with others grievously tarnishes his or her testimony, and I might add, the corporate testimony of the body of Christ. In summary, the fourth of the five characteristics of righteousness is conviction. Are you a man or woman of conviction? Such exalts a nation.

E. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST BE PRAYERFUL

The last of the five characteristics of righteousness found in Proverbs is that of being prayerful. Note Proverbs 15:8-9 in this regard:

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD; But He loves one who pursues righteousness.

In these two back-to-back Proverbs of parallelism, prayer is equated with righteousness (the second stanzas of both passages). What every country most needs are men and women beseeching God’s guidance in their personal and State affairs. Furthermore, and very important to understand about this:

GOD ONLY HEARS THE PRAYERS OF LEADERS AND CITIZENS WHO ARE UPRIGHT AND RIGHTEOUS FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE MEANING THEY HAVE PLACED THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

Scripture is clear here. For those who are at odds with God, who passively or actively reject the Son of God, their prayers, beyond the prayer of repentance, go unheard. States Proverbs 15:29 in this regard:

The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

In summary, the fifth of the five characteristics of righteousness is prayerfulness. Are you prayerful? Such exalts a nation.

In invoking Proverbs 29:2 to instruct a grand Jury, William Paterson said:

“When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.”

— William Paterson, Attorney General of New Jersey; signer of the U.S. Constitution; U.S. Senator; Governor of New Jersey; U.S. Supreme Court Justice.

United States Oracle (Portsmouth, NH), May 24, 1800.

William Paterson
IV. CONCLUSION

All would agree that characteristics of righteousness are necessary to the dispatch of good civil government, but how you produce such individuals to lead in the State is more difficult than the simple analysis of the need. The only way to produce these virtues in leaders is through the evangelism and discipleship efforts of believers in the lives of other individuals. As the discipleship priorities responsibilities, and manifestations of the Church go, so goes the State. Put another way, the State reflects the collective righteousness of its people, much more than it is the cause of it. Put still another way, the heralders of God’s truth are critically important to the success of the Public Servant and the future of the country; the expositor/instructor of God’s precepts is the seminal incubator of a country’s present and future culture. In Hosea 4:6, God said to his Bible teachers of the time:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

This OT passage serves to reveal the God-intended relationship between the Church and the State today. For the Church to fail to teach God’s precepts to the leaders of the State is a sore subject in the eyes of God. It is incumbent on the Church to teach God’s precepts and manufacture righteous leaders in and for the State. The State itself is dependent on the Church to do this for her.

The insight and emphasis of Proverbs regarding the health of a State clearly reveals the need for the continual development of righteous leadership. Definitively, a Solomonic spectral analysis of righteousness reveals at least five beautiful colors: Calling, Justice, Discernment, Conviction and Prayerfulness. To what degree does each of these wonderful virtues shine forth in and from your life? Does your life reveal these characteristics? To the degree it does, you are adding to the exaltation of our nation.