

“Delegation of Authority”

Scripture reveals the wisdom of the delegation of authority for political power. One reason is because of the heavy responsibility of leading people. The apostles of Jesus delegated the responsibility to serve the widows to faithful deacons so that they could dedicate their work to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:3).

Another reason is because of the depravity of the human heart. Good intentions do not negate the truth that no human being is perfect. Governments reflect the depravity of human nature. No human being becomes perfect upon entering political office. As Lord Acton famously said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” In the *Federalist Paper 51*, James Madison wrote, “*But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.*” The power of the state also needs checks and balances, which comes through the delegation of authority.

One biblical story demonstrates the wisdom of the delegation of authority. In the ancient near east, the job of judging disputes goes along with a leadership position. This is demonstrated in the position of Pharaoh. He was the one-man ruler and judge. Because of his depraved heart, Pharaoh himself became the rule of law.

When God’s people crossed the Red Sea, Moses took the example of Pharaoh and leadership. Moses is doing it all. But in Exodus 18, the burden of resolving the numerous disputes was too much for Moses. It would inevitably make people frustrated, adding annoyance now to the dispute. So, the Lord established a system of local accountability and governance over the people of Israel.

Moses’s father-in-law Jethro determined that Moses could not keep this pace indefinitely. He suggested a judicial hierarchy to address the cases. Virtuous judges selected at lower levels would be available at any time to handle lesser cases. Moses could then decide the greater cases as well as lead in other ways. It would be more likely for Moses to persevere. Also, it would be more likely that people will come to the place in peace because their results have a greater chance of being addressed quickly.

Because of the depravity of human nature, a system of checks and balances, of the delegation of authority, and of the decentralization of power minimizes evil doing. At the same time, it requires the church to disciple the nations in godliness and virtue, for any system of government reflects the morality of the people governed.

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