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CHOOSING A LEADER

I was recently reading an observation made by Michael Blumenthal, chairman of Unisys, regarding mistakes he had made in hiring people:

In choosing people for top positions, you have to try to make sure they have a clear sense of what is right and wrong, a willingness to be truthful, the courage to say what they think and to do what they think is right, even if the politics militate against that. This is the quality that should really be at the top. I was too often impressed by the intelligence and substantive knowledge of an individual and did not always pay enough attention to the question of how honest, courageous and good a person the individual really was.

Many people have made the same mistake that Mr. Blumenthal made in choosing a leader. Most of the time intelligence and knowledge do not even carry the day because more superficial qualities such as height, physical attractiveness, a winning smile and saying what the person in charge likes to hear wins out. Part of the reason we have such a crisis in government today is that we really don't know the value of honesty and courage as necessary characteristics of our leaders. This is not a new problem. The same situation existed when Israel wanted to have a king and be like all the other nations.

For hundreds of years the nation of Israel was a loose federation of 12 tribes that had a series of judges that were usually strong military leaders. Some times the judges also served in the role of priest. Samuel was one such leader. He was a very faithful priest; however, as he became older, his two sons started taking a more active role as judges. They were not honest and were open to bribes from anyone who would pay them. The people used this as an excuse to approach Samuel and demand that they be given a king to rule over them and lead them in battle. They gave two reasons for their request: 1. They were tired of the actions of Samuel's sons and 2. They wanted to be like everyone else. The first reason was a valid one. The second reason was not. They had recognized a problem and wanted to correct it; however, they wanted to use the solution of the world system to solve the problem. We constantly make that same mistake in the operation of our church. We attempt to run our church as one might run General Motors. This may be the only means we know to accomplish a job; however, we are not to rely on our own strength but on God's strength.

Samuel was hurt by their request since he interpreted their request to be a rejection of his ministry, however, he did not lash out at the elder but took his situation to God. God assured Samuel that the people were not rejecting him, but they were rejecting God as being King over them. God's advice to Samuel was to give them what they asked for. Once they had an earthly king, then they would be sorry that they rejected God. God had warned them of all that the king would require of them. He would take 10 percent of their crops and animals, conscript their sons into his army, take their daughters to be servants. [Our situation is even worse, the federal government does not stop at 10 percent of our income, our property is taxed, what we spend is taxed, 20 percent of all the people work for the government, and the list goes on.]

God gave Samuel instruction as to whom to choose for the first king of Israel. God picked out a person that would be like what the people would pick. He chose a handsome person that was head and shoulders above all his countrymen. He chose someone that represented superior human strength (shoulders) and intelligence (head). Samuel anointed Saul as king over Israel and God then gave Saul special spiritual preparation to do the job. Saul had a spiritual encounter and prophesied as evidence of the fact that the Spirit of God had come upon him. Then at the appointed time Samuel

called all the people together to reveal the king to them.

I SAMUEL 10:17-19 Samuel's message to the people reminded them of what God had done for them in the past and to make it very clear to them what they were doing: They were not just asking for a king, but they were rejecting God. This also show the grace of God in that they had a chance at this point to change their minds and abandon the idea of having a king.

I SAMUEL 10:20-24 Apparently, Samuel cast lots to demonstrate to the people that the choice of who was going to be king was really God's choice. The first choice was among the tribes and Benjamin was picked. Then lots were chosen among the family units and so on until the lot had been cast upon Saul. One would have thought that Saul, knowing that he had been chosen king, would have been right there on the front row to accept the honor that was about to be bestowed upon him. However, Saul was no where to be found. He was hiding among the baggage. At this point in his life, Saul was small in his own eyes and did not think that he deserved to be king.

We all know that Saul did not remain small in his own estimation but let the importance of the office go to his head. The fact that he had been chosen by God and had been anointed by the priest of God and had the power of the Spirit come upon him did not guarantee that he would do what was right and honest and courageous.

God was right in His assessment of what the people would accept for all the people saw that Saul towered over other men and he was instantly accepted.

I SAMUEL 10:25 The issue that needed to be addressed when Samuel instructed the people and Saul about the kingship related to how they could maintain their covenant with God now that they had an earthly king. Even though the people of Israel wanted to be like the other nations, God made it clear through Samuel that the monarchy in Israel was to be on a different footing from that of the surrounding nations. The king of Israel was to be subject to the laws of God and the word of the prophet. The king was to be an instrument of God's rule over the people. All people in leadership roles today would do a better job if they would acknowledge this fact--that the leader is simply an instrument for the use of God who must be our ultimate Leader.