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The British Government is currently passing through “choppy waters” largely brought about by the conduct of the Prime Minister himself and of others around him over the past year or so.

In 1995, in the first report of the Public Standards Committee, Lord Nolan submitted “The Seven Principles of Public Life” which have since become applicable to all who serve in public office in the United Kingdom. Here they are: selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; leadership – “holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example”. These Seven Principles are worthy and desirable, although they entirely ignore the existence of both Almighty God and human sinfulness! As such they boil down to a well-meaning, secular list of “good conduct” which will be rarely achieved in real life.

As ever, we find that the Lord God has already provided in His Word His own “principles” for how any life should be lived, along with numerous examples of conduct both good and bad. These divine principles are of course summarised in the Ten Commandments and the “two great commandments” (Exodus 20.1-17 / Matthew 22.36-40), and still remain valid for all of humanity. Sadly of course, because of sin, God’s Word has long been set aside in public life and in many private lives, and the fruits of that foolish setting-aside are all too clear around us today.

A few sample references within the Book of Proverbs are worth looking up on these matters: - Concerning the Lord’s oversight: 15.3 / 20.27 /// Concerning what the Lord hates: 6.16-17,19 / 12.22 /// Concerning restraint of speech: 10.19 / 21.23 /// Concerning the avoidance of falsehood: 4.24 / 19.5 /// Concerning kingship and leadership: 16.12 / 20.28 / 29.12,14 /// Concerning the blessings of obedience: 16.3,6-7 / 18.10 / 19.23 / 22.12. We see how all these references in their own way are little expressions of “the two great commandments”.

Leadership remains crucial in setting the tone and direction for all those placed under that leadership, and hence in turn the beliefs, priorities and behaviour of each individual leader is also crucial. Adam, as the first “leader” of the human race, knew his unique God-given status, (“made in the image of God”), his privileges (dominion over the earth) and his responsibilities (stewardship and obedience) – (Genesis 1.26-30; 2.8-9). With Eve at his side as “help meet” and wife (Genesis 2.18,21-25), the scene was set fair, a scene of abundant blessing, stewardship, and

fellowship with the Lord God; and this all depended on this first couple respecting their accountability to the Lord their Creator (Genesis 2.16-17). It did not take long for them to go seriously wrong, with dire consequences for all who have come after, the promise of “the seed of the woman” (Genesis 3.15) being a tiny light in the gloom which they had wrought.

By contrast to Adam comes Moses, the reluctant leader (Exodus Chapters 3 & 4)! Time after time Moses stood in the breach (eg., Exodus 32.7-14), pleading with the Lord to hold back His righteous judgment from His sinful, murmuring covenant people in their longing for “the fleshpots of Egypt” (eg., Exodus 16.2-3). Lord Nolan should be proud of Moses! - and acknowledge that the key to his praiseworthy leadership was Moses’ obedience to the Lord.

We are given further examples of good and bad leadership in the books of Judges, I and II Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. Be these judges or kings, the divinely-set principle remains constant: obedience to the Lord God brings His blessing to leaders and people alike, and disobedience to Him brings trouble and judgments. During the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah God constantly sent His various prophets to speak “truth to power”, words which were often very unwelcome. Notable examples are Elijah standing up to Ahab and Jezebel (eg., I Kings 17.1; 18.17-20,36 – Ch.19.3), and Jeremiah suffering at the hands of false prophets and corrupt kings (egs., II Chronicles 36.11-12 / Jeremiah Chapters 20-23).

Finally for this time we come to the Ultimate Leader, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Fulfilment of that longstanding Genesis 3.15 promise, whose sinless, flawless leadership - as Messiah and Lord, yet also as Suffering Servant and the Lamb of God - was carried out in complete obedience to His heavenly Father (egs., Isaiah 61.1-3 / John 5.19,30; 8.28; 14.10-11 / II Corinthians 5.21 / Hebrews 4.14-15).

Biblically we see that the conduct we would all appreciate in ourselves and in others, including in our leaders, is brought about by God’s Holy Spirit within us, who fosters our faithful obedience to God the Father and to God the Son, and who “guides us into all truth” (John 14.16-17,26; 16.13-15).

Any of us today, in leadership or not, still does well to “look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith” (Hebrews 12.2a, KJV), for choppy

waters are always best coped with - when Jesus is in the boat (Mark 4.35-41; 6.45-51).

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