



"Out of the crooked tree of humanity no straight thing can ever be made."

—Immanuel Kant

13-Jul-07

The Dark Side of Government

The federal government just did the state of North Carolina a big favor. Over the past couple of years, it investigated, indicted, tried, and convicted the former Speaker of the State House of Representatives, Jim Black, a Democrat from the Charlotte area, on federal corruption charges. He has been sentenced to serve 63 months in federal prison and to pay a \$50,000 fine. It seems that Mr. Black, an optometrist by trade, had taken several under-the-restaurant-table payments totaling \$29,000 from chiropractors to move favorable legislation through the House. Many observers of North Carolina state politics believe that he was caught for only one among many instances of political skullduggery.

Black—oh, the irony of that name!—had been top dog in the House for four terms, giving him a tight hold on legislation for many years. Being a dyed-in-the-wool liberal Democrat, he relentlessly moved North Carolina law toward the Left in just about every area from education to environment. He was also responsible for ramroding the state "education" lottery through the political process—and not without considerable controversy, as at least one pro-lottery lobbyist linked to Black has already been convicted of criminal monkey-business during that fight—after North Carolina had steadily

resisted it on principle for many years. He was also implicated in shenanigans involving video poker.

He was a slick politician. A few terms ago, Republicans gained a two-vote majority in the North Carolina House, and for all intents and purposes, it appeared as if the tenure of Black as Speaker was over. But after a few weeks of public wrangling and backroom deals involving \$50,000, a legislative job, and a representative switching parties, Black was suddenly back in the saddle, having arranged an unprecedented "co-speakership" with the leading Republican, and in the House it was business as usual. As new information comes out, it seems that this was generally how he operated when something he wanted done needed doing.

It is amazing to consider how he kept getting re-elected, when the general area of his district in southern Mecklenburg County has been fairly conservative in outlook. A look at the map of North Carolina House districts shows that his district 100 looks somewhat gerrymandered, especially in contrast to the districts around it. Whether it is gerrymandered or not to benefit him, his district returned him to Raleigh term after term because he brought home the bacon, as it were. Black was much-loved in the Charlotte area, particularly by the city's powers that be, because he routed to Charlotte-Mecklenburg state money and projects that would have likely gone to eastern North Carolina, as is traditional here. Somehow, he was a lock for re-election every time a vote came around.

All very interesting, right? As a quick chronicle of a corrupt political career, perhaps it is. However, the broader question that comes to mind is, "How many more Jim Blacks exist in the other forty-nine states and in the federal government?" Put another way, "Does Jim Black represent the way government works across the whole country?" Political corruption investigations and trials make the news often enough across the nation to persuade a person that crooked politicians outnumber honest ones. Or, perhaps we should not look at numbers but at the balance of power, and if that is the criterion, we can probably conclude that corrupt leaders hold more sway in this country than respectable ones. Call me cynical.

It starts at the top. With few exceptions, every U.S. President since at least John F. Kennedy has been embroiled in scandal and controversy. Two have

been impeached. Several have had close aides or acquaintances serve time in jail. Even Ronald Reagan, hero of the conservative Right, was tainted by the Iran-Contra Affair. The present Chief Executive and his Vice President have had to face almost constant allegations of abuse of power in matters from detaining enemy combatants to firing federal prosecutors. So far, nothing criminal has been proven, but very few Americans think that their hands are completely clean. Many people believe, in fact, that no one can ascend that high in American politics without dirtying his or her hands.

Congress gets no better marks. Whether the charge is sexual impropriety, drunk driving, or bribery, Senators and Representatives are called on the carpet with stunning regularity. They openly trade pork projects costing millions or billions of dollars for votes on important legislation. It all begins with lying to the American people during their campaigns, and when they get to Congress, they follow the money. State and local politics are no different, as we have seen.

Government is a game of power and money, and frankly, it always has been. The corruption in politics that we see splashed on our television screens today is little different from what screamed in the headlines of yesteryear's newspapers. Corruption is a product of unbridled human nature, and it has marred every form of government—and possibly every government—in human history. Even the early New Testament church had its problems with fraud and bribery (see Acts 5 and 8)!

Whether corruption in government is increasing or not is hard to say. It certainly seems that it is, but such a perception might simply be a result of greater media coverage. Yet, it is a fact of human existence that we have to expect. It is the rule rather than the exception because the nature of humanity begins as a blank slate, but it is more often than not overwritten with the graffiti of the Three Big Pulls: the flesh, [the world](#), and the Devil ([Romans 8:7](#); [I John 2:15-17](#); [Revelation 12:9](#)). A politician—and really, any person—trying to resist them alone fights a losing battle.

As [Christians](#), what can we do? Within this system, very little or nothing. We have been called out of this world and made citizens of a perfect government ([I Peter 2:9](#); [Philippians 3:20](#)). Our job now is, as the apostle Paul puts it, "to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (

[Ephesians 4:1](#)). In other words, we have to scrub our slate clean of any corruption that still clings to it, and to conduct ourselves as spotless examples of Christian virtue. In the world to come, we are promised to be involved in the government of [God](#) ([Revelation 5:10](#); [20:4](#)). Then, glorified Christians will show the world how government can be done on the level.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Our Awesome Destiny](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Without our special calling and the gift of God's Holy Spirit, we would be about as clueless as to the purpose of our life as Solomon was throughout Ecclesiastes. Understanding is totally different from knowledge. Some people with ample knowledge are incredibly stupid when discerning the plan of God. Without God's Spirit the Bible makes no sense whatsoever. The mystery of God's plan, that special secret code, can only be discerned through special revelation powered by God's Holy Spirit. God did the choosing (often choosing the weak and base of the world); we did not. God is totally running the show; our lives must be in complete submission to His will, totally devoted to preparing for the next stage of God's purpose for our lives. The Millennium will be but a blip in the whole scheme of time propelling us as immortal beings and the very offspring of the immortal God into the vast infinitude and plenitude of the universe—all eventually under the subjection of God's family. Mankind is designed to be a builder, not a destroyer like Satan. The family will be the basic building block of the new government. Scriptural understanding will only become activated if we believe it, are committed to it, and are led by God's Holy Spirit following the pattern of our Elder Brother Jesus Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Fast-Forwarding the Tape](#)

by David F. Maas

Many of us like sneak previews of movies or books. Some of us even fast-forward or read ahead to catch a glimpse of the ending of a story. David Maas compares this natural curiosity to God's practice of showing us in His Word how life's experiences can turn out.

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