

The Same Plumb Line

David C. Grabbe

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We are going to take a trip down memory lane. For those who are old enough, think back to the 1990s and the scandals of that decade. I was in high school when the news broke that the President of the United States had an affair with an intern, and many other allegations of misconduct followed. It was a watershed event, and it marked an acceleration in the moral decline of the nation. The actions of the President at the time brought all manner of shameful things into the public discourse, and the standard of what was acceptable was crudely redefined. That President was sexually immoral, had no problem lying, and used his position to further his own ends. His profession of faith was a sham. But he and his defenders claimed that what he did in his personal life had no bearing on how he performed his duties, as though character could be partitioned. That President was impeached for “high crimes and misdemeanors,” and specifically, for obstruction of justice and lying under oath.

Conservative observers were alarmed by the blatant immorality in the top office. They could see that it foretold bad times. The Bible shows that when there is a righteous leader, those under him generally prosper. But when there is a corrupt leader, those under him have a tough time. God measures leaders by their character and morality, and when that plumb line was held up to that President, those with discernment could see the nation was headed for perilous times, and they were proved right. Character matters greatly, and the morality or immorality of the leadership is a reliable indicator for how the nation will fare. Proverbs 14:34 says “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

One commentator at the time noted that “[That President] made us comfortable with our own sins.” Hopefully that was not true for us, but let’s turn that into a question: Have we become comfortable with the sins of the current President?

Let’s acknowledge an ugly truth. Like the notorious President in the ‘90s, the current President is also sexually immoral, and has no problem lying, and has used his position to further his own ends. His profession of faith also appears to be calculated. But are we willing to apply the same plumb line to these two leaders from different parties?

Now, for some, such questions may be fightin’ words. Undoubtedly, some of the more excitable visitors to our website will miss the overall point here, but I hope you won’t. Nevertheless, if your heart starts pounding, please take some deep breaths, and ruminate on this for a while to see if *maybe* there is a valid point in here somewhere.

I will interject here that I wrote most of this last November, before *Christianity Today* made its call for the President’s ouster. I am not casting my lot in with that magazine, and my intent today is altogether different. My focus really is not the current President, nor the other one. These men are just ready examples. I also hope that I am as apolitical as the rest of the church of God. My object here is to encourage us to evaluate our evaluations, and to judge whether we judge with unchanging weights and scales.

God has much to say about the importance of honest weights and scales. He says unjust weights and measures are an abomination. This means that if we measure one thing one way, we must be careful

not to put our thumb on the scale to tip it when we measure something we are partial to. We must apply the plumb line honestly. This is a test of our objectivity, requiring disinterestedness and self-reflexiveness, as Dr. Maas has spoken on.

Going back to the '90s, think about how shocking the President's escapades were then, and how mainstream the same character defects are now. It's as though the assaults on morality no longer register with us. This demonstrates how the conscience will adjust, such that what was once appalling in a leader is now considered normal, maybe even desirable. We have witnessed the death of moral outrage, both in the nation and even in the church.

We in the church profess that we are apolitical, and we should be. We have been translated into Christ's Kingdom, and now we are ambassadors of a righteous Kingdom that is not of this world. We have a heavenly citizenship. And these circumstances that are put before us give us an opportunity to evaluate using the principles in God's Word.

As God has been pushed out of the public square, He has been replaced in many ways with pragmatism. It is worldly wisdom, devoid of godly principles except where they happen to coincide with an agenda. Those in politics and foreign relations excel at pragmatism, and when they speak of an ally who is unscrupulous, they say things like, "He may be a [so-and-so], but he's *OUR* [so-and-so]." They know the man is a scoundrel, but they overlook it because of the perceived benefits. They are willing to be bribed. The bribe can take many forms, but it still results in turning a blind eye. Their pragmatism overrides their principles, causing them to defend what they might otherwise condemn if it did not involve an ally.

God forbade Israel from making alliances with other nations, in part because He would protect them, and in part because He did not want Israel defending peoples who were ungodly. In the same way, we should evaluate whether we have made an alliance in our hearts with the carnal of the world, an alliance that causes us to overlook God's standards.

In addition, the wickedness of one leader or party does not mean another leader or party is godly by default. We've all seen the vileness of the media and political foes of the President. Richard explained a couple of months ago that the opposition has pursued the President's downfall without regard to federal law [*"Christianity Today* and Trump"]. Their conduct has been both shameful and shameless. Yet a man's enemies are not an ironclad indicator of a man's morality, even as ancient Israel's abominable enemies were not evidence of Israel's righteousness.

Our Great King's standard is not based on whether one leader is less bad than another leader, party, or media group. It is not based on whether the leader says the right things, has a backbone, or even whether he does some good things. Personally, I am very pleased with some of the increased protections for the unborn that have been instituted—I think that is tremendous. Yet in the hands of a schemer, good things can also be bribes to distort evaluation, so we need a better guide.

The Sermon on the Mount contains a section that is energetically ignored by Protestantism, in which Jesus declares to many upon His return, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:23)—even though they were doing things in His name. Christ does not operate by an exchange system, whereby we can dispose of a barrel-full of lies by doing works in His name. We are still accountable for the iniquity. And Romans 1 and Amos 1 show that even the unconverted are accountable for basic lawlessness.

If a President suffers a loss by wicked men and women, that is not a defeat for us, because we didn't elect him. In the history of Israel, God knew the tendencies toward good and evil in the kings He raised up. He even raised up proud Gentiles to do His will. If we believe in God's sovereignty, then we must believe that God has raised up all the Presidents, good and bad. Yet an appointment to office cannot be taken as God's approval of the man's character, only that God can use him. God uses men for good and for calamity, yet each is still measured against God's standard.

Jesus said His Kingdom—and thus our Kingdom—is not of this world. This forces us to choose with whom we align ourselves and who we represent, and this can apply to each comment and picture that we post. Sometimes we forget that factions and party spirit are works of the flesh. Factions and party spirit are found in the word translated “heresies” (Galatians 5:20) and the word can include the opinions and dissension arising from choosing a party or elected official. Think of that regarding social media. Paul says it can keep us from inheriting the Kingdom of God.

God tells us not to put our trust or confidence in princes (Psalm 118:9; 146:3), as we just heard from Martin. Our hope and trust must be in something supremely greater. We have been translated into Christ's Kingdom, and that rare privilege should clarify how we evaluate the circumstances in the lands in which we reside, as well as who we champion. We still honor the human king, but as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, our responsibility is to present the position of His Kingdom and His standard of righteousness.