

The Ambassador's Privilege: A City Manager's Holy Assignment

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City managers undoubtedly have authority. Sometimes, that authority is given to them by the legal constructs of man derived from the **authority of the law** found within city or county charters and related codes. But attempting to recognize, decipher, and apply the laws of man in a profession that is often now afflicted by bipartisan disputes bordering on outright lawlessness (at least at the federal level) can be described perfectly by the phrase **a fool's errand**. By that I mean this, thinking that the charter and code matter as to how one should carry out their work while attempting to lead based on what the law says is the fool's errand. Why? Because the law was replaced by confusion. It's akin to an evil version of a biblical typology. Instead of grace replacing the law, the law is replaced by confusion and that comes directly from you know who – the god of Confusion.

Admittedly, I was once that fool, but not at first. During my most successful city manager assignment that occurred during the years 2004 – 2007, there was a pretty solid consensus among the elected officials related to the differing roles of policy making versus that of policy implementation and city operations. Policy implementation and operations were for the most part delegated to the appointed city manager. There was **relative clarity** regarding where the division of roles and responsibilities occurred and who needed to do what.

The manager even determined the best teammates to assist with the execution of the business plan, or conversely, who would be invited to pursue another career opportunity since they were an obstacle to important agreed upon priorities and objectives. Before the era of relative clarity that my career evolved in, there was actually very little relativism at all regarding roles, only clarity. What was clear was that the manager had valuable knowledge, technical abilities, understanding, and wisdom regarding the tools and techniques of governance that most elected officials did not.

But the profession changed rapidly over the last 40 years. It devolved from perfectly clear, to relatively clear, to relatively unclear, to completely confused. Do you see the connection to another pattern – the emergent pattern of relative truths? Today, the Charter and codes are often immaterial as to how a city governance system functions. I'd argue that the strong manager-council form of government is on life support. Today, an instant reaction, no matter how far-fetched or ineffective, is much more important than actual results.

Elected officials' political considerations rule the day and the electorate pays little attention to the policies being made and no attention to what exactly the laws and codes prescribe as to the form of government and the positional roles and authorities. The mayor is always in charge, right? This means the electorate is no longer a check and balance mechanism due to political disinterest and leadership confusion. Many would-be contributors to good government willfully and purposefully disconnect from the toxicity. A charter may provide for a strong city manager form of government and yet the city may be governed as if it is a strong mayor form, or even a commission form of government. It is not uncommon for the charter to be entirely disregarded or even completely

negated via a substitute truth by the most powerful political alliance and/or the loudest dissenters who must be quieted. We are now frightened by hearty and respectful discourse in a public setting in which sound bites can be harvested and abused.

What are we to do as local government professionals? What does your charter and codes say and how is your government operating? Honestly, it matters little because a Christ follower always knows what to do. Just be an ambassador for the kingdom and be led by God's Word. Regardless of whether you are in an environment in which you are expected to be the biblical character equivalent of Cornelius or Ashpenaz.

Cornelius was a centurion, a commander in the Italian Regiment of the Roman military. (I imagine kind of like a squad leader in SEAL Team 6 but that is complete conjecture on my part.) He lived in Caesarea. His story is found in Acts 10, and despite being a Roman, Cornelius was a worshiper of God, a Jewish proselyte known and respected by the Jewish community (Acts 10:22). Cornelius was a devout man who regularly prayed and gave to charityⁱ. He sounds like someone I certainly would not object to leading my city or even being in a foxhole with. Of course we could interpret his conversion as a act of fitting in with the culture he was assigned to guard – only God knows.

Then there's Ashpenaz. He was the Chief of the eunuchs of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. The king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles to serve in his palaceⁱⁱ. Young men were specifically taken in order to serve the king in his palace, but they had to be prepared first. They were often castrated to ensure a king's advisers did not have children or romantic interests that might tempt them towards betrayal. The key prerequisite which your life depended on while serving in the king's governing system was to show unwavering loyalty, no matter how unrighteous or how it was achieved, inclusive of the use of physical mutilation. I have served in such a system, but without the physical mutilation.

Biblically, Ashpenaz was a eunuch himself and was in charge of the court of the eunuchs. He had a direct line of communication with the king. Needless to say, King Nebuchadnezzar did not subscribe to the delegation of authority to a strong and entrusted commander when it came to inner circle politics. Unfortunately, city managers often don't get to choose our elected officials, only the possible jurisdictions God ultimately appoints us to lead in. And we must choose wisely what assignments we accept.

The centurion Cornelius did not work for King Nebuchadnezzar, nor did Esther work for the King of Persia or his queen, Queen Vashti. They honored, glorified, and served God, and so should we. We were appointed by the God of the universe to a position of authority in the cities in which we lead. This is clear from Romans 13. If I had a choice as to who my boss was I'd certainly choose to work with or for someone like Cornelius or Esther - thank you very much. Not King Nebuchadnezzar nor King Ahasuerus, not Ashpenaz, not Queen Vashti, but someone who places service to God first. In that regard, be Cornelius, or Esther.

During an era some twenty plus years ago, when citizen involvement offered one of the checks and balances against unrestrained political power, it was not uncommon for a city manager to yield to a much greater authority – the authority that emanates from the Spirit of Truth. It is the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit provided by our faith in Jesus Christ that legitimizes our authority and validates our

holy appointment. And what is required of us? Certainly, to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lordⁱⁱⁱ. But it is even greater than that.

The very important assignment of providing *good government* in today's political environment is often measured by both compliance with the world and in being complicit to every policy whim and every policy board member you serve. Illogically, this rule applies even when doing what all the elected officials tell you will result in working at cross purposes, cause contention, dissensions, confusion and even division. Yes, we must listen, be good and virtuous, but we also know we are not driven by the world's standards but God's. We are to honor Caesar with our service but when is it not okay to do so? When our jobs and livelihoods are at stake? Does doing what you are told to by everyone merely help you keep your job while causing a stumble in our walk with the Lord? The noise of selfless service and voice of personal need must be quieted by the duties of our ambassadorship, to serve God.

Scripture gives us our orders. We are commanded to oversee a ***ministry of reconciliation*** in everything we do including serving as governmental leaders. How? We must first be reconciled to God through Christ's blood and then we can be salt, light, and love in this fallen world. Reconciliation helps restrain chaos and corruption while honoring and serving God first. Serving those in authority to the best of our ability using Christ's means and methods are never in direct conflict with what God teaches us. Yes, we are appointed for such a time as this. We should emulate Christ, and Cornelius, and Esther. We do this when we consider our ***Ambassador's Privilege***.

A city manager who believes in the Lord is an ambassador who understands the ministry of reconciliation. We must be reconciled to God before we can provide godly service to our elected boards, staff, and citizenry, no matter what level of confusion might be present in the community. The god of Confusion has nothing to do with our service. Christ has everything to do with our service.

If we are properly curating the ministry of reconciliation, if we understand who placed us in our positions, and if we subscribe to the Golden Rule, how we treat everyone will be the same no matter who we are dealing with. We shall be salt, light, and love and let the chips fall where they may. Our virtues, guiding light, and spiritual advisor all come from the Word of God, the Logos. The Greek term Logos means word, reason, or ***divine ordering principle***. And what is that principle? God first. Who is our model of behavior as leaders? Christ Jesus. Just realize that the only guarantee from our ambassadorship is that we will store up treasures in heaven.

I have three observations about your role as a city manager or for any other leader in local government for that matter. They're failproof for a Christ-follower because they come from the Bible and will go a long way toward your achievement of ambassadorial excellence:

- **Godly Appointment** - Know that you were appointed by God and are an Ambassador to the Kingdom of Heaven operating on foreign soil – this world. As stated earlier, Romans 13 is a good reference for further study related to this point.
- **Holy Assignment Requires Holy Behaviors** - When you place God first you understand that God has given you a Great Commission and that is delivered by how you present yourself to this world as a *living testimony to the gospel of Christ Jesus in actions and words*. Your ambassadorship comes with a commitment to the ministry of reconciliation. A positive

attitude is a good start. Working out our sanctification, as in seeking moral excellence in all we do is even better. And there is no shortage of things that I can do much better at.

What are some holy behaviors? The chart of 32 virtues that follows was derived from the following verses: *Galatians 5:22–23; Philipians 4:8; Colossians 3:12–14; Romans 12:9–13; and 2 Peter 1:5–7.*

Some Godly Virtues (Moral Excellence) Found in Scripture
(alphabetical listing)

1. Affection (brotherly)	9. Generosity	17. Justice / Just	25. Purity
2. Compassion	10. Gentleness	18. Kindness	26. Self-control
3. Courage (implicit)	11. Godliness	19. Knowledge	27. Sincerity
4. Excellence	12. Goodness	20. Love	28. Steadfastness
5. Faith	13. Honor	21. Meekness	29. Truth / True
6. Faithfulness	14. Hope	22. Patience	30. Virtue (moral excellence)
7. Fervency	15. Humility	23. Peace	31. Worthiness / Commendability
8. Forgiveness	16. Joy	24. Prayerfulness	32. Zeal

- **Ambassadorial Privilege** – We do not necessarily obtain perks from our ambassadorship. Our ambassadorial privilege is to deliver Christ’s ministry of reconciliation. Being an Ambassador to the Kingdom is a great privilege. It is a both a holy assignment and an expectation of our ministry in service to local government that is described by God and expected of all Christ followers. The term **ambassador** that I am using is derived from the ministry of reconciliation in *2 Corinthians 5:17-21* while *reconciliation* is further discussed in *Colossians 1:19-23* and *Philemon 8-21*.

Without being reconciled to God and driven by the Holy Spirit, we cannot deliver on our holy ambassadorship. And remember that when we practice the ministry of reconciliation, there is no guarantee we will not be opposed or even destroyed. This may very well be our **privilege**, to suffer in Christ, and likewise it may very well be God’s will as He refines and strengthens us to be light in the darkness. The *imago dei*. But no matter what, the ambassador’s privilege is a great privilege indeed!

May God Bless your work and your leadership! Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Cornelius-in-the-Bible.html>

ⁱⁱ Daniel 1:3

ⁱⁱⁱ Michah 6:8