

## Introduction

The Third Alternative: Christian Self-government Introduction: The Third Alternative God is Sovereign &ldquo;What can my nation do?&rdquo;

A tall African man stood up in the audience to ask me this question.

I was in the middle of a lecture on the Lordship of Christ and World Missions. He was from Nigeria. I am from Illinois, U.S.A., where I was giving the lecture at a college Sunday school class at the University of Illinois.

We appraised each other through a vast grid of culture, language, experience and distance. Our common bond was Jesus Christ. The year was 1977 and he posed the question I will never forget.

&ldquo;What can my nation do?&rdquo; he said with a beautiful Nigerian accent. &ldquo;In Nigeria we are sixty percent Christians. Yet our society is characterized by chaos, tyranny, gross ignorance and abject poverty. What can my nation do?&rdquo;

The facts he presented astonished me. &ldquo;Sixty percent Christians!&rdquo; I thought. Even though I believed that the Gospel would have a positive effect on any culture, I really hadn&rsquo;t a clue how to solve his problem. I heard myself say something to the effect of, &ldquo;Just trust the Lord, brother.&rdquo; It sounded so hollow and meaningless to me.

It must have sounded that way to him, too, because his face suddenly became anguished as if he&rsquo;d been punched in the chest. He sat down in more pain than when he stood.

At that moment I was devastated by my own ignorance and shallowness, and my inability to give that man any hope. It seemed like I was saying, "Depart in peace. Be warned and filled," (James 2:16). That very day I began to pray in earnest, "Lord Jesus, what can his nation do? Surely You have answers. Surely Your word has answers. Surely there must be hope. But I don't see it. Lord what can his nation do?"

In answer to that prayer, the Lord began to bring across my path individuals, seminars, teachers and resources that shed light on this new heart-cry of mine.

At the same time, as an American believer in Jesus Christ, I have been distressed by the downward cultural slide of my own nation, noticeable in my own short lifetime. The question in the back of my mind has been, "Why is this happening?" and "How can it be redressed?" Many are blinded to this slide by external success and momentary material prosperity. My question now is, "Lord, what can my nation do?"

After being raised from the dead, Jesus gave His followers a last command, a great commission, before his ascension: And Jesus came up to [His disciples] and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt. 28:18-19

The 20th century saw a vast increase in going and baptizing, in international missions and planting churches.

In our own day, there is now also a renewed emphasis on discipling and teaching the nations. This means us believers taking seriously our responsibility as stewards of our societies, moving beyond the doorways of our churches to apply Biblical principles to every aspect of life. The purpose of this is so that our societies and cultures can shift towards freedom, order and prosperity from tyranny, chaos and suffering. Part of this discipleship has to do with government. If we are going to disciple the nations, we are going to have to understand the Biblical philosophy of government. The

Third Alternative: Christian Self-government is intended to be a layman's primer on the personal moral (internal) and structural (external) foundations of a free society. It is not an exhaustive treatise. It is an introduction to the basics, a beginning point, much of which was left out of our own education. There are many resources available by authors past and present for further study, but everyone must understand and implement the basics or we are doomed to tyranny.

The world is crying out for liberty. As the Soviet Communist tyranny unraveled in Eastern Europe, the result was economic collapse, civil war and bloodshed. Many had thought it would mean freedom and peace and prosperity! Why did we suppose that? From where does liberty come? Is liberty simply the absence of tyranny? Is liberty license to do what &ldquo;I want?&rdquo; Is democracy itself the answer? Can liberty be sustained? How is liberty sustained? Is God in control? How? Is there hope?

These are questions that we as Christians must be able to answer in order to communicate the reality of the kingdom of God to others effectively, keep the freedoms we have and help the nations we are serving reap the blessings that God desires for them. Social reform is part of loving our neighbor as ourselves. THE THIRD ALTERNATIVEEroded as they are, American political institutions are rooted in the Biblical philosophy of Christian Self-government where political sovereignty rests in the individual under God rather than in either the state or the church on the one hand, or the individual in and of himself on the other. Christian self-government is the third alternative. In other words the state is not God, and the individual is not God, but God is God. In order for these institutions to work as they should, the individual must understand how to govern himself under God in every area of life including the civil sphere, delegating proper authority to his public representatives. Otherwise he will delegate improper authority, actively or passively, and will end up losing his freedom.

We are bombarded daily by various issues from economics to "family values," but what are the Biblical principles that define the issues and provide guidance and solutions to the problems of society? This book is written to address the need for a basic understanding of the principles of Christian self-government and their application. It will show from the Bible how God changes nations. The application of these principles in any nation will release and protect liberty without spawning chaos.

Learning these principles will help us recognize the hand of God in our lives, our nation and our world, and help us interpret the news and current events from His perspective. Seeing the providence of God gives needed hope for the

future. Seeing the crucial significance of all our efforts in God's kingdom gives needed courage to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that [our] toil is not in vain in the Lord," (1 Cor. 15:58).

This book is also intended to show the necessity of personal reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ, which besides being God's greatest desire and the individual's only hope for eternity, is the cornerstone of a free society as well. It also points out the crucial need for true Spiritual awakening, prayerful evangelism, loving discipleship, and Biblical Christian education as the source of our social action and decisions.

It must be clarified that this book is not about politics but about government. The dictionary definition of "politics" is "factional scheming for power and status within a group, sometimes crafty or unprincipled" (Webster's New World Dictionary). This aspect is distasteful to Christians and can cause us to shy away from the subject of government altogether. Our discussion here, however, will not focus on politics but on philosophy of government.

"An exciting book on government is what we need!" Though this seems to be a contradiction in terms, it is only oxymoronic if we leave out the Governor. He is the most exciting Being in the universe and governing is His forte. Who He is, what He does, how He does it and why He does it comprise the study of government. **TENDENCIES** TODAY Concerning the civil sphere of government, in our day in America, Christians seem to fall prey to two errors in thought. The first is the thinking that civil government as an institution is at enmity with God, that civil government is the enemy of the church. This stems from the thought that civil government is man's idea, which is an evolutionary notion and is how the world naturally thinks, not believing in God's existence. As a result, civil government barely enters the consciousness of Christians. Many believers subconsciously think, "What do I have to do with civil government?" and in the extreme, "The non-Christians will take care of civil government. It's their domain." Since Christians are also usually busy with family, church, jobs or helping their neighbor, civil government often slides to the bottom of the list of priorities. Many, perhaps most, Christians don't bother to vote, much less take an active part in the political process. The consequence of this mentality is that the majority of people involved in civil government are those motivated by self-interest rather than love and the highest good. Even though we pray for Godly government, only the ungodly are actually involved. The result is that power shifts upwards to the state and freedom evaporates. Christians are surprised that abortion becomes legal, condoms are distributed in schools and evangelism becomes outlawed as "religious discrimination," and even a "hate crime." But this should be no surprise considering the fallen state of men. The ungodly are doing what the ungodly naturally do, acting from within their limited worldview.

There comes a reaction to this predicament, in which Christians fall into the second error of thought, which is control. The thinking goes, "We must control society to prevent and redress this downward slide and loss of freedom!" Notice the contradiction. This is also a move towards tyranny, the difference being in who will control, the ungodly or the Christians. This thinking gives rise to a so-called "Christian Right" which perhaps justifiably strikes fear into the hearts of many and produces violent reaction to the church.

But God's way is neither apathy nor control, but love. Love is defined as an active laboring for the highest good of all, and its ways and means are expounded by God in the Bible. The Bible shows us that civil government as an institution is not at enmity with God, but is an institution ordained and given by God, with certain specific purposes. As such, Christians are the stewards of civil government as an aspect of their stewardship of society. Our job is to keep civil government within the boundaries that God has set for it, which are protecting the individual and controlling the evil. As believers abandon this stewardship, the ungodly rise to fill the vacuum, corruption and perversion ensue, the individual is controlled and the evil is protected! This is why believers often seem to be on the wrong side of civil government, which in turn propagates the sense that civil government is not our business.

The major cause of the decline of our civil structure in America is ultimately found to be a lack of Godly Biblical character on the part of Christians. On the one hand, this lack of character manifests itself in an apathy that does not recognize Jesus' command to "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13), and does not spend time, energy and resources exercising stewardship in the area of civil government. On the other hand, this lack surfaces as a "worldly spirit" that seeks to control people rather than help them. Controlling is easier than helping.

Civil government as an institution ordained by God is a concept difficult to recognize because governments are staffed by people, and because man's nature is fallen, the above mentioned corruption and perversion of God's purpose for civil government are pervasive. **FIX THE PROBLEM** There are two other divine institutions that God has given to mankind: the Family whose purpose is nurture, and the Church whose purpose is provision - spiritual, social and physical. Similar problems are seen within these institutions as we note in civil government. Families are "staffed" with people. Many are "staffed" with the ungodly and are filled with corruption, violence and perversion of God's purpose of nurture. Yet Christians don't say that the family is at enmity with God and should therefore be abolished. It is the world who sees the corruption and concludes that the family is obsolete and should be abandoned. The proper response is, "No, the family as an institution is a divine institution with a divine purpose, and we need to fix it and bring it back to that purpose of nurture."

If civil government is a divine institution with a divine purpose, then obviously that purpose has been and is continually being perverted. As God's stewards, we Christians have been sluggards. It is our responsibility from God to fix the problems and restore civil government to its proper Biblical purpose. This is a long-term labor on various fronts, not simply gaining control in the next election and relaxing. It will take a depth of character that we as the body of Christ have been lacking. Shifting power downwards, which increases liberty, i.e. decentralizing power, means taking on the corresponding responsibility at the individual level, whether in education, welfare, economics, crime or the environment. The good news is that the church in America is growing in character and in understanding the ways of God. In chapters to come, we will discuss the Biblical philosophy of government, the basis and purpose of the institution of civil

government, the connection between liberty and individual character, and the personal application of these principles in the various spheres of life. We will see how every one of us Christians can effectively exercise our God-given stewardship of society, particularly in the area of civil government.