

Changing the World

by Anton Bosch

The sermon discusses the futility of legislating morality in a sinful world and emphasizes the need for heart transformation through Christ.

Scripture: John 17:16

Topics: "Church And State", "Christian Worldview"

Description

Anton Bosch discusses the desire for a righteous society and the misconception of achieving it through legislation, emphasizing the distinction between 'the world' and 'the church' as highlighted in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 and John 17:16. He explains that a truly Christian nation would require all its people to be born-again Christians, reflecting God's law entirely, which has never been fully realized. Drawing examples from history, including John Calvin's attempt in Geneva, he illustrates how enforcing laws without transformed hearts leads to hypocrisy and failure.

Transcript

We all long for a righteous and just society where God's laws are respected and where people all do the right thing. There is nothing wrong with that desire as I believe that is in line with God's plan also. But the question is how do we get the world from its current state to that ideal state?

There are many Christians who feel that this needs to be done by bringing into power, a government that will enact laws that will change society into, what they believe, to be a righteous society. But is that correct? Will it work? Has it been tried before and more importantly, what does the Bible have to say about it?

First we need to understand that the Bible makes a clear distinction between "the world" and "the church", or what 1Corinthians 5:12-13 calls "those who are inside" and "those who are outside". Jesus said "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16).

The world and the church cannot be the same thing. That sounds pretty obvious, but what does that mean? It means you cannot have a "Christian world". The two things are mutually exclusive. Christians cannot be the world and the world cannot be Christian (although both keep trying to be). I'm sure you agree with me on that. But here's the problem. If you cannot have a Christian world, then you cannot have a Christian nation! Nations are, by definition, part of the world and its system and the two can never be the same.

By this I do not deny that there are, or have been, nations who have a predominantly "Christian" ethic, morality or value system. But it does not make the nation Christian. For a nation to be Christian in the true sense of the word, the nation, including its government and all its people would need to be born-again Christians (at least the vast majority), its laws would need to reflect the whole of the Bible (not just the Ten Commandments) and its government and the leadership of the church would need to be one-and-the-same. Clearly this has never happened except for a few failed attempts.

The closest we have ever come to this ideal was in the nation of Israel when God Himself established a theocracy - a nation under God's rule. In Israel there was no difference between church and state. The civil government and the spiritual leadership was the same and there was only one law - God's law. The problem was that this did not work. Not because God failed or because His plan was flawed, but because the people of Israel were sinful, and in constant rebellion to God and His laws.

And here is the nub. As long as people's hearts are unregenerate they will never (indeed cannot) keep God's law. This, again, is not a reflection on the Law, but on the inherent wickedness of man's heart. Therefore to attempt to create a Christian society through legislation becomes an exercise in futility because the laws do not change the wickedness of man's heart.

John Calvin dreamt of such a utopian society and attempted to establish one in Geneva in the mid-16th century. For 25 years he ran the city/state with an iron fist. He ruthlessly exterminated any opposition and enacted laws that forbade anything and everything that was in conflict with his view of godliness. As time went on the laws became increasingly draconian and harsh. Many were executed for infractions of the law, including heresy. These executions were so gruesome and macabre that they cannot be discussed amongst civilized people. Missing a church service, giving your child a name that is not in the Old Testament, any form of joy or merriment and a thousand other things were punishable by prison. Confessions were extracted by torture paralleled only by the inquisition. What people ate, what they wore (including the color, style and type of cloth) was all regulated. He built an increasingly invasive KGB-type police force that would routinely search people's houses for anything that may be contraband and would check on who attended church and who did not. In addition the police were supported by a network of informants who would report on their friends and neighbors, just like in the former USSR.

Calvin did not only enforce the law, but made sure people would be in church to hear the Word several times a week. But none of this made a happy, just or righteous society. It all failed. It only produced a drab, miserable, neurotic and hypocritical community. "The extant records of the Council reveal a high percentage of illegitimate children abandoned infants, forced marriages, and sentences of death; Calvin's son-in-law and his step daughter were among those condemned for adultery". The city failed on other levels, including that of creativity, aesthetics, productivity and spirituality. This system did not only break the spirit of the community but also caused the murder of some of the godliest people in Geneva.

The Pharisees in Jesus' time tried to do the same thing. They added law upon law. They taught the laws, shamed and punished those who disobeyed them and did everything in their power to create a society which would conform to their idea of a biblical one. But in the end they produced a society which was so morally corrupt that they crucified the King of Glory!

Trying to legislate an unrighteous community into becoming righteous produces the same thing in the world as it does in the church - hypocrisy. You simply force people to appear to do the right thing on the outside while the evil just goes underground where it flourishes even more under the cover of darkness.

Hypocrisy is about two standards, one for what can be seen and one for that which cannot be seen.

I am not propagating lawlessness and antinomianism in the church or in the world. Paul is specific: Civil government is placed there by God and its purpose is to maintain order and peace and if we disobey the government, we will not only be punished by the judicial system, but also by God. (Romans 13:1-7).

But the only way to get people to avoid the wrong, but to also do the right, and to do so irrespective of whether they are policed or not, is if their hearts are changed. And our hearts can only be changed when we are born-again. It is then that God writes his laws on our hearts and minds. For the unregenerate the law is an external thing which is written on stone or paper and which requires enforcing by external "police". To the saved the law is written on their desires, will and intellect and it does not require external policing but it is obeyed willingly (Hebrews 8).

"...not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6)

(To be continued)

"Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" John 18:36.

Bernard Cottret. Calvin. A Biography. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1995. pp157-231

Will Durant. The Reformation. A History of European Civilization From Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster. 1957. p 476.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/anton-bosch/changing-the-world/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net