



'The Case for Self Government'

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This is a happy day for me. I have great respect for this college, for President Woodhouse, and for you students. Most of you are in different situations than the typical university student. I assume that many of you pay your own way. You are probably more serious about studying because it is your own money at stake. You are less likely to get caught up in the false notions and fads that so often accompany the fuzzy intellectualism of so many of our nation's universities. In short, you're my kind of people.

I am an investment manager by profession. Today, however, I want to address something beyond the world of business. I want to share a personal concern about our society. It has to do with the ever increasing role of civil government and the corresponding decline of freedom.

First, I shall quote from Alma 61:15: Therefore [wrote Captain Moroni to Pahoran],...conduct the war in that part of the land, according to the Spirit of God, which is also the spirit of freedom which is in them."

The Spirit of God is closely linked to the Spirit of Freedom. Elsewhere in Alma, the battle for freedom is called "the cause of Christians." (Alma 48:10). We cannot, without serious consequences, be indifferent to these matters.

I wish to teach some principles and history that we might all be edified, gain understanding, and desire to do our part to make this country a little better.

Through years of study, I have gained a great love for the Constitution of the United States. The depth of its manifest wisdom, the delicacy of its provisions, and the intricacy of its checks and balances inspire me. It is the work of wise and good men. It was a "Miracle at Philadelphia". Madison and Washington who were there identified it as such.¹

There is much more to "government" than man-made laws, court orders, and executive actions. There are laws of physics, laws of health, economic laws, laws of chemistry, and laws of God. Societal mores also govern. In business the wishes of customers govern. The Doctrine & Covenants says there is no space where there is no law (D&C 88:36-38). So

some form of government is everywhere. Actually, the government which *should* most influence our lives is not civil government, but rather divine law.

May I suggest that the morally highest form of human government is self-government: the individual's free will obedience to divine law. A near second, is the government of the family. It is here, in the family, that individual self-government is best taught, learned and nurtured.

Civil government is the crudest, or lowest, form of government - speaking in the moral sense now - because civil government has as its primary tool: force and compulsion. Civil government is necessary, but it should **always** be the last resort if resorted to at all. The greater the self government of a people, the less civil government is necessary.

James Madison wrote in *The Federalist* Nr. 39 that the writers of the Constitution chose "to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self government."

Indeed John Adams, George Washington and others echoed the theme that the great American Experiment of freedom depended on the society as a whole to be religious, God fearing, and self governing. They believed the best elected official, the one who we dare entrust with political power, is he who submits to the laws of God above all else.

The Founders did **not** trust human nature. Note their passionate dislike for democracy - the unbridled will of the people. Citizens when in political office were not to be trusted any more than citizens out of office as it pertains to the exercising of power over another. The Christian concept of man commonly shared by American colonial leaders was that man was fallen, very capable of evil, and that the only salvation for man was to "get religion" and be changed by the power of the redemption of Jesus Christ.² Therefore, the Constitution was crafted to check the weaknesses of man's nature, that the best in man might shine forth and the would-be abusers of freedom might be restrained.

The system of checks and balances in the Constitution is perhaps its most magnificent yet unappreciated feature.

James Madison wrote in a later number of *The Federalist*:

“Ambition must be made to counteract ambition....If men were angels, no government would be necessary [no civil government, that is.] If angels were to govern, neither external nor internal controls of government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” [Nr. 51]

Those noble men whom Constitutional Convention delegate William Pierce called “the wisest Council in all the World”³ understood the capacity of man for good and the propensity of man to do evil. Man by himself is necessarily limited in the harm he can do. But give that same man political power and entire nations can be destroyed. Thus the Founders had greater trust in individual freedom than in centralized government.

There is a law higher than all the acts of political councils and to which all nations must some day give account. And when any people put their own will above that of the will of God, bondage and suffering will be the end result.

We live in a constitutional republic. It is a form of government where the people exercise sovereignty through their elected representatives according to rules and limits written in their political charter. This means that if those we elect go astray, we the people have responsibility to correct it.

Why is it that today we are so good at complaining about government but do so little about changing it? Is it ignorance, apathy, impotence, or some other inherent weakness in the population? *I would suggest that the core reason for electoral impotence is the absence of moral courage that can only come from virtuous living.*

Benjamin Franklin, on the occasion of the signing of the Constitution in 1787, said: “I think a general Government necessary for us, and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years and can only end in Despotism.... when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other.”⁴

My conviction is that societal prosperity is a result of being a God-fearing and virtuous people. This is certainly the Book of Mormon perspective. If our focus is only on material prosperity to the exclusion of virtue, in time we will have neither. It is the absence of virtue that breeds government expansion because there is no moral courage to resist it.

I do not want to sound gloomy. Not all trends are toward corruption and tyranny. While in health care, environmental, labor, and workplace law the government is expanding its powers, in public utilities, transportation, banking, and communications we have seen encouraging progress away from overbearing regulations.

The satellite dish, the Internet and computers also now

allow the individual to react faster than government can. Technology **has** increased man's capacity to do good and harm.

Joseph Story was a contemporary of many of the Founding Fathers. He became a lawyer and a great scholar of common law in the Christian tradition. He was both a member of the United States Supreme Court bench and first dean of the Harvard Law School at the same time. He wrote the first definitive commentary on the U.S. Constitution and is perhaps the best scholar on the original intent of the Framers. Justice Story concluded his *Commentaries on the Constitution* with these thoughts:

“Let the American youth never forget, that they possess a noble inheritance, bought by the toils, and sufferings, and blood of their ancestors; and capable, if wisely improved, and faithfully guarded, of transmitting to their latest posterity all the substantial blessings of life, the peaceful enjoyment of liberty, property, religion, and independence... It may, nevertheless, perish in an hour by the folly, or corruption, or negligence of its only keepers, THE PEOPLE. Republics are created by the virtue, public spirit, and intelligence of the citizens. They fall, when the wise are banished from the public councils, because they dare to be honest, and the profligate are rewarded, because they flatter the people, in order to betray them.”⁵

Now to restate the principle: The highest form of government **is** self-government - the free will obedience to divine law. If we would enjoy freedom for ourselves and our posterity, then we as a nation must turn again to the grantor of all good gifts, put our lives in harmony with His will and spread the message so others will do the same. **This effort must begin in the homes where truth must be taught and self-government learned.**

Remember, that the cure for our society does not lie in changing government but in changing hearts. It is through the power of ideas and a worthy example that hearts are changed. Institutional government may be the last to reflect the changes that have already happened in the hearts of the citizenry. Government will not be just and virtuous until the citizenry can, without hypocrisy, demand it.

Each of us has a unique contribution to make in this process. In my case, I felt I could best contribute in the realm of ideas, in developing and articulating principles of government and how those principles might be applied at various levels of government. It was in this spirit that I founded here in Utah the Sutherland Institute.

Sutherland Institute is a public policy think tank. Our task is to publish articles, speeches, op-ed pieces, and research which will make popular sound principles and practices in the arena of public policy. For example, last spring, and then again in the summer, we held conferences on the subject of privatization of government services through divestiture and outsourcing. We hope to focus heavily on

family related issues and public policy that can re-enthroned the family as the core governmental unit of society. We want to be a unifying force for people of good will and hope to be a valuable resource to the media, to elected officials, to those seeking office, and to people like you who are trying to exercise your influence for good. We have much to do but have made good progress in the last two and half years since our founding.

We need to win in the battle of ideas not just elections. Are we not often disappointed when political officeholders go adrift because they are not deeply grounded in correct principles? Sometimes they go adrift merely because they are overwhelmed in their responsibilities and do not have time to give each issue adequate attention. At Sutherland, we hope to help in both cases by focusing on principles and proposing positive solutions. Yes, we will criticize bad ideas, but only when we have better suggestions.

We must build rather than criticize. The critics may be right but unless we provide constructive and workable alternatives someone else will fill the vacuum with their ideas and agenda. For example, we may criticize government welfare - that's easy. But what are we doing individually to help those in need by our own free will and choice.

May I share some of my thoughts on how we can be a catalyst for good and turn away from the humanistic and materialistic notions that are so dominant in our society?

First, we as individuals and as a nation, must once again without shame or embarrassment acknowledge that man is the creation of God and that children are the God-given stewardship of the family. This alone will break through the false religion of humanistic materialism. [Remember that it was just these simple notions which brought down the notions of Marxism in the mind of Whitaker Chambers.] For example, if children are the God-given stewardship of parents, then, the state has no authority above the parents in educational matters and our public policy will move in that direction. All governmental reform needs to move toward favoring the morally higher form of government [meaning the family] to exercise its just powers first, before other attempts are made to intervene. Notice the pattern of the Founding Fathers in making regular references to Divine Providence and the influence of God in the affairs of men. We need more public discourse with similar acknowledgments.

Second, those of understanding must be willing to lead out and do what they can to reclaim responsibility for themselves without the help of the government or a special tax break. [There is the Chinese proverb: He that stand on side of hill with open mouth waiting for roast duck to fly in -- wait long time.] We must be the pioneers who blaze the trail to societal reform. We must set a moral example. Yes, some may pay a heavy price before the injustice can be shown to others. It requires sacrifice and courage. Freedom always requires sacrifice and courage. To paraphrase President

Reagan, I must "just say no" to offers of governmental programs and assistance that lead us towards bondage. Among the highest of moral actions is to refrain from doing that which is popular and within our power to do but is unethical or degrading. It is not just in drugs and sexual matters that we should advocate abstinence. Government aid and programs are also a very dangerous addiction.

Third, we must become well informed and develop positive, constructive, alternative solutions to today's ills. These solutions must move us toward the ideals of self government under God. We must be patient and realize that a hundred years of constitutional decay cannot be cured in one session of Congress. I personally believe we are called of God to be a leaven in society not a demolition squad.

Fourth, our loyalties need to go beyond petty labels such as liberal, conservative, republican, democrat, left or right, Hispanic, feminist, black and white, etc. These labels tend to conceal the real issues and divide us rather than unite. Aren't we Americans, fellow citizens?

A number of very positive changes in public policy have transpired at times when the levers of government were controlled by those who traditionally would oppose those changes. Welfare reform, for example, may be easier to accomplish when Democrats rule than Republicans even though the Democrats are known for giving away other people's money. But first the correct notions and principles need to become sufficiently popular and the evidence and case for them so persuasive that the change is irresistible.

Fifth, we must live the best lives possibly, not for the glory of the world but so that we have the power that comes from virtuous living. Darkness can never endure the light and we must have light before we can let our light so shine.

One of the remarkable thinkers of our times is the Russian author, Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn grew up in a godless country, was converted to Christianity, and for a number of years lived in exile in the United States. While his native country was moving away from atheism and communism, he observed that the materialism of the West was leading America towards corruption and godlessness.

In his book, *The Russian Question* he observed: "It has been pointed out by various thinkers many times...if a personality is not directed at values higher than the self, corruption and decay inevitably take hold....[W]e can only experience true spiritual satisfaction not in seizing, but in refusing to seize. In other words, in self-limitation.

"Today, not many will readily accept this principle for themselves. However, in the increasingly complex circumstances of our modernity, to limit [or govern] ourselves is the only true path of preservation for us all. And it helps bring back the awareness of a Whole and Higher Authority above us - and the altogether forgotten sense of humility before this Entity. There can be only one true Progress: the sum total of the spiritual progresses of individuals."⁶

There is great wisdom in Solzhenitsyn's words. It is a powerful reminder.

So again, I ask, where are we, individually and as families, in living virtuous lives and in governing ourselves? Do we recall the words of that wonderful patriotic hymn, "America the Beautiful"?

*"God mend thy every flaw, confirm thy soul
in self-control, thy liberty in law."*

*"May God thy gold refine, 'til all success
be nobleness and every gain divine."*

*"And crown thy good with brotherhood,
from sea to shining sea."*

The Lord in Old Testament times promised his children:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." [2 Chronicles 7:14]

If we but learn to govern ourselves we too can experience that same healing.

Thank you.

¹. Catherine Drinker Bowen: *The Miracle at Philadelphia*. Boston: Atlantic--Little, Brown Books, 1986, p.xi.

². See George Washington's "Farewell Address."

³. Charles Callan Tansill (ed.): *The Making of the American Republic: The Great Documents, 1774-1789*. Reprinted by Arlingotn House 1972. Page 108.

⁴. From James Madison's notes from the Federal Convention of 1787. See Charles Callan Tansil (ed.): *The Making of the American Republic: The Great Documents, 1774-1789*. Reprinted by Arlington House 1972. Page 739.

⁵. *Commentaries*, Vol.III, pp 759-760.

⁶. Alexander Solzhenitsyn: *The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995, pages 127-128.