

“God & Government” by Charles Colson

Discussion 3

Chapter 16: Benefits Of The Kingdom

Although church and state stand separate, the political order cannot be renewed without theological virtues working upon it...It is from the church that we receive our fundamental postulates of order, justice and freedom, applying them to our civil society. – Russell Kirk

1. Colson believes that Christianity, of all faiths and religions, is the best resource for serving as the moral conscience for a society. What arguments does he give for this? (pp.267-268)

2. *“The Kingdom of God offers benefits no society can afford to be without.”* You and I should readily be able to share with others why true Christianity – rightly understood and rightly practiced – contributes so powerfully to the overall health and well-being of a culture. Discuss the following benefits it brings:

The Compassion Christianity Unleashes

Christians Help Break The Endless Cycle Of Evil And Violence In The World

Christianity’s Impact On Crime

Christians Are A Powerful Bulwark To Legal Sanity and Moral Good By Calling The State To Account; We Are The Moral Conscience Of Society

Chapter 17: Christian Patriotism

3. *“In the Kingdom of God one learns the obligations of citizenship from the Scriptures, the ultimate source of basic Christian truth...Christianity rests on the belief that God is the source of truth and that He does not alter it according to the spirit of the times. When Christians sever their ties to absolute truth, relativism reigns, and the church becomes merely a religious adaption of the culture...The first responsibility for the citizen of the Kingdom, then, is to understand historic Christian truth: to know Scripture and the classic fundamentals of the faith.”* (pp.276-278)

Why do you think Colson says that Christian patriotism begins here? How does knowledge of Scripture protect from errors of both Right and Left?

4. There are two errors to avoid when it comes to Christian patriotism. Read the quote, then discuss them.

“But Christians, at least in the United States, have all too often been confused about their biblical mandates and have therefore always had trouble with the concept of patriotism. They have vacillated between two extremes — the God-and-country, wrap-the-flag-around-the-cross mentality and the simply-passing-through mindset.”

5. Why are true Christians the best patriots and best citizens that a nation has?

6. When is civil disobedience justified? And how should it be carried out?

Chapter 18: Little Platoons

The greatest thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years. – C.S. Lewis

7. The title of the chapter comes from Edmund Burke, who described the work of small volunteer societies as “little platoons”. What did he mean by that, and why is it fitting to think of the wider Church as a community of little platoons?

8. *“Volunteerism...fosters a uniquely American brand of civic responsibility...America's founders did not believe governments could create virtue; government attempts to make people good are inherently coercive. Instead, our Constitution rests on the premise that virtue comes from citizens themselves — acting through smaller groups such as the family, church, community, and voluntary associations.”*

Why are little platoons more effective for changing society for the better than large government programs, or even “celebrity benefits”?

9. The chapter is filled with stories of Christian little platoons at work. What are some examples that inspired you?

“Historically, Americans have always impressed outsiders with their habit of volunteerism. In the nineteenth century, the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville marveled that Americans form associations for everything — to start libraries, send out missionaries, build hospitals and schools. By contrast, de Tocqueville remarked, in his own France there were not ten men doing what ordinary Americans do routinely.”

Chapter 19: The Problem Of Power

It is a magician's bargain: give up our souls, get power in return. But once our souls, that is, ourselves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls. – C.S. Lewis

10. Colson shares his experience of how the power of the White House impacted him for the worse. Later on as a Christian he felt the same allure of power when he co-hosted the 700 Club for just one week (after which he foreswore ever doing it again.) Write out a sentence or two that describes for you what exactly is *the problem of power*.

11. How does Jesus turn conventional and cultural ideas of power completely upside down?

12. What advice does Colson give at the end of the chapter to a Christian who find himself or herself possessing real political power?

Chapter 20: Christians In Politics

13. What three reasons does Colson give for why Christians should be involved in politics.

14. Is it possible for a Christian to serve in government without violating their conscience and their constituency (balance their duties to God and to the national interest.) Yes, says Colson, but only if the Christian officeholder understands several key truths. What are they?

15. While the church should serve as the “conscience of society”, there are pitfalls to beware of. Read the following quotes, then discuss them.

“One of the greatest [pitfalls] is the tendency Christians have to believe that because the Bible is “on their side”, they can speak with authority on every issue...This is not the way Christians should operate in the political arena...We shoot ourselves in the foot [when we become] just another political interest group, pontificating on matters about which we are willfully uninformed.”

“It is one thing for an individual Christian to address whatever issue his or her conscience dictates, but the church as a body, which purports to speak God’s truth, should speak only to those matters in which fidelity to holy Scripture itself makes it necessary to speak out: issues where human life or dignity, religious liberty, or justice are concerned.”

16. What is the church’s first and foremost calling? Underline the parts of the following quote that speak to you.

“Politics is not the church’s first calling. Evangelism, administering the sacraments, providing discipleship, fellowship, teaching the Word, and exhorting its members to holy living are the heartbeat of the church. When it addresses political issues, the church must not do so at the risk of weakening its primary mission.”

17. What might Colson say to the American church today? Summarize the following quotes in your own words.

“It is fair to say that most Christians have not done a particularly good job at this task [showing wisdom and grace with politics]. Often they have terrified their secular neighbors, who see Christian political activists as either backwoods bigots or religious ayatollahs attempting to assault them with Bible verses of religious magisteriums. In a pluralistic society it is not only wrong but unwise for Christians to shake their Bibles arrogantly and assert the ‘God says...’. That is the quickest way for Christians...to lose their case altogether. Instead positions should be argued on their merits. If the case is sound, a majority can be persuaded. That’s the way democracies and free nations are supposed to work.”

“Success is not the criteria. Faithfulness is. For in the end, Christians have the assurance that even the most difficult political situations are in the hands of a sovereign God...The manifestation of the Kingdom comes through God’s power, not theirs.”