

“Pursue Virtue by Loving Christ”

“Chronological snobbery” was a term used by C.S. Lewis to describe people who frowned upon earlier generations because “we have it all figured out today.” But every age, like every person, has blind spots. Both history and theology show this. There has been no perfect country, for there is always injustice, and theology informs us of the imperfectability of mankind because of sin. For example, every parent thinks they will correct the sins of their upbringing in the way they raise their children. But ask the children and they’ll point out to you the sins of their parents in due time. It’s a never-ending cycle.

One of those blind spots today is the necessity of virtuous living. In his great work *City of God*, written in the 5th century, Augustine reminds his readers about the necessity of virtue for a commonwealth. It requires a common object of love. The object of love for the Roman Empire was man. Because the object of love was man, their goals were earthly goals, such as a lust for power and to conquer. The determination to excel was not a desire to serve others but for personal glory. Hence, the heroes of the Roman Empire were not truly virtuous.

Christianity, on the other hand, promotes true virtue. True virtue begins with an object of love that stands above mankind, namely, God revealed in Jesus Christ. By emphasizing personal virtue, Augustine hits an important biblical point. We are to supplement our faith with virtue and good works (2 Pet. 1:5). By emphasizing personal virtue, Augustine prioritizes the cultivation of personal virtue over against changing institutions. A selfish person changing the institution increases evil more than a virtuous person doing good works living in an unjust civil authority. Growing in virtue takes precedence over institutional change.

The freedoms we enjoy in this country require virtuous living. It begins with love for an object greater than mankind, namely, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Love for Christ demonstrated in virtuous living will greatly benefit a people. As Augustine challenges, “Let those who say that the doctrine of Christ is incompatible with the well-being of the commonwealth give us an army of soldiers such as the doctrine of Christ requires them to be; let them give us such subjects, such as husbands and wives, such as parents and children, such masters and servants, such kings, such judges, in fine, even such tax-payers and tax-gatherers as the Christian religion has taught that men should be; and then let them dare to say that it is adverse to the well-being of the commonwealth.”

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