



PAUL WOOLLEY

Confidence
in the Gospel

As part of the Evangelical Alliance's *Confidence in the Gospel* initiative we are hosting a series of five national consultations to wrestle with significant and timely issues relating to the gospel.

To ensure that as many people as possible can engage with this programme, the talks are being filmed and made available online.

Why not watch some of the videos, and use the questions provided, to explore these vital subjects with your small group or leadership team?

For more information, videos and resources visit eauk.org/confidence

Paul Woolley

is executive director of charity at the Bible Society. Previously he was the founding director of Theos, the public theology think tank.

Synopsis

There is a crisis in our politics. There are serious issues, such as apathy and disillusionment. We are obsessed with representation, but not participation – which is what politics is really about. There are many things that we get wrong in our political engagement and the responsibility for that sits at our door.

When it comes to what we get wrong in our political engagement there are two basic problems.

Kingdom of God: We mimic the dominant, but very flawed understanding of the kingdom of God that existed among Jesus' contemporaries in his first century context. The Pharisees thought it was about an intensification of the requirements of Old Testament Law. The Zealots wanted to bring in the kingdom by military means. The Herodians compromised with the Romans for their own personal gain. The Essenes withdrew into the desert, cutting themselves off from the rest of society.

The vision of the kingdom declared by Jesus was completely different than these four approaches. Jesus declared, at just the right time, that God's rule and reign was breaking in and called people into a completely new way of living. The challenge for us today is to develop a theology of the kingdom that seriously and radically shapes our political engagement.

Christian spiritual formation: We really lack the vision, intention and the means to form disciples. The challenge of Jesus' followers is to move from self-worship to Christ-centred self-denial as a general condition of life in God's present and future kingdom. That's what Jesus asks from us. Christian discipleship is about me living my life as Jesus would live it if he were me.

Christian engagement with politics often doesn't look different from anyone else's. It is not surprising that there is a lack of understanding as to what the common good actually is, let alone any creative thought about the political actions that are required to deliver the possibility of securing it. There is a crisis and if the Church is serious about being part of the solution we have to correct what we do wrong and do better.

Questions

- 1) Among our peers / church, what is the perception of, and level of engagement with, politics? Why do we think this is?
- 2) What are the best and worst examples we can remember of Christian engagement with politics? What was good/bad about these engagements and how could they have been better?
- 3) In our understanding and outworking of the kingdom, which approach do we see ourselves most aligning with? How is this potentially at odds with the kingdom Jesus initiated? How will a correct understanding of the kingdom of God impact how we engage with politics?
- 4) When it comes to Christian spiritual formation what is our current vision (personally and/or as a church)? What is our level of intention and what are the means? How does this compare with what it should be? How could we potentially move to where we need to be?