

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

American politics are messy, emotional, controversial, and particularly difficult to talk about— especially for Gospel-centered Christians who seek to put their hope in and focus on God’s kingdom. American politics are not, however, ignorable. A quasi-religious movement has gained popularity within the last few years, and although it is not particularly original, it has become increasingly relevant and must be addressed by Christian leaders. If not, it has the unique potential to spiritually destroy our people.

Although it is disguised in Christian garb, Christian Nationalism has proven to be a religion in and of itself with its own foundational narrative, way of salvation and teleological vision entirely different from what God has revealed in Scripture. The goal of this work is to address these specific claims and to provide a biblical response to them.

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INTRODUCTION

July 4th, 1992: shortly after the Gulf War. A megachurch fervently celebrates a special Fourth of July worship service. On center stage brashly stands an imposing star-spangled banner alongside a wooden cross. To stand for one is to kneel for the other. The sound of boisterous praise choruses saturates the large auditorium, intermingled with patriotic anthems like *God Bless America*. The climax of the service centers around a video of a well-known military general proudly proclaiming that God had blessed America and had granted them a speedy victory with few American casualties. The hearty homily is enriched with patriotic background music. As the video ends a silhouette of three crosses is backdropped by an American flag as four fighter jets fly over the crosses and the words “God Bless America” appear on the screen. The applause is deafening.¹

September 11, 2002: A year has passed since thousands of Americans saw their loved ones for the last time—unknowingly surrendering them to a fiery death as Islamic radicals unleashed their fury and sinister religious zeal. President George W. Bush addresses his wounded nation with a call to stand firm in her American values. This violent attack, according to President Bush, was an attack not simply on the nation, but on the values and ideals that America was founded on, namely, that all life is inherently valuable because it is granted by the

1. Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 98. One could argue that this particular example is not Christian Nationalism, but instead blatant worship of country in a slightly unique way. This example is therefore used not as an example of modern Christian Nationalism, but as somewhat of a precursor or historical prerequisite to Christian Nationalism.

“Giver” of all life who intended all people to live in freedom and equality. This, according to Bush, is what separates America from her enemies: those who consider lives dispensable in the pursuit of power. The exhortation concludes with an allusion to the words of the Apostle John in the first chapter of his Gospel— words about Christ himself: “This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. That hope drew millions to this harbor. That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it. May God bless America.”²

January 6th, 2021: Thousands of conservative faithful take to the streets. The nation has spoken, or so it seems. President Donald Trump, who four years earlier had achieved an unprecedented victory over the former First Lady, now stands in front of an agitated crowd. He has lost. A man whose brand is defined by winning claims that the election has been stolen from him by the Democrats, aided by Republican traitors like Vice President Mike Pence. The rhetoric is shrewdly crafted: not so brazened as to shock his voting base³ into indicting him for the following events, but incendiary enough to evoke action— violent action that would be long remembered: government buildings invaded, security officers assaulted, and places of legislation overrun by men and women convinced that their president had been unfairly expelled from office.

2. George W. Bush, “President’s Remarks to a Nation” (Ellis Island, New York, New York, September 11, 2002). Again, this is not a blatant case of Christian Nationalism, but an example of an American leader advocating for American values using biblical language. He is not the only one who does this. George Again, this example is used as a historical prerequisite for the rhetoric used by Christian Nationalism.

3. Domenico Montenaro, “A Majority Thinks Trump Is to Blame for Jan. 6 but Won’t Face Charges, Poll Finds,” *National Public Radio*, July 21, 2022.

It isn't pretty, but a common dreadful theme is noticed by the media: *these people are Christians*. Throughout the day, groups of protestors huddle together in prayer circles. Crosses and various Christian symbols are mixed with Trump paraphernalia, including signs of a blonde-haired Jesus wearing Trump's famous, "Make America Great Again" ballcap. Shirts and flags proclaim the battle cry: "Jesus is my king. Trump is my president," "God bless President Trump," and the fiery image of a bald eagle and a lion, presumably, the Lion of Judah.⁴ Echoing in the air is the prayer given by Paula White, Donald Trump's spiritual advisor:

"Let every adversary against democracy, against freedom, against life, against liberty, against justice, against peace, and righteousness be overturned right now in the name of Jesus. Let justice be done. Let justice be done. Let justice be done. Let we the people have the assurance of a fair and just election. I thank you for President Trump. I secure his purpose. I secure his destiny. I secure his life. I put a hedge of protection around him. And I thank you that he will walk in a holy boldness and wisdom, and that you will go before him. You will be his rear guard. And you will go in front of him this day and every day, God. Amen."⁵

Even bolder is the prayer offered by those who invaded the chamber of congress:

"Thank you, Heavenly Father, for being the inspiration needed by these police officers, to allow us into this building, to allow us to exercise our rights; to allow us to send a message to all the tyrants, the communists, and the globalists, that this is our nation, not theirs; that we will not let America, the American way of the United States of America, go down. Thank you for allowing the United States of America to be reborn. Thank you for allowing us to get rid of the communists, the globalists, the traitors within our government. We love you and thank you. In Christ's holy name we pray, Amen."⁶

4. Joy Dalsheim and Gregory Starrett, "Christian Nationalism Is Getting Written out of the Story of January 6," *The Conversation* (2022).

5. Paula White, *Religious Extremists Mix Trump Worship With Christian Nationalism* (Washington D.C., 2021).

6. Luke Mogelson, *A Reporter's Footage from Inside the Capitol Siege* | *The New Yorker* (Washington D.C., 2021).

What *is* this? What can we call this bizarre combination of American Evangelical Christianity and zealous, even violent, nationalistic patriotism? On display is Christian Nationalism— a movement, an ideology, and most important for Christians to understand, *a reactionary religion*. It is a religion in and of itself— not a Christian sect or branch under the umbrella of historical Christian theology. It is an altogether unique religion with its own foundational narrative, its own plan of salvation, and its own teleological vision.

LITERATURE REVIEW: DEFINING THE SUBJECT MATTER

What exactly are the tenets of Christian Nationalism? The answers are widespread and diverse. An insightful *credo* gives the reader a view into this world. The “Watchman Decrees” are statements that charismatic⁷ pastors like Dutch Sheets encourage all American Christians to believe and proclaim:

As a patriot of God I attest my allegiance to the kingdom of God and to the great commission.

We decree that America’s executive branch of government will honor God and defend the Constitution.

We decree that our legislative branch (Congress) will write only laws that are righteous and constitutional.

We decree that our judicial system will issue rulings that are biblical and constitutional.

We declare that we stand against wokeness, the occult, and every evil attempt against our nation.

We declare that we now take back our God-given freedoms, according to our Constitution.

We declare that we take back influence at the local level in our communities.

We decree that we take back and permanently control positions of influence and leadership in each of the **Seven Mountains.⁸

7. Charismatic in the theological sense, not the personal sense.

⁸. “Seven Mountains” is a reference to Revelation 17:9. Sheets, along with others in the “Seven Mountains” movement, interpret this passage to mean that God’s desire for his Church is to control all of society by means of the seven most important elements of society, and after such dominion, bring about the end times. These “seven mountains” are commonly understood to be family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government. While “Seven Mountain Dominionism” can and should be

We decree that the blood of Jesus covers and protects our nation. It protects and separates us for God.

We declare that our nation is energy independent.

We declare that America is strong spiritually, financially, militarily and technologically.

We decree that evil carries no power, authority or rights in our land nor over our people.

We decree that we will operate in unity, going beyond denominational lines in order to accomplish the purposes of God for our nation.⁹

Paul Miller, writer for *Christianity Today*, provides a definition from an outsider's perspective:

Christian Nationalism is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way. Popularly, Christian nationalists assert that America is and must remain a “Christian nation”— not merely as an observation about American history, but as a prescriptive program for what America must continue to be in the future... and that we will lose our identity and our freedom if we do not preserve our cultural inheritance.¹⁰

Simultaneously, Christian Nationalism is a reaction as much as it is a religion.¹¹ It is a reaction to the secularization of the American government, media, and education system. It is a reaction to an ideology that treats unborn human life like a nuisance and a chain that restricts a woman's rule over herself. It is a reaction to the screaming voices who scoff at traditional biblical marriage values— who demand that their sexual preferences be not simply approved,

distinguished from Christian Nationalism, one can certainly notice the overlap. For more information on this movement, visit <https://www.generals.org/the-seven-mountains> or read *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate* by Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau.

9. “Watchman Decree,” *Flashpoint.Govictory.Com*, July 1, 2022.

10. Paul Miller, “What Is Christian Nationalism? An Explainer on How the Belief Differs from Other Forms of Nationalism, Patriotism, and Christianity.,” *Christianity Today*, February 3, 2021.

11. One can especially see this in the rise of the Religious Right and the Moral Majority in the way of the *Roe v. Wade* decision: Erling Jorstad, *The Politics of Moralism: The New Christian Right in American Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 4–7.

accepted, or tolerated, but celebrated— who hurl their wrath at those who disagree. It is a reaction to secular materialists who claim to be enlightened, objective, scientific, and rational, but at the same time make moral claims without a shred of intellectual integrity.¹²

This is precisely what makes a biblical response so difficult, and its clarity so vital. *Christians should share their concerns.* These secular ideologies are irrational, destructive, oppressive, and blatantly evil, and those who peddle them need to be addressed. The trends in American society that concern them should be concerning to any Christian. But the solution given by the God of the Bible is radically different from what Christian Nationalism has to offer and vastly more satisfying, nuanced, and beautiful.

Some Clarifications: What Christian Nationalism Is Not

To adequately discuss Christian Nationalism, one must first clarify what Christian Nationalism is *not*. Like most theological discussions, willingness to clarify one's words bears good fruit.

12. James Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.

The Christian Can and Should Be Patriotic.

Christian Nationalism is not Christian patriotism. The Bible does not condone hatred— or even apathy— toward one’s country (even a country responsible for the Christian’s oppression). God encourages his people to use their gifts to be a blessing to Babylon and to even pray for its peace, promising that they would benefit from this (Jeremiah 29:7). In the same historical context, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are uniquely gifted by God to work under Nebuchadnezzar and the Bible gives no indication that God was displeased by their involvement in the government. On the contrary, he blesses them with success (Daniel 2:48,49). The same can be said about Joseph in Egypt, whom God used not only to serve Jacob’s family, but to save countless heathen lives (Genesis 47:13-26).

God also uses his people to correct and critique the government when it errs and to help it rule justly. The book of Esther provides striking examples of God’s preservation of both his promised people and a pagan government. God uses Mordecai to prevent the violent death of Xerxes, which would have likely led to even more political violence and social unrest (Esther 2:21-23). Yet, when Xerxes is fooled by Haman into declaring the massacre of the Jews, it becomes clear that God placed Esther in her seat of power to prevent a grave governmental atrocity (Esther 4:14). God then uses the decreeing power of Xerxes, which was used to attack the Jews, to protect the Jews (Esther 8:11-13).¹³

¹³. Christian Nationalists may argue that this is proof that the Church’s job is to correct the government when it errs, and an effective way to do this is to submit the government under the rule of Scripture or only have Christian leaders. As a response to this possible argument, one should notice that neither Mordecai nor Esther makes a single effort to proselytize Xerxes or make him aware of the morality laid out in the Torah. They function under the rule of a pagan government and show no desire to change it.

In light of other passages (Romans 13:3-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14), the Christian must conclude that the native country in which she lives is to be respected and cherished as God’s instrument for taking care of human needs and administering justice— both those who belong to him and those who do not. It is also subject to correction when it errs— not for the sake of power, but for the sake of the good of the state and her subjects. Paul Miller, who is formerly quoted for his definition of Christian Nationalism, also provides a helpful definition of healthy Christian patriotism:

Our affection and loyalty to a specific part of God’s creation helps us do the good work of cultivating and improving the part we happen to live in. As Christians, we can and should love the United States—which also means working to improve our country by holding it up for critique and working for justice when it errs.¹⁴

The Christian Can and Should Be Concerned with Societal Morality

The desire for societal morality is not Christian Nationalism. As said before, Christians should share the basic moral grievances that Christian Nationalism addresses. Although it is certainly true that all human righteousness is unable to gain the divine saving favor of a holy God (Isaiah 64:6), this does not mean that God does not place any value in it. The primary importance of righteousness *coram deo* does not make righteousness *coram mundo* unimportant.

What makes sin bad? Sin separates one from God (Isaiah 59:2). Sin angers God (Psalm 78:58). Sin is a violation of God’s Law (1 John 3:4). Sin sends the sinner to hell (Matthew 5:30).

14. Paul Miller, “What Is Christian Nationalism? An Explainer on How the Belief Differs from Other Forms of Nationalism, Patriotism, and Christianity.,” *Christianity Today*, February 3, 2021.

At the same time, sin is also bad because it hurts people.¹⁵ This especially applies to what is called the Second Table of the Law, or the latter portion of the Decalog that pertains to behavior involving fellow human beings. God is angered when humans harm each other (Proverbs 6:16-19) and affirms the harming nature of sin on a corporate level (Psalm 9:17, Proverbs 14:34).

Therefore, Christians not only give thanks for God's sovereignty on display in the secular state, but also share God's concern for what happens to people *on earth*, and therefore, the moral state of the nation in which they live.

The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: Our Working Assumption

These two truths are found in both Scripture and Luther's teaching:

God has therefore ordained two governments: the spiritual which by the Holy Spirit produces Christians and pious folk under Christ, and the secular which restrains un-Christian and evil folk, so that they are obliged to keep outward peace, albeit by no merit of their own.¹⁶

Luther's words clearly and concisely confess the biblical truth that God works on earth through two distinct institutions with different functions: the Church and the State. The Church's concern is for the soul's eternal salvation. The State's concern is for temporal justice. These

15. The argument can and has been made that the reason sin offends God's Law is for that exact reason: it does some sort of damage to either the sinner or someone else, either directly or indirectly. While a biblical case for this can certainly be made, it is outside of the scope of this paper.

16. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, American Edition, Vol. 45 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–1986), 91.

institutions and their vocations are to be distinguished. The Church's job is not to legislate civil law. The State's job is not to endorse or preach the Gospel.

The applications are numerous. For the sake of this section, John Brug offers valuable insight:

Government is a good gift of God, but like every gift of God it can become an idol or a tool of Satan when it is misused by sinners. At Babel a sinful society made a human empire its god and tried to defy the plans of this world's real king (Gen. 11). Government takes on a monstrous form when Satan uses it to spread suffering and bloodshed and in his vain attempts to destroy the kingdom of God. Jezebel, Athaliah, Antiochus Herod, Pilate and the Sanhedrin, the world empires pictured in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, and the medieval papacy which descended from them are but a few examples of Satan's henchmen sitting on the throne and serving the Dragon.... God often uses one such tyrant to bring judgment on another. The cruel rulers of Assyria sweep away the corrupt, self-indulgent rulers of Israel. The proud Babylonians destroy both the Assyrians and the "rulers of Sodom" seated in Jerusalem. Persia crushes Babylon, Alexander destroys Persia. On and on it goes. Every Jezebel has her Jehu.... Through it all, as the world tyrants briefly strut their stuff, the one enthroned in the heavens laughs. The Lord scoffs at their vain pretensions. Only his King, enthroned on Zion, will rule forever (Psalm 2).... Government is a good institution of God, but it has been perverted by sin. If we remember this, we will avoid both sinful extremes, that of making government a god which we trust and obey without question, and that of making government a devil which we hate and despise.¹⁷

Christian Nationalism Is a Religion

In her work, *The Philosophy of Religion*, Ninian Smart states that to categorize secular worldviews like Marxism and Humanism as "philosophies" and not "religions," simply because they are functionally atheistic, is to have an artificial view of what a religion is in the first place. Although they both functionally reject the existence of the metaphysical or supernatural, they

17. John F. Brug, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: Current Problems Christian Citizenship and the Separation of Church And State*, 1999, 2-4.

both make assumptions that cannot be scientifically or philosophically proven, like all religions do. The basic assumptions necessary for the tenets of any atheistic worldview must be taken by faith, and are therefore, in a real sense, religious.¹⁸

Presbyterian theologian and philosopher Francis Schaeffer¹⁹ expounds on this idea in his analysis of Secularism as described in the “Secular Manifesto,” showing that it indeed, like all religions, has a narrative *mythos* that provides a foundation for its doctrinal statements. It has a teleological vision: a hope in an atheistic, scientific, advanced utopia where the archaic, oppressive, obstructive claims of religion are a thing of the past— where tolerance, peace, and logic reign.²⁰

WELS pastor Benjamin Schaefer elaborates on this idea in his essay on Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* given at the 2020 Symposium at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Part of Reformation was a reclaiming of the sacraments. In Catholic theology, the sacraments are a means through which one gains righteousness and grace from God through a specific special work.²¹ Schaefer shows how this legalistic view of the sacrament has a striking parallel in the specifically liberal “woke” form of modern Secularism. Protesting for certain causes, wearing certain shirts, posting specific rhetoric on social media, are all very

18. Ninian Smart, *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University, 1979), 20.

19. It should be stated that Schaeffer’s work is often quoted by those who advocate for Christian Nationalism— and for good reason. His theological conclusions lend themselves to a “Seven Mountains” worldview quite well. The writer of this paper humbly disagrees with his conclusions while still using his exceptional insights.

20. Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian View of the West*, vol. 5 of *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), 445.

21. *Opera ex operato*

“sacramental” in nature because they are public actions that gain approval and, therefore, righteousness.²²

This method of analyzation can be applied to Christian Nationalism. Christian Nationalism is a religion not only because it invokes the name of God or encourages followers to pray, but because it has a very distinct foundational narrative, a way of salvation, a teleological vision, and a distinct personal enemy. There are many ways to analyze and organize the tenets of Christian Nationalism. This is one of them. I pray that it will be useful for you, the reader.

A Few Difficulties in this Area of Study

Although Christian Nationalism can rightly be called a religion, there are many factors that make it much more difficult to analyze than other religions.

Christian Nationalism has no specific “Holy Writings.” Yes, the Bible is quoted extremely often, but so is the United States Constitution, various writings from the Founding Fathers, as well as various theologians and philosophers throughout American history. There is no “What we believe” section on a website where specific tenets can be quoted and analyzed. “The Watchman’s Decree” is useful because of its popularity, but one should never assume that all who identify as a “Christian Nationalist” believe every tenet. Much of the basic material for

22. Benjamin Schaefer, “Breaking Free: Martin Luther’s ‘Babylonian Captivity of the Church’ in Context” (Symposium on the 1520 Treatises of Martin Luther, Mequon, WI, 2020), 35.

this work comes from rhetoric found in speeches, sermons, interviews, and survey responses, and is heavily aided by the foundational work of social scientists and cultural analysts.²³

One must also distinguish between the two major sources of researchable material. In one realm lies the rhetorical side of Christian Nationalism. Speeches and materials from politicians²⁴ and pastors make up a sizable portion of “original sources” of this work, and they should because this is what the normal Christian sees most often. On the other hand, Christian Nationalism is found in the academic realm and is a position held by serious and respected scholars and theologians. To distinguish between the two sources, and to give examples from both realms, is crucial so as not to give the impression that Christian Nationalism is simply a tool used by politicians to gain votes and not a serious movement with theological weight. It is both.

One must also remember that there are distinct flavors of Christian Nationalism; not every person who believes a specific Christian Nationalistic claim believes others. Christian Nationalism is not a single idea that can be measured solely by agreement with a specific tenet, but rather a more dynamic ideology or religion incorporating several beliefs and values.²⁵ How we define someone as a “Christian Nationalist” greatly depends on how we interpret the statistics. For example, if we define a Christian Nationalist as anyone who believes the United States is currently or ever was a “Christian nation,” then more than three out of every five

23. Particularly useful for this study was the book, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*.

24. Throughout this paper, several politicians will be quoted. Their words and actions will be deeply criticized. These criticisms are in no way saying that voting for these specific politicians is wrong or that their opponents are better options for public office.

25. Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back For God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020) 2–5.

Americans find themselves in the category. If it includes only those who currently see America as a “Christian nation,” or “believe that the U.S. should be a decidedly Christian state,” then the number is roughly two in ten.²⁶

Another difficulty is the fact that the term “Christian Nationalist” is used both as a pejorative term and a badge of honor depending on who is speaking. Andrew Walker, Professor of Christian Ethics at Southern Baptist University, observes that left-leaning politicians and news outlets tend to attach the word “Christian Nationalist” to anyone who advocates for conservative political policy with the purpose of making them and their positions sound extreme or puritanical.²⁷

Throughout the course of this work, the reader must remember this truth: not *every* person misled by Christian Nationalism may believe every tenet, but many do. The specific claims addressed in this work are the claims that seem to be the common denominator among Christian Nationalist rhetoric and practice: Specifically, the foundational narrative, the way of salvation, and the teleological vision.

26. “Baylor Religion Surveys (2021): Christian Nationalism,” *Baylor University*, 2021.

27. Rev. Todd Wilken, *Christian Nationalism - Andrew Walker, Issues, Etc.*, n.d.

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

A Foundational Narrative: “America Was Founded by Christians, For Christians!”

The Words of President Ronald Reagan:

Those who created our country—the Founding Fathers and Mothers—understood that there is a divine order which transcends the human order. They saw the state, in fact, as a form of moral order and felt that the bedrock of moral order is religion.

The Mayflower Compact began with the words, “In the name of God, amen.” The Declaration of Independence appeals to “Nature’s God” and the “Creator” and “the Supreme Judge of the world.” Congress was given a chaplain, and the oaths of office are oaths before God.

James Madison in the Federalist Papers admitted that in the creation of our Republic he perceived the hand of the Almighty. John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, warned that we must never forget the God from whom our blessings flowed.

George Washington referred to religion’s profound and unsurpassed place in the heart of our nation quite directly in his Farewell Address in 1796. Seven years earlier, France had erected a government that was intended to be purely secular. This new government would be grounded on reason rather than the law of God. By 1796 the French Revolution had known the Reign of Terror.

And Washington voiced reservations about the idea that there could be a wise policy without a firm moral and religious foundation. He said, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”²⁸

Those who attempt to argue for a government completely void of “God talk” or define “separation of Church and State” with the notion that the state should be completely free from

28. Ronald Reagan, (Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast, Dallas, Texas, August 23, 1984).

any and all religious ideas, do so without historical support.²⁹ The writings of the Founding Fathers, and most notably, the opening line of the Declaration of Independence, are fraught with theological language. The foundation of Jefferson's claims cannot be supported or discovered by secular philosophy or atheistic scientific theory. The assertion that all people are created in the first place, let alone created equal, assumes the existence of a powerful transcendent deity who exists outside of creation who has a specific moral value system. According to Jefferson, the ideals which inspired the creation of this American nation was dependent upon the existence of a divine creator. Otherwise, he would not have invoked one.

As pointed out by Reagan, other Founding Fathers not only acknowledged the existence of a transcendent deity but encouraged their people to pray to that deity for guidance and strength.³⁰

But does this make America "Christian"? Does this mean, as Michael Flynn, former U.S. General and member of President Trump's Council, claim, that the United States was declared by the founders to be a "Christian nation," and that the government can and should show a specific preference for the Christian faith and have "one religion under God?"³¹ According to these specific influential Founding Fathers, no.

29. "Why Is FFRF Concerned with State/Church Entanglement?" *Freedom From Religion Foundation*, n.d.

30. Ronald Reagan (Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast, Dallas, Texas, August 23, 1984).

31. Brad Bule, "Michael Flynn Says America Needs 'One Religion under God,'" *Baptist News Global*, November 15, 2021

A Brief Look at American History

Thomas Jefferson denies the idea that American liberty laws are grounded in the Bible:³² “The Common law existed while the Anglo-Saxons were yet Pagans, at a time when they had never yet heard the name of Christ pronounced or knew that such a character existed...Christianity neither is nor ever was a part of Common Law.”³³

George Washington, when pushed by local clergy to include Jesus by name in the constitution, responded, “the path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction.”³⁴ In other words, Washington, who valued religion in general, did not consider faith in Jesus to be the government’s concern.

John Adams may have valued Christian ethics and may have been an active member of a Christian congregation, but he wanted nothing to do with Christianity’s central teaching: “I also shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved: The Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced.”³⁵ Concerning the virgin birth and incarnation of Christ, he wrote, “God is an essence

32. One could argue that Jefferson went too far in this statement. One can say that Common Law was influenced by the Christianity without claiming that its source is Christianity. For more reading, see <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ab2686bcef37284f39cbe8b/t/5bd07a9b0d929757ea4c4022/1540389531829/Rivers+-+Is+English+law+Christian.pdf>.

33. Thomas Jefferson, “Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 24 January 1814,” January 24, 1814, Founders Online.

34. George Washington, “To the Presbyterian Ministers of Massachusetts and New Hampshire,” November 2, 1789, Founders Online.

35. John Adams, “John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 3 September 1816,” September 3, 1816, Founders Online.

that we know nothing of. Until this awful blasphemy is got rid of, there will never be liberal science in the world.”³⁶

Thomas Paine, one of the American Revolution’s leading thinkers, was at best skeptical of any sort of organized religion- especially at the national level: “All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”³⁷

James Madison, although he signed of the Declaration and therefore approved of its theological language, also wrote, “Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise.”³⁸

Perhaps the most eloquent statement that nicely summarizes the general thought of many other leading thinkers of the time comes from, unsurprisingly, Benjamin Franklin:

Here is my Creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we render to him is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another Life respecting its Conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental Principles of all sound Religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever Sect I meet with them.

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting Changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his Divinity; tho’ it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble. I see no harm,

36. John Adams, “John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 December 1813,” December 25, 1813, Founders Online.

37. Thomas Payne, *The Age of Reason* (USHistory.org, 1794).

38. James Madison, “To Mr. William Bradford Junior At the Coffee-House Philadelphia.,” April 1, 1774, Founders Online.

however, in its being believed, if that Belief has the good Consequence, as probably it has, of making his Doctrines more respected and better observed; especially as I do not perceive, that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the Unbelievers in his Government of the World with any peculiar Marks of his Displeasure.

I shall only add, respecting myself, that, having experienced the Goodness of that Being in conducting me prosperously thro' a long life, I have no doubt of its Continuance in the next, though without the smallest Conceit of meriting such Goodness.³⁹

It is obvious that several of the most well-known Founding Fathers saw value in religion in general, and certainly were influenced and shaped by a generic belief in a creator deity. One could even say that many of them appreciated the morality of the Bible and, knowingly or unknowingly, were deeply influenced by it in their thinking. But does that make them, their writings, or their visions “Christian?” According to the Bible, no.

Christian Founding?

It was not a generic belief in a transcendent creator that credited righteousness to Abraham, but his faith, that he *believed God* and his promises (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). The God of the Bible is not a distant transcendent creator who watches human development from afar. The God of the Bible is deeply concerned with and emotionally invested⁴⁰ in what happens in the world

39. Benjamin Franklin, “To Ezra Stiles, With a Statement of His Religious Creed,” March 9, 1790.

40. This is not a claim that God is somehow not transcendent or immutable, but simply acknowledging the anthropomorphic language that God uses to communicate the happenings of his unknowable and unsearchable mind.

(Exodus 2:25). He grieves over sin (Ezekiel 6:6-9), is angered by oppression (Proverbs 6:16-19) and at the same time is infinitely more merciful than one would dare hope (Exodus 34:6-7). Even more antithetical to the idea that God is a remote deity, he attaches himself to, communicates to, and dwells with his people. The god of Thomas Jefferson and those who thought like him is simply not the God of the Bible.

Secondly, what Franklin and those who thought like him failed to understand is this: If Jesus is not true God, he, his ethical system, the Old Testament which he endorses, and the New Testament which invokes his name and power, and all who call upon his name, should be dismissed as fraudulent and useless. Jesus claims divine authority (Matthew 28:18; Mark 2:10) accepts divine worship (John 10:28), claims eternal existence (John 8:58), and most convincingly, rises from the dead (Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–10; Luke 24:1–49; John 20: 1–25). Jesus’s divinity and the validity of his claims are the center of the Christian faith, and if they are not true, then Scripture itself and the Christian faith falls apart (1 Corinthians 15:17). But if they are true they are the most important truths that exist and the very center of human history.⁴¹ Therefore it is deeply illogical to claim that the Bible’s values are good and useful, and that Jesus should be listened to, while at the same time claiming that it doesn’t really matter if what he claimed is actually true.

Yet, Franklin does so. But the point is this: Christianity cannot be boiled down to its ethical system. Just because someone appreciates and adheres to the morals given by God’s Word does not mean that person is a Christian. The Pharisees are proof of this. It is not an

41. C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 100-101.

appreciation for God’s moral system that makes one a Christian, but faith in Jesus as God and Savior from sin (Galatians 3:21,22; Romans 3:21,22).

This is crucial to understand. At the time of her founding, the United States of America was certainly filled with people who at least identified as Christians. Many of the Founding Fathers, even if they aren’t particularly well known, identified as Christians and invoke the name of Jesus as God and Savior. *But does this mean that America as a nation was or can be identified as “Christian?”* According to Jesus, no (John 18:33–38).

A Christian Nation?

Jesus affirms Pilate’s question the day of his Passion. He is a king! But his kingdom is not of this world. If it were, he would command his disciples to fight on his behalf. He would attempt to gain power here on earth. His name would be attached to an earthly government. And wouldn’t now, a time when Jerusalem was controlled by the pagan Romans, be the time to stage a religious coup? If there were ever a time to make a nation “Christian,” would it not have been first century Israel, which had been divinely appointed to be God’s nation (Exodus 6:7)? Yet, Jesus does not attach his name, promises, or power to the nation of Israel, nor does he tell his followers to make his “kingdom come” through means of governmental authority or power. Instead, he tells them to preach the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:18,19). If Jesus never attaches the word “Christian” to a specific nation, neither should his people.⁴²

42. Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 92.

Yearning for a Story

There is a reason so many look with nostalgia to a “Christian” nation with “Christian” founders. The society in which the Christian lives is not home. Something within the human heart looks around in a broken evil world and rightly says, “I don’t belong here (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Humanity often solves this issue with a story to make sense of a world that does not.”⁴³

The Christian Nationalist says, “Our Founders were Christian, and so were we! Now look at us! Look how far we have fallen! To truly find our rest and our home, we must take power, fight the enemy, and be what we used to be.” Yet, history and Scripture are clear. To look with nostalgia to a “Christian” nation with “Christian” founders is to believe a historical lie and place one’s hope in something theologically false. The Christian story tells of a perfect world made by a God of love and friendship, who made humanity and the rest of creation for just that purpose (Genesis 1:28). Yet, humanity failed, and has been hiding from God ever since and has suffered, longing for the perfection and joy of God’s presence— to be home (Genesis 3). As Augustine rightly puts it, “because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.”⁴⁴ In love, God the Son willingly became humanity’s servant, suffered God’s wrath, and rose so that humanity could again enjoy what it was made for: the Garden and in it friendship, unity, and harmony with God and fellow humans (Revelation 22:1-3).

43. This observation is the same made in Paul’s sermon on Mar’s Hill in Acts 17. He points out that they all have their own gods. We know that each deity in the Greek pantheon has some sort of narrative attached explain some fundamental part of human life. Observation shows us that each religion outside of Christianity has its own narrative explain why the world is the way it is.

44. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Translated by Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 1963.), 17.

The Christian story is not defined by principles or ideas, but by the lovingkindness of God himself, and his blood freely shed for the salvation of his enemies so they could be his people. The Christian story does not evoke nostalgia for what once was, but joy and hope as the empty grave serves as a sign of what is to come. The Christian Nationalist says, “This is how it was, and if you do this, it can be this way again!” Jesus says, “This is how it was, and because of what I have done, it will be this way again.”

The Personal Plan of Salvation

Consider the overarching thought of Christian Nationalism. “I am a citizen of a nation that God has chosen, and vice versa. ⁴⁵As a result, God has blessed this country with precious freedoms and bountiful prosperity. However, there are people who wish to take away these precious freedoms. Therefore, I need to fight for my freedoms.” ⁴⁶

Christian Nationalist rhetoric, whether it be political speeches or sermons, share a common salvific message: a call to arms: The American Christian must fight for freedom and for American Christian values!⁴⁷

45. George W. Bush, “President’s Remarks to a Nation” (Ellis Island, New York, New York, 11 September 2002).

46. Lindsey Jensen, “The Decline of Christian Values Is a Danger to America,” *My Faith Votes*, (June 11, 2020).

47. Again, the distinction between using the government to enforce the Christian religion and/or using the Church to enforce civic law must be distinguished from the Christian’s good and appropriate concern for societal morality.

Given the foundational narrative, this makes a great deal of sense. If one works with the assumption that the Founding Fathers, and all who agreed with them, were Christian men founding a Christian nation by fighting a Christian war against the English oppressors, then the idea of “fighting” for freedoms against the “evil” oppressor fits squarely into this framework. Yet, questions arise. Who should do the fighting, and where? What kind of fight is this? And if American Christians are to fight, who is the enemy, and what is the threat of said enemies?

The Enemy and Its Threat.

In several speeches given during 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis often ended his speeches with this cohortative appeal:

So, what I’ll tell you for 2022: Get ready for Battle. Put on the full armor of God. Take a stand against the Left’s schemes. Stand firm with the belt of truth buckled around your waist! You will face flaming arrows, but the shield of faith will protect you. And so, in 2022, I think this November will be the time when America fought back.⁴⁸

It may be obvious, but DeSantis is quoting *nearly* word-for-word the apostle Paul’s famous “Armor of God” section of Ephesians 5. *Nearly*. Paul speaks about the schemes of the Devil, and his flaming arrows that he uses to hurt God’s people. But DeSantis replaces Satan with “the Left,” or the Democratic party.

This is unbelievably brazened for several reasons. Firstly, DeSantis is equating his political opponents to the Devil. More subtly, DeSantis is making a statement that defines the

48. Ron DeSantis, *Ron DeSantis Addresses CPAC 2022* (Orlando Florida, 2022).

Christian Nationalist movement: The “Left” is the enemy, and to fight against them is to fight for God. A bit sharper are the words of Pastor Greg Locke:

You cannot be a Christian and vote Democrat in this nation. I don't care how mad that makes you. You can get as pissed off as you want to. You cannot be a Christian and vote Democrat in this nation. They are God-denying demons that butcher babies and hate this nation.⁴⁹

The point is clear. Leftist politicians, especially ones who advocate for abortion rights, same-sex marriage, trans rights, and defunding the police are the enemy must be defeated. But how?

As stated before, this is precisely what makes a balanced, nuanced, helpful discussion about Christian Nationalism so difficult. Bible-believing Christians share many of the same concerns with those who peddle and embrace this teaching. But as one will be able to see, the solution to these concerns offered by Christian Nationalism is radically different than what the Bible teaches.

“Fight for Freedom!”

After his victory in the Pennsylvania Republican Gubernatorial primaries, Doug Mastriano, an accomplished soldier and scholar, began his speech: “God is good. All the Time. All the time. God is good... 1 Corinthians 1:27 gives us all hope, God uses the foolish to confound the wise

49. Greg Locke, “The Kingdom Life” (Sermon presented at the Global Vision Bible Church Sunday Service, Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, 15 May 2022).

and the weak to confound the strong... And he uses people like you and me to change history. I like to say that when we make His story, our story, we can change history.”⁵⁰

With or without knowing it, Mastriano subtly displays the way of salvation offered by Christian Nationalism: Vote for the right people. The way Mastriano puts it, if Pennsylvania voters “choose this day to serve the Lord” by voting for him and his conservative principles, thereby making “God’s story” their story, they can make history. They can change the downward direction of the country which they love so deeply. They can turn America back toward God. They can put a stop to the evil agenda of the Left. They can, by voting for the right people, save themselves by saving their country, but there is more than that. According to the Christian Nationalist, the Left does not simply threaten the success and prosperity of the United States with their morally vacuous principles and ideas. They threaten freedom itself- the fundamental cornerstone on which Christian Nationalist dogma rests.

It is in the definition of and the desire for freedom where Jefferson and other founders were likely more influenced by John Locke and Enlightenment Humanism than the Bible.⁵¹ Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, provides a helpful insight into the thinking of his day:

Political freedom includes in it every other blessing. All the pleasures of riches, science, virtue, and even religion itself derive their value from liberty alone. No wonder therefore wise and prudent legislators have in all ages been held in such great veneration; and no wonder too those illustrious souls who have employed their pens and sacrificed their lives in defense of liberty have met with such universal applause. Their reputations, like some

50. Doug Mastriano, *Acceptance Speech*, May 7th, 2022.

51. Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 101.

majestic river which enlarges and widens as it approaches its parent ocean, shall become greater and greater through every age and outlive the ruins of the world itself.⁵²

Clothed in articulate verbiage is this essential idea shared by the founders: “Freedom is the highest virtue, and without it, society itself will devolve.” Yet what kind of freedom is being discussed? Thomas Jefferson’s answer: “Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law' because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual.”⁵³

Again, sheathed in eloquence, is freedom’s basic definition: “Freedom means that I can do whatever it is that I desire as long it does not inhibit your individual freedom to do whatever you desire.” It sounds good, and an increasing number of politically conservative Americans are prioritizing this in their personal belief systems.⁵⁴ One can see this in the major talking points of Christian Nationalists, evident in Doug Mastriano’s speech:

This is infectious. Everyone wants to walk and live as free men and women, right? So, our number one goal is, first, is to restore freedom. So, on day one all (vaccine) mandates are gone. On day one, any jab for job requirements are gone. On day one I’ll be happy to reinstate any national guard member who was kicked out for a jab for job requirement... The people of Pennsylvania are tired of being trodden upon... So, on day one we are reaffirming parental rights. In this Pennsylvania here you are going to walk as free men and women and live in joy and peace and prosperity. You’re going to walk in freedom.⁵⁵

52. Benjamin Rush, “To Catherin Macaulay,” January 18, 1769.

53. Thomas Jefferson, “Thomas Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, 4 April 1819,” April 4, 1819.

54. Patrick Van Kessel and Laura Silver, “Where Americans Find Meaning in Life Has Changed over the Past Four Years,” *Pew Research*, 18 November 2021.

55. Doug Mastriano, *Acceptance Speech*, May 7, 2022.

This of course is the same speech where Mastriano urged his people to “choose this day to serve the Lord” and support his candidacy with money, voice, and votes. The message of salvation is clear: Freedom, the liberty to do what you like, be who you are, raise your children with your values, and prosper without the government’s greedy paws on your wealth, is your salvation, and you must fight for it.

A Better Freedom

This particular issue of freedom may be an area where gospel-centered Lutherans may be easily confused. Anyone who reads Luther, especially his most famous works, can see that the concept of “freedom versus bondage” is one of Luther’s favorite ways to communicate the free Gospel of Jesus Christ in opposition to the Catholic Church! Luther would often sign his writings with the word ἐλεύθερος– “Free Man!” This is likely what caused his name to be spelled consistently as “Luther,” as opposed to “Luder.”⁵⁶ He was passionate about freedom, and so are we!

But Luther’s concept of freedom, the biblical concept of freedom, is radically different from the Jeffersonian, American concept of freedom for this reason: American freedom is primarily a freedom *from* restraint and a freedom to do whatever pleases *me*. Christian freedom is a freedom *from* my own selfish destructive will and a freedom *to* love what God loves.

56. Michael Blachem, “Luder-Elleutherios-Luther: What’s in a Name,” *Academia*, (2013).

American freedom works under the assumption that when the average person is given freedom, he or she will make the right, productive, benevolent choice. It assumes that when disaster or misfortune strikes, others who are more fortunate will help if given the freedom to do so. It assumes that when unlimited and unbothered by governmental restriction, the rich and powerful will make decisions that help those who are not. As history has clearly shown, oppression and destruction are not always the result of a lack of freedom and resources, as Enlightenment era thinkers like David Hume, and those influenced by him, presume.⁵⁷ One can find, even in American history, examples of horrid evil enacted not by governmental decree, but by wealthy businessmen, whose evil actions were caused by neither restriction nor necessity. One sees this in the African Slave Trade, or the unfair wages and unsafe working conditions forced upon the impoverished during the rise of American industries. Human evil is often enhanced, not healed, by unrestricted freedom.

Jesus, seer of the human heart, dismantles any hope of inherent human goodness and affirms what history has proven. What makes a person unclean, according to Jesus, (murderous thoughts, evil actions, and immorality), is not what is on the outside, but on the inside. In fact, the human heart itself is the very source of oppression, murder, lies, and all evil (Matthew 15:19). In short, human freedom could never be the solution to human oppression because humans are the problem. Therefore, the Christian who understands and believes the very words of Christ, both from his own mouth and through the mouth of his inspired writers (Romans 5:12: Psalm 51:5: Jeremiah 17:9: Job 15:14: Genesis 8:21) must be fundamentally and completely

57. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Charles Hendel (Indianapolis: The Bobby-Merrill Company, 155), 112.

opposed to the American notion of freedom for its own sake for that reason alone. Limitless freedom, freedom to be and do what the individual desires, which is evil, according to Scripture is not freedom at all. It is slavery in its purest, most sinister, and oppressive form (John 8:34).

True freedom, according to Scripture, is not freedom from all limits, but freedom from the righteous condemnation God reserves from sinners and servitude to Christ (Romans 6:18). True freedom, therefore, is not the ability to do what one desires, but to desire what God desires. The biblical concept of freedom is not an individualized *laissez-faire* policy toward human behavior. Biblical freedom is realized when a person is reconciled to God as the Holy Spirit enters the heart, enabling the Christian to serve God and neighbor in love instead of in fear or greed under the yoke of slavery to the Law (Galatians 5:1). Christianity offers true freedom: not only freedom from guilt, fear, and eternal death, but freedom to live as the Creator intended. Freedom is not found in limitless, unrestricted word and action, but in sincere love and service to one's neighbor. As Luther describes: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."⁵⁸

To be clear, this does not give the Christian the right to despise the benefits that may come from living in a country in which this secular, humanistic freedom is the governing principle. There are many blessings and advantages. The point is that Christians should not confuse the two different freedoms, nor should they idolize the earthly freedom as a principle that solves humanity's deepest problems.

58. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, American Edition, Vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–1986), 277.

A Fight for Values

Perhaps where Christian Nationalists make their greatest connections with mainstream, conservative Christianity is in this issue: Morality, and biblical morality at that. Consider this statement by Georgia congresswoman Marjorie Taylor-Greene:

I'm a Christian Nationalist. I have nothing to be ashamed of because that's what most Americans are. We're proud of our faith. We're proud of our faith and we love our country. And that will make America great again- when we lean into our biblical principles... Is there anything wrong with loving God and loving others? No. And when we lean in and the Republican party is the party that serves America and Americans first, then we really will win and the Democrats will not destroy our country, so I don't back down from those comments, but I denounced the lying media for what they've said.⁵⁹

Notice the subtle connection between faith in God, Christian morals, and the prosperity of the United States. Christian Nationalism is at its root deeply and fundamentally moral in its rhetoric, replacing terms like “conservative” and “liberal” with “good” and “evil.” Yet, the biblical morals that it emphasizes tend to be a bit selective.

Abortion and the sanctity of unborn life is a major talking point in Christian Nationalist rhetoric, being at least mentioned in virtually all speeches and sermons. This is one of the foundational issues, Roe v. Wade being one of the catalysts of the creation of the “Religious Right” movement, an older version of and a predecessor of today’s Christian Nationalism.

Others would include vaccination mandates, governmental corruption among Democrats, rights to carry firearms, and others.⁶⁰ While some are biblical, others are not. Yet they all share

59. Marjorie Taylor-Greene, *Marjorie Taylor-Green Speaks at CPAC* (Dallas, 2022).

60. An example of this will be shown later.

this, they must be embraced, honored, reclaimed, and fought for if God is to continue to choose the United States as his chosen, special nation.

This in particular is where Christian Nationalism veers off from biblical Christianity and proves itself to be an entirely religion altogether: Christian Nationalism in its basic form is unapologetically, unwaveringly, and unmistakably void of God's grace. It is entirely legalistic, moralistic, and law oriented. It is Christianity completely void of the Gospel, and therefore, a different religion entirely (Galatians 1:6–9).

God Does not Attach his Spiritual Blessings to the Law.

There are only two religions in the world: the religion of works, and the religion of grace;⁶¹ And only one is true! Before one can write against the legalistic nature of Christian Nationalism, the righteousness of God must be affirmed. Yes, God is passionate about justice, truth, and goodness, and hates all that is evil (Psalm 47:5) and calls his people to be the same.

Yet God in love has promised forgiveness and righteousness to every sinner who places his or her trust in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus (Romans 3:23). The God of the Bible is so just that he must punish evildoers, and therefore all people. And yet the Father punished the Son in the place of all sinners so that sinners may be honored as God's perfect people, which then means that Christians are neither enslaved to the Law of God, nor are they indifferent about the Law of God (Romans 2:31).

61. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 10.

The Gospel has vivid and real applications that speak to the way Christians consider the righteous nature of a nation's laws. God is passionate about justice. Christians should be too. Yet, the Law simply does not change the fallen human heart, and it certainly will not change the human heart to be good enough for God's righteous standard, even if it passes the human "eye-test" (Romans 3:20).

Again, Christians are not opposed, but vehemently support civic righteousness and work for it in their vocations. Christian Nationalism is different. Christian Nationalism teaches that the human heart can be changed by the Law, and it appeals to the very real and natural desire in the Christian heart for a society which reflects the Law and morality of God.⁶² The underlying assumption of Christian Nationalist thought is that a person, even a whole society, can become good if the laws are good and this will gain God's favor.⁶³

This is, quite literally, theologically, and anthropologically backwards. Every human heart is inherently evil and hostile to God (Romans 8:7) and can only be changed, reformed, and in a sense⁶⁴ replaced by God himself (Ezekiel 36:26) by the renewal and entrance of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8). The Holy Spirit works through and in connection with the Gospel (Galatians 3:2) of Christ crucified. In other words, the inner change of the human heart does not come through the preaching and enforcing of the Law, but through the preaching of the free Gospel of Christ! This means that laws, while good, useful, and necessary for a functioning society, and

62. James Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.

63. Beverley LaHaye, "How Christians Make an Impact on Their Government," in *Citizen Christians: The Rights and Responsibilities of Dual Citizenship*, ed. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 2-6.

64. This is said to avoid any kind of Flaccian error.

one of the ways that God governs and protects his people on earth, cannot and will not do what the Gospel can do. Only God can produce the righteousness that he desires within a human being, and he does this through the Gospel, not the Law. Christian Nationalism is biblically false not because it advocates for civic righteousness, but because it expects from the Law of God, enforced by governmental power, the personal change that only comes through the Gospel.

Christian Nationalist Moralism Falls Short of Biblical Morality.

As said before, Christian Nationalist rhetoric focuses heavily on abortion, marriage and family issues, and issues regarding to freedom from government such as gun rights, vaccination requirements, and election fraud. The issue of the lesser view of freedom and its effect on morality has been discussed, but more issues remain.

Of course, the Bible is abundantly clear: ending the life of an unborn child is murder because an unborn child is alive and dearly loved by his or her creator (Psalm 51:5–6). Of course, marriage is to be enjoyed by one man and one woman (Proverbs 5:15–20) and all sexual activity outside of this union is therefore sinful. But God has much more to say!⁶⁵

The following moral criticism will be general in nature, but it is based on extensive observation and applies to the general norm of Christian Nationalist rhetoric. Firstly, Christian Nationalism has little to no room for the immigrant, the refugee, or those who come into this

65. Again, while it is true that many conservative politicians and theologians personally fail to live up to the moral standards they endorse, to use this fact as an argument against Christian Nationalism would be logically fallacious-, ad hominem to be exact.

country and are not immediately willing to assimilate to American culture. Studies show that those who embrace Christian Nationalist principles tend to be more prone to negative feelings toward immigrants⁶⁶ and this reflects nationalistic views in Europe as well.⁶⁷ It makes sense. When allegiance to a country is held up as a religious tenet, those who are outsiders will be looked upon with suspicion and disdain because they and their cultural differences are a threat to the national identity.

A glaring example of this is Ron DeSantis's actions concerning Venezuelan immigrants in San Antonio in September 2022. DeSantis used taxpayer money to transport hundreds of immigrants to Martha's Vineyard, a small town in Massachusetts known for its politically liberal-leaning citizens who harshly (and hypocritically) criticize conservative politicians for their immigration policies.⁶⁸ DeSantis quotes the Bible and advocates for biblical values, but his treatment of immigrants, using them as political pawns by dumping them onto cities run by Democrats, is antithetical to the clear command of God, which is *to love* one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39).

Other specific examples exist, but for the sake of the scope of this research, an observation of Christian Nationalism in general will have to do: Christian Nationalism does not value or communicate the Bible's central virtue: love (Matthew 5:43–44; 22:35–40). "Put

66. Samuel Stroope, Heather M. Rackin, and Paul Froese, "Christian Nationalism and Views of Immigrants in the United States: Is the Relationship Stronger for the Religiously," *American Sociological Association* (2021): 1–14.

67. "Attitudes of Christians in Western Europe," *Pew Research Center*, 29 May 2018.

68. Erum Salam, "Ron DeSantis Investigated over Migrant Transfer from Texas to Martha's Vineyard," *The Guardian*, 12 October 2022.

simply, Christian Nationalism does not encourage high moral standards or value self-sacrifice, peace, mercy, love, justice...”⁶⁹ This truth is seen most clearly in the way Christian Nationalist communicators deal with their opponents. Christian Nationalism has little time for those who disagree, and is completely uninterested in listening to, or even converting its opponents.

The Left is often criticized for demonizing its political opponents as bigots, oppressors, and holding themselves up as those on the right side of history, and rightly so.⁷⁰ But Christian Nationalism does the same thing, as seen before with the likes of DeSantis, Lock, and many more. Even an intellectual like Stephen Wolfe,⁷¹ whose demeanor is much more calm, cool, and

69. Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back For God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 84.

70. Joseph Pearce, “Demonizing the Enemy: The New Tyranny of Irrational Discourse,” *The Imaginative Conservative*, 12 December 2016.

71. Here is an appropriate point in the paper to briefly address Stephen Wolfe in particular. His brand of Christian Nationalism is somewhat distinct. Wolfe, a self-proclaimed Calvinist, proposes that since every nation needs a common cultural ethic in order to be prosperous and strong, and because the Bible is God’s own ethical system, America’s systems and government and culture should all be governed by the Bible’s ethical system. He himself admits that his convictions are not the result of careful biblical exegesis, but political philosophy because he is not a theologian, but a political philosopher. Therefore, his concern is not that souls be saved, but that his country thrive.

It is for that reason that a thorough study of his work is beyond the scope of this paper. He is not taking passages from Scripture and twisting them to say what he wants them to say. His assertion is simply, “Every country has a uniting cultural value system, and so do we. Ours should be Christianity.” He is not an American Exceptionalist, nor does he believe that civil law can change a heart toward Christ. That is completely beyond his concern.

If one had to respond to his claims, perhaps a good place to begin would be this: Scripture is not meant to be used as an expansive code to govern a nation. The Bible certainly speaks volumes on public life and is useful to those in power, but that is not the main use of Scripture. Also, his conclusions are a bit concerning.

According to Wolfe, because America is meant to be a sovereign nation, and because its cultural distinction from other nations is vital to its health, he would be openly against any immigration in this country, even if those immigrants are Christian. Again, his concern is not saving souls, but maintaining national and cultural distinctiveness. According to Wolfe, the Judeo-Christian ethic handed down through the Western tradition is key to this. Wolfe’s claims deserve a paper of their own.

open than most, does so not to convert others to his side but to recruit those who are already conservative Christians!⁷² Tim Keller rightly sums up their position regarding their opponents: “They are evil—what does their opinion matter? Sure, they hate you—just hate them right back. Own the libs.”⁷³

Even if American values and biblical values were synonymous, and the answer to America’s issues was a government enforcing and endorsing Christianity, wouldn’t the proper way to communicate these values be to show an equal amount of love with this truth (Ephesians 4:15)?

A Beautiful Truth that Confounds Even the Experts.

In their research, Perry and Whitehead make a surprising, not so surprising discovery: When it comes to politics, Christian Nationalism and religious commitment are not the same. In response to the questions, “Refugees from the Middle East pose a terrorist threat to the U.S.” and “People should be made to show respect for America’s traditions.” Christian Nationalists, of course, strongly agreed.⁷⁴

72. Steven Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 2022), 10–20.

73. Timothy Keller, “Tim Keller Reviews a Book on Christian Nationalism,” *Gospel in Life* (2021).

74. Perry and Whitehead, *Taking America*, 84.

But they also note “as Americans become more religious in terms of attendance, prayer, and Scripture reading, they move in the opposite direction on these issues”.⁷⁵ Perry and Whitehead prove that the more devout the Christian is, the less inclined he or she is to embrace xenophobia, racism, or intense nationalistic pride!

What is more surprising to Perry and Whitehead, however, is this: “increasing levels of personal religiosity result in more conservative attitudes toward sexuality, gender and divorce.”⁷⁶

Americans who are more devout in their Christianity “are less likely to ostracize immigrants, less likely to espouse anti-Black prejudice or fear Muslims. Perry and Whitehead expected, then, that they would also be less likely to oppose gay marriage, transgender rights, and divorce. Here, however, they find the opposite. As Americans exhibit higher levels of religious commitment ... they are more likely to desire more traditional roles in the home, oppose same-sex marriage and transgender rights, or have more negative views of divorce.”⁷⁷

Admittedly, Perry and Whitehead began their studies assuming that as Christians reject Christian Nationalist tendencies of racism, xenophobia, and disdain for the impoverished, they would also be more accepting of homosexuality, divorce, and transgender theory. But they are not!

This, of course, should not surprise Christians because the Bible speaks clearly about all these issues. *The Bible simply does not fit within conservative or liberal moral ideals.* The Bible affirms traditional family values (Malachi 2:16; Genesis 2:21–24), life within the womb (Psalm

75. Perry and Whitehead, *Taking America*, 84.

76. Perry and Whitehead, *Taking America*, 143.

77. Perry and Whitehead, *Taking America*, 142.

51:5), and at the same time requires advocating for the poor (Proverbs 31:8-9), loving the refugee (Deuteronomy 10:19) and sacrificing wealth for the sake of others (Deuteronomy 15:11, James 4:14–17).

The truth of the matter is that Christian Nationalism is not a product of historically Christian teaching gone wrong; it simply does not stem from biblical teaching.⁷⁸ It is a political ideology clothed in Christian language, taking specific passages out of context to endorse something entirely unbiblical.

The solution, then, to this toxic Conservatism is not political Liberalism, but teaching and embracing the Word of God, as it has been from the beginning (2 Timothy 3:6–7).

Christian America: A Teleological Vision

What then is the goal of Christian Nationalism? Contrary to the impression given by the likes of Michael Flynn,⁷⁹ it is not any kind of theocracy. Andrew Torba, founder of *Gab*, a social media platform specifically for those who have been targeted, maligned, and rejected by “big tech” platforms, co-authored a short book with Minnesota pastor Andrew Isker which provides an important insight into the Christian Nationalist movement. Consider these statements:

The people who believe that the Christian Nationalism movement is merely political are missing the bigger picture. Christians are absolutely missing the bigger picture. Christians are absolutely going to get active in the political discourse and we will elect Christian candidates who boldly share our values and proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ, but that is only a small focus of this movement. We fully understand that the arena

78. Perry and Whitehead, *Taking America*, 84.

79. Peter Wehner, “The Desecrations of Michael Flynn,” *The Atlantic*, 25 October 2022.

of politics is so corrupted and controlled by money- in particular, the money of our enemies- that we know where our true focus must be.

This movement is spiritual first and foremost. We must reform, repent, and bring our own hearts into focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we must reclaim our family and point them to Christ too. The family is the backbone of any nation and thus it is also the backbone of Christian Nationalism built on the foundation of Christ... We can and must reclaim and maintain our townships, school boards, and countries. Then our state legislatures. Then the entire nation. In order to do so we must exit the beast system completely and build our own parallel Christian society, lying in wait for their system to collapse which is when the Godly infrastructure we have built will fill the vacuum. We must support, start, and grow Christian-owned businesses. We must stop using the technology tools of the enemy and start building and using our own.⁸⁰

To be clear, the views held by Torba and his following are not to be assumed with all, or even most who embrace Christian Nationalism's teachings. The purpose of his book, *A Biblical Guide To Taking Dominion and Disciplining Nations*, is to awaken American Christians from their spiritualistic slumber and to follow Christ's Great Commission; which they interpret as, quite literally, discipling entire nations through governmental means into submission to Jesus's moral code and thus spreading Christ's dominion and authority (which already has been given to him) over the earth.⁸¹

Again, lumping all those who embrace Christian Nationalism with Torba and Isker's specific vision and solution to America's problems would be unfair and inaccurate. But they provide important insights into the overall τέλος of Christian Nationalism: it is not *just* political power- and this may be where different branches of Christian Nationalism diverge. To get into every single rabbit hole is far beyond the scope of this research, but they mostly share this vision:

80. Andrew Torba and Andrew Isker, *A Biblical Guide to Taking Dominion and Disciplining Nations* (Clark's Summit, Pennsylvania: Gab AI, 2022),53-54.

81. Andrew Torba and Andrew Isker, *A Biblical Guide*, 3.

To have an American society in which Christian values are respected, embraced, and endorsed by the government.

Is This Really What We Want?

In a few ways, the nation of Denmark in which Soren Kierkegaard lived resembled the goal of Christian Nationalism. Christianity, particularly Lutheranism, was endorsed and even mandated by her government. Sure, there are differences between Denmark's system and what Christian Nationalism teaches, but the basic idea was there. The government was Christian! Christian laws were enforced. Denmark was a Christian nation—in fact, to be Danish was to be Lutheran! One would expect, if operating under the assumptions of Christian Nationalism, that society would at least look Christian, and Christ would reign in the hearts of more people than in a secular state. Consider the words of Kierkegaard:

We are what is called a "Christian" nation-but in such a sense that not a single one of us is in the character of the Christianity of the New Testament, any more than I am, who again and again have repeated, and do now repeat, that I am only a poet. The illusion of a Christian nation is due doubtless to the power which number exercises over the imagination. I have not the least doubt that every single individual in the nation will be honest enough with God and with himself to say in solitary conversation, "If I must be candid, I do not deny that I am not a Christian in the New Testament sense; if must be honest, I do not deny that my life cannot be called an effort in the direction of what the New Testament calls Christianity, in the direction of denying myself, renouncing the world, dying from it, etc.; rather the earthly and the temporal become more and more important to me with every year I live." I have not the least doubt that everyone will, with respect to ten of his acquaintances. let us say, be able to hold fast to the view that they are not Christians in the New Testament sense, and that their lives are not even an effort in the direction of becoming so.⁸²

82. Soren Kierkegaard, "Attack Upon Christendom," in *A Documentary History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 304.

It wasn't working. Although Denmark was a Christian nation and the Lutheran faith was certainly given preferential treatment in the public square, it was apparent that people were neither Christian in their religious convictions, nor in their personal conduct.

This, along with the empty churches and secular societies of Denmark, France, England, Germany, Italy, and other European countries in which Christianity was endorsed and enforced by the government, should serve as a warning to American Christians: it doesn't work. One cannot make a nation truly "Christian," and the attempt to do so does untold damage to both the Church and the State.⁸³

Christian Nationalism is Idolatry at Best and Sacrilege at Worst

In the months leading up to the 2022 Midterm Elections, a strange, disturbing phenomenon swept the nation. The *Reawaken America Tour* toured throughout the country, headlining the likes of Eric Trump, General Michael Flynn, numerous Christian pastors, and a variety of nurses, doctors, businessmen, comedians, and others.⁸⁴

In short, the sessions of this tour have the trappings of an Evangelical worship service. Most sessions are held in a church. Religious leaders lead prayer and give sermons. Christian hymns are sung along with the National Anthem and various patriotic songs. But sprinkled in

83. Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 94.

84. "Reawaken America Tour Lineup, Branson Missouri," *The Thrive Time Show*, n.d.

with apparent theological content is a heavy dose of not-so-theological content. For example, here are some scheduled events of the session held in Branson, Missouri on November 4, 2022:

8:25 AM – 8:35 AM – Opening Prayer by Dave Scarlett of HIS Glory Ministries and Amanda Grace of Ark of Grace Ministries

8:35 AM – 8:40 AM – Aiyah Kelly Sings the National Anthem

8:40 AM – 9:00 AM – Praise and Worship Provided by Influence Music

9:00 AM – 9:15 AM – Lori Gregory – The Power of Film | How to Fight Back Against Mandated Vaccination

10:00 AM – 10:15 AM – Stella Immanuel | Why We Cannot Win a Spiritual Battle with Strictly Political Actions

10:30 AM – 11:00 AM – Mike Lindell | Why We Must Expose Election Fraud and Get America Back to God

12:15 PM – 12:30 PM – Seth Keshel | How to Restore Integrity to Our Election Process

1:15 PM – 1:30 PM – Marty Grisham | A Prayer for Those Have Been Deceived the Narrative of COVID-19 / The Great Reset

2:10 PM – 2:30 PM – Amanda Grace | Why Now Is Time to Preach and Teach This Gospel All Around the World for HIS Glory

3:00 PM – 3:05 – Deneen Thomas | Revival Is HERE!!!

2:30 PM – 2:45 PM – Pastor Brian Gibson | Why It's Time for Lions and Not Sheep

3:05 PM – 3:35 PM – Eric Trump | Why the Trump Family Has Committed Their Time, Treasure and Talents to Save This Great American Republic

3:40 PM – 4:00 PM – General Flynn | Why Now Is the Time to Act without Fear and Hesitation to Save This God-Given Republic

5:00 PM – 6:00 PM – Baptisms Hosted by HIS Glory Ministries and the ReAwaken America Tour Meet and Greet Hosted by the Flyover Conservatives⁸⁵

85. "Reawaken America Tour Lineup, Branson Missouri," *The Thrive Time Show*, n.d.

It is the opinion of this writer that this event, and ones like it, are one of the most vivid and alarming expressions of Christian Nationalism. One can see why. This event is quite literally a worship service in which the United States of America is the subject of worship, and specific truths about the country are being preached, sung, and celebrated. The distinct doctrines are apparent in the titles. America is God's chosen country, and it must be claimed back from God's enemies through bold deliberate action – and not just in the political realm! It is God's will that America be on top. It is an "America-above-all" teaching disguised in Christian garb.

Obviously, as shown throughout the course of this thesis, to attach God's will to the success of any particular nation, especially this one, is completely unbiblical. To attach God's will to the success and power of the United States is nothing short of molding God to fit a human desire. It is to create an entirely new and false god. It is idolatry. And to scantily dress America-worship as a divine worship of Christ and to place it aside the holy sacrament of Baptism is nothing short of sacrilege.

Another shocking example comes from Arizona, in which supporters of Republican gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake reenacted Joshua's march around Jericho, except this battle march was around the Maricopa voting center. Reports show that *Awesome God* by Rich Mullins was the anthem sung by the protestors.⁸⁶ Arizona state representative John Fillmore, who was at the demonstration, had this to say: "We're very concerned, our country [is] being turned upside down. The fact of the matter is, is that there's a lot of reason for us to be concerned."⁸⁷

86. Jason Lemon, "Kari Lake Supporters Reenact Biblical Battle of Jericho in Maricopa Protest," *Newsweek*, November 13, 2022.

87. Jason Lemon, *Newsweek*.

Yet, much of the idolatry seen in Christian Nationalism is not so blatantly obvious. It may be extremely subtle, especially when held by otherwise orthodox and Gospel-oriented Christians. Doug Wilson, a popular Presbyterian theologian who has amassed a large following on YouTube, must be brought into the conversation. His video *A Brief Scattershot Primer on Christian Nationalism* serves as a helpful guide on what some moderate Christian Nationalists may believe. He states that Christian Nationalism is not synonymous with American Exceptionalism, and that America is *not* God's chosen nation simply because it was and will be a Christian Nation. He even states that all who make an idol of their country should repent!⁸⁸ But what he does not realize is that in advocating for Christian rulers, Christian laws, a Christian society, Christian dominion in this, and other countries, he is advocating a type of dominion that God does not promise to his people, and a means that God does not use to advance his kingdom. He is testing God. Wilson's teleological vision is thus stated: "If we succeed, this will not be Christian America. If we succeed, this will be Christian America 2.0."⁸⁹

It is in this statement that we see the subtle idolatry. Worship not of a specific nation for its own sake, but investing one's trust, hope, effort into a vision that God does not condone or promise. This could be said regarding Christians who put their hope in anything that God doesn't promise, whether it be specific miracles, prophecies, or physical blessings.⁹⁰ While Wilson and

88. Doug Wilson, *A Brief Scattershot Primer on Christian Nationalism*, Blog and Mablog, September 12, 2022.

89. Doug Wilson, *A Brief Scattershot Primer*

90. An observation that can and should be made is that certain charismatic church leaders who encourage their listeners to place their hope in material blessings, tongues, spiritual revival, and miracles that God has not promised also are the ones promoting false hope in the "Christian Nation" vision. Specific examples are Kenneth Copeland and Dutch Sheets. Again, this does not mean that God does not promise temporal blessings to civic righteousness.

those like him may quote the Great Commission and Isaiah 40:15 (“Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust”) to endorse the idea of spreading Christ’s dominion for him through means of human power, nowhere in Scripture does one get the idea that part of Jesus’ τέλος is that specific nations and their governments be the means through which disciples are made, or that a “nation” would be discipled in the first place! If not even Israel could be discipled into being a godly nation, why would any nation be? Yet, the ultimate issue with Christian Nationalism is that its teleological vision expects and demands less than –not more than – the vision that God promises his people. Christian Nationalism is a religion that settles for less.

Christian Nationalism looks not to the skies for Jesus’ coming, but toward humanity. In the case of Colorado congresswoman Lauren Boebert who famously told members of the Knox County Republicans that they were “part of the second coming of Christ,”⁹¹ we see this quite literally. It finds ultimate hope and comfort not in the new heavens and new earth, but in a new society set in the old one as if that were the extent of God’s plan for a fallen humanity or if that were the prerequisite for his Second Coming. It settles. It settles for a fraction of what God has to offer.

God does not promise a Christian society in which his people thrive in context of a broken world. It may sound good, but the fundamental human problem of sin would still exist. Death would still exist. Jealousy, pain, and evil would still exist in this world. God doesn’t promise this. He promises a renewed and regenerate society and culture where the evil that

91. Maya Yang, “Boebert Tells Republican Dinner Guests They’re Part of ‘Second Coming of Jesus,’” *The Guardian*, October 22, 2022.

Christian Nationalists rightly hate and the evil that they may be blind to, is a thing of the past; where human tragedy, violence, oppression, and conflict no longer exist (Isaiah 65:17-25). The beauty of Scripture is that it not only dismantles the claims of Christian Nationalism, but that it simultaneously affirms the desires of its followers. The Christian Nationalist, along with the Christian, sees a world that doesn't reflect God's value system, and they are rightly troubled! But the God of Christian Nationalism is far too small and not nearly as generous as the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible will not settle for anything less than the perfection of Eden itself, and promises nothing less than his very presence where nations and kings honor him fully and the fundamental issue of human sin is finally and fully forgotten (Revelation 21:24-27).

Do Not Fear

Fear is certainly a powerful motivator, and it can cause otherwise normal people to do, say, and believe almost anything. Both on the level of popular political/religious discourse, and in the realm of scholarship, Christian Nationalism separates itself from authentic Christianity for this reason: Christian Nationalism is a religion motivated by fear of what may be, not by hope of what will be.

Dr. James Dobson, evangelical author and founder of Focus on the Family, provides an eye-opening statement:

“If we fail at this moment of destiny, we will become a secularized nation like Canada or the continent of Europe, whose laws are based on secular humanism, or worse, on postmodernism, which holds that there is no truth, no basic right or wrong, nothing good

or bad, nothing evil or noble, nothing moral or immoral. Law then will be a whimsical standard that shifts with the sands of time.”⁹²

To be clear, the specific concern for the natural concern for moral decline is not the issue, but the appeal to fear. If good Christian people do not act, they will lose their country! Even those who may not buy into all the fear mongering of many politicians and pastors hoping for a few votes or donation dollars still seem to have this mindset: “Well, Christian Nationalism is better than Secular Nationalism, Globalism, or whatever else may be in its place.”⁹³ In other words, a nation will be ruled by someone, and its laws and culture will always reflect something; Why not Christians and Christian ethics? This more nuanced view, however, still stems from a fear of what may be, albeit subtly.

Paul’s rhetorical question to the Romans should be considered by all of us who are tempted to fear a world that doesn’t acknowledge Christ: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ” (Romans 8:35)? As Paul spoke to Romans living under an Emperor exponentially less moral than anyone in America’s current regime, he tells them that nothing, neither persecution, famine, sword, or anything Satan could throw at them would ever pull them from Christ’s love or take away what Christ has determined to give them. Yes! The government does not reflect Christian morals. Neither did Paul’s! And Paul did not feel the need to have the government

92. James Dobson, “Restoring the Foundations: Repealing Judicial Tyranny,” *Family.org*. November 12, 2004.

93. Allie Stuckey and Voddie Baucham, “*Christian Nationalism*” *Sure Beats Progressive Globalism*, *Relatable*, October 24, 2022. While both Baucham and Stuckey seem to reject the Christian Nationalist *mythos* and way of salvation (both are Christians and provide useful theological content), they both admit that as ugly as Christian Nationalism may sound, it would be more conducive to human flourishing to have Christians in charge than radical secularists.

perfectly reflect biblical ethics. The Roman society in which the Church was born was not Christian! And yet, God used this government to administer justice (Romans 13:1-5), and he used Paul to spread the Gospel regardless.

Paul shows that because the Gospel is true, Christians should not act in fear of what may happen if their world doesn't reflect their worldview. They should rejoice that Christ is theirs and face an ungodly world with poise and courage. They should let hope, patience, and joy be their default mode (Romans 12:12) because what God has in store is infinitely more precious and lasting than anything this world has to offer (Romans 8:18) – even if it is “Christian.”

Concluding Thoughts: What, Then, Shall We Do?

Admittedly, Christian Nationalism is a difficult topic for many reasons. It is ever evolving, likely making this paper dated by the time it is presented. It involves topics and ideas that evoke strong emotions that make any discourse with objectivity and fairness difficult. But what it is not, is ignorable. Here are two important things for God-fearing Christians to keep in mind when studying or discussing Christian Nationalism.

This Is Not Just a Conservative issue.

The goal of this thesis is not to give the impression that politically right-leaning Christians are the only ones at risk of or prone to falling into the idolatry of putting undue trust in “princes” (Psalm 146:3). Even those on the Left have observed that the Left's constant obsessive

demonizing of President Trump is, in a sense, equally as idolatrous as the Right's mythologizing of him.⁹⁴

Eddie Glaude, a political commentator for MSNBC, was brought to tears on the eve of Joe Biden's inauguration, stating, "I'm reminded of the Psalmist, you know, 'He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds...'"⁹⁵ This is not subtle. This is blasphemy, and it should shock all left-leaning Christians who consider themselves above the idolatry of Christian Nationalism.⁹⁶ The solution to Christian Nationalism and conservative politics gone wrong is not liberal politics. The solution is biblical truth and a biblical view of government and its role.

Lack of Fear is Not a Lack of Concern.

Most importantly, the modern Christian must once again grapple with this question: "What is my relationship to the government?" Of course, more than enough confessional Lutheran ink has been spilled, and will continue to be spilled in the near future on this specific issue. This concluding thought should suffice.

94. Charles Johnston, "Getting Beyond Politics as Idolatry—And That Means the Left as Well as the Right," *Cultural Maturity: A Blog for the Future*, n.d.

95. Joseph Wulfsohn, "MSNBC Contributor Compares Biden to God, Suggests Trump Voters Should Be Blamed for COVID Deaths," *Fox News*, January 19, 2021.

96. Even more troubling is California Governor Gavin Newsom's usage of Mark 13:21, "Love your neighbor as yourself" on billboards encouraging women to move to California to abort their unborn children.

The temptation for the Church to use governmental means has been and will always be a tremendous temptation for God's people, and it must be avoided. If we truly trust the Gospel's power, we need not fear.

Yet, paired with a fearless peace is a healthy concern for what happens. God cares about what happens to people on Earth. So should we. Just because governmental law will never change the human heart does not mean that it is insignificant or useless to God (Isaiah 61:8, Romans 13:4). Matters of law, justice, and social righteousness should be of concern to Christians as well (Proverbs 31:8-9, Micah 6:8, Luke 11:42).

Separation of Church and State, like some Christian Nationalists may point out, is not clearly taught in the Bible. This does not give Christians any reason to attempt to gain governmental power for Christ or to use the government to enforce Christian morality. At the same time, to ask Christians to simply put aside their fundamental anthropological or moral convictions during public discourse, simply because those views are "religious," is preposterous and deeply hypocritical. God's teachings are the center of the Christian's life (Psalm 119:97-105)! If this is true, God's teachings will deeply influence the Christian in all vocations, even governmental service.

Consider this statement by John Brug as he applies this principle to discussions about abortion:

The first priority for Christian citizens is to educate. We should help to bring society back to its senses by promoting sound moral values. We will have moral laws only when a majority of the citizens and public officials of our land recognize the value and necessity of such basic moral principles as the right to life, high regard for marriage and the family, and the accountability of every individual for his actions. On the basis of such standards, we can then promote good, moral laws. In doing this, we are not trying to force Christianity on anyone by law. Reason, the inscribed law, and the conscience of natural man all testify to these standards, and when we are promoting civil laws, we must argue

on this basis. Such educational efforts can bear fruit. The campaign to expose the true nature of abortion in the battle over “partial-birth abortions” seems to have had an impact on public opinion.⁹⁷

The Christian can and should share the moral concerns of Christian Nationalism. But the solution to such issues is not a power grab, political influence, or mass culture change. As the Church, it is the free, powerful, efficacious, life-changing, life-giving Gospel of Christ that declares the sinner righteous and ensures forgiveness. Then, and only then, can a sinner be set free from their slavery to sin.

As Christian citizens, the goal is to educate, not shame or attack. It is to show why God’s way is better, not to attempt to seek power to punish. It is to proclaim the truth, not fall into another lie. It is to love, not despise. If Christians are voted into office, and laws reflecting God’s truth are implemented, lives are saved and suffering reduced, praise be to God! But there will still be sin, suffering, poverty, oppression, and death— that is, until he comes back and creates the New Jerusalem and brings us home. Until then, let our hearts join John’s plea: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

97. John F. Brug, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: Current Problems Christian Citizenship and the Separation of Church And State*, 1999, 20.

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