

What Are the Dangers of Christian Nationalism?

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“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1).

Politics and Christianity are strange bedfellows, indeed. Even so, there seems to be a now full-grown trend to tie religion into the context of politics.

Over the past few years, there has been a great deal of public attention and discussion given to the concept of “Christian Nationalism.” Of course, as with so many other subjects, that discussion throws up immediate barriers and arguments, with the line drawn by one’s political persuasion. People seem to fall on one side or the other – liberal or conservative – with accusations thrown back and forth.

Society has even resorted to labels and name-calling. Right-wing. Left-wing. Both are intended to be derogatory labels aimed at dismissing the opinions and viewpoints of the person so labeled. “Christian nationalist”; woke; racist; socialist; fascist; communist. All terms with the same double-sided intent to insult and dismiss.

The term “Christian Nationalism” itself seems to stem from a politician by the name of Marjorie Taylor Greene who stated in a mid-2022 interview that “We need to be the

party of nationalism and I'm a Christian, and I say it proudly, we should be Christian nationalists." And the gauntlet was thrown down, as it were. Following that, several other religious and political leaders have expressed some level of support for the term – despite the fact that there really is no clear definition of what the term even means or what the politician intended.

It might surprise some that, despite the attention, according to a Pew Research Center survey in September 2022, less than half of U.S. adults have even heard the term "Christian Nationalism" and have any idea what it means. However, as Christ-followers, it would seem important that we *do* understand the term and, more importantly, recognize how the division impacts the church and our mission to create disciples of Christ Jesus.

It is important that we see how true Christianity has been hijacked by so-called Christian Nationalism.

What Is Christian Nationalism?

Purely by definition, Christian Nationalism focuses on the morals of society through a political process – such as legislating criminal and civil laws that reflect Christian or biblical views. The core argument is that America was founded as a Christian nation and the government should take active steps to keep it that way.

Those who support Christian Nationalism use the argument to combat, in particular, pro-choice and LGBTQ advocates. As support for those two issues has risen over the past decade, so has the division. Of course, those on the other side of the political argument weaponize the term and use it to, as said, insult and dismiss the view as bigoted, misogynist, racist, homophobic, and others. They view Christian Nationalism as theocracy.

As we all know, our country was in fact founded on the freedom of religion. That freedom has often been misinterpreted and misapplied as "separation of church and state" – which is actually derived from a letter written by President Thomas Jefferson in 1802, to a Baptist church in Connecticut; it is not contained in the Constitution. Yet that has not prevented those who oppose Christianity – or any religion, for that matter – from using that argument. The term "separation of church and state" has been used as a weapon – with many unaware of its exclusion from the constitution. It seems impossible today to state one's Christian faith without being labeled a Christian Nationalist – used as a vehement insult – by those of a differing viewpoint.

The Reverend Billy Graham once wrote this: "Even where persecution isn't an issue, an upsurge in secularism and religious intolerance is apparent, and religion has been scorned and removed from public life."

It is absolutely true that Christianity has been under attack worldwide. I read recently that more Christians have been persecuted and killed for their faith in the last 100 years than in all the previous centuries combined since the time of Christ. In present day, however, many who call themselves Christians are politically on fire – perhaps seeking a political resource as a fall back, or as a protection against the persecution.

Graham continued this way, “Another reason is the rise of militantly antireligious political systems.”

So the question then is, should we or should we not support Christian Nationalism? Are we, as the true church, called to a life of active politics? What would – no, what *did* Jesus do?

Related article: 3 Ways Our Faith Influences Our Politics

A Biblical Perspective

One of the first truths we learn as Christian believers is that nothing is outside of the purview of God. Nothing. In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us:

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

“There is no authority except that which God has established.” When Paul wrote those words, Nero was the emperor and as evil as they come. In fact, Nero ultimately would put Paul to death. Yet, Paul still held that God himself had established Nero’s authority.

Throughout Biblical history, God used people such as Nero – and Nebuchadnezzar, and Pontius Pilate, and Herod, and Pharaoh during the time of Moses. Daniel too taught that God controlled the leaders of the world’s nations:

“The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people” (Daniel 4:17).

This truth ought to paint a reality for all believers that politics is nothing more than a method God uses to accomplish his will. Yes, evil men will abuse their political power and conduct evil, but even this God uses for his own purposes (Romans 8:28). God's message throughout **Scripture** is that he is sovereign over all things. *All* things. As followers of Christ, we must hold on to the deep belief that God takes people – even non-believers – and puts them in positions of power to fulfill his will. Not our will – his.

By the way, that includes both Joe Biden and Donald Trump. As I write this, we approach the 2024 election. Whichever one happens to win, we must recognize that as God's will – and God *will* use that to fulfill his purposes, regardless of outcome.

God's plans for this country are going to happen – regardless of what we believe or say or do.

But what should our role be now, today? More importantly, what are the dangers of Christian Nationalism?

4 Dangers of Christian Nationalism

1. Freedom of Religion Goes All Ways

Freedom of religion does not apply only to Christians and Christian faiths. It also applies to Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists – you name it. Atheists, too. And yes, Atheism *is* a religion – one that has every right to live here, to believe as they choose to believe, and to celebrate their faith.

Each of these groups must vote according to their personal values and beliefs. Of course, that means Christians. Even more so, we have an obligation to fulfill our duties as citizens, to ensure that we vote and that our vote reflects our Biblical values regarding the sanctity of life and sanctity of **marriage**.

2. Lack of Grace

As followers of Christ, we are called to live differently than the rest of the world. We are called to grace, not hate. We are called to love others – even those with whom we disagree. Yet, simply look around – look at social media – and see the vitriol that accompanies political discussion. Love for our country cannot exceed the love we show to our neighbors, and those with whom we disagree politically are also our neighbors.

Philip Yancey, in his book “What is So Amazing About Grace,” called it “noxious ungrace.” Yancey witnessed firsthand the hatred and threats toward Bill Clinton, raised Southern Baptist, from those who called themselves believers.

“And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

If we carry more anger and more contempt than we do compassion for lost people – then perhaps we remain lost. Paul, in his letter to the church at Corinth, basically said, “Hey, if you’re doing all the right things, but for all the wrong reasons you haven’t learned anything. If you don’t have love for others, then you gain nothing” (v. 13:1-3 author paraphrase).

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

3. Christianity Is for Christians

We cannot expect non-believers to behave as believers do. We cannot force faith on anyone through legislating behavior. How would that be any different from Shariah law?

If the grace of Jesus Christ teaches anything, it is that our actions and behavior – our works – accomplish absolutely nothing to save our souls. They serve nothing for the kingdom of God. Nothing. Imposing morality is absolutely contradictory to our mission – to sacrifice our lives for the sake of others. Jesus came to fulfill the law, and thus rendered it obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

And we know that all are saved by grace and not by dictated behavior. We must not only preach and teach this, we must also exemplify it in our actions and attitudes toward others.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Romans 2:8-9).

4. A Barricade to Non-Believers

Perhaps the most critical of all is the barricade to non-believers built by the term “Christian Nationalism.” Our great commission as followers of Christ is to create disciples. How can we do that if we immediately render the listener deaf and blind to

the gospel? If we are choosing to demand behavior changes before giving them a reason to believe – a reason to give themselves to Christ – then we have lost before we started. We cannot share the love, grace, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus if all we do is point a finger of blame, exclaiming “You’re wrong! You’re a sinner!”

Trying to alter the political landscape to a legalist, nationalist view of Christianity becomes a barrier rather than a magnet. Simply read the gospels and you will find that all kinds of sinners were immediately attracted to Jesus – not because of his labeling them sinners, but rather because of the love he showed before telling them to sin no more.

“‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’” (John 8:11b).

What Did Jesus Do?

Jesus’ life and death were served under incredibly evil regimes – both on the Roman side, as well as the Jewish side. Julius Caesar, Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate – all political leaders who seemed to have no aversion to using evil means to accomplish their goals and wiping out any opposition to their rule.

At the time, the Jews were expecting a Messiah who was a military leader, someone who would lead a rebellion against Rome and free the Jews from slavery. Yet, Jesus did none of that. In fact, Jesus was asked about paying taxes to Caesar, in hopes to trick him into committing a crime against Rome – his response stunned many in the crowd:

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’” (Mark 12:17).

During the time of Jesus, it was a practice of Roman families to take an unwanted child and leave that child on the side of a road to die. Christians of that era would pick up those children and raise them as their own. Yet, Jesus said not a word about these acts. He said not a word about the political climate of the time. So while it is admirable for us to attempt to save the lives of children through legislation – failing that, perhaps we ought to look at other means to help mothers considering abortion and help the children – both born and unborn.

We are called to live differently than the rest of the world. We are called to keep our focus on loving God and loving our neighbors. We are called to proclaim the gospel to a

dark and broken world. We must recognize that our government – any government – cannot save us. Only Jesus Christ can do that.

Do we really believe we can legislate against any sin and make everything okay? Change people's hearts? If people will rebel against the laws of God, why would the laws of man be any different? Not one person would be saved through a change of behavior as the result of legislation. Not one.

We are called to set our minds on Christ Jesus. On God's kingdom. We are called to a higher standard than the laws of men.

Let's keep the first thing first. Let's work on changing hearts – and by changing hearts, we might just change our nation and the world.

“Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth”
(Colossian 3:2).