

Chapter 2

The False Gospel of Christian Nationalism

“Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.”

— *Psalm 146:3*

Let’s begin by calling a spade a spade: Christian nationalism is not rooted in Christ. It is a misuse of Scripture to sanctify political power and cultural dominance.

Patriotism and Christian nationalism are often conflated, but they are not the same thing. Scripture gives space for patriotism—for honoring one’s homeland, praying for its peace, and showing respect for those who lead and serve. The prophet Jeremiah urged the exiles in Babylon: *“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper”* (Jer. 29:7). Paul also encouraged believers to pray *“for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”* (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

To be proud of one’s country, to honor its sacrifices, to celebrate its achievements, and to pray for its leaders is both natural and commend-

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able. Gratitude for your homeland, in and of itself, is not idolatry. It is a recognition of God's providence in placing you within a particular people, place, and time.

Christian nationalism, on the other hand, fuses national identity with divine authority. It blurs the line between faith and state, casting America as God's chosen instrument for ushering in Christ's second coming. Most dangerously, it replaces the way Jesus said His Kingdom would grow.

Where the Gospel advances through transformed hearts, self-giving love, and invitation, Christian nationalism seeks expansion through political power that legislates morality and wields control. Where Jesus calls His followers to embody the Sermon on the Mount, Christian nationalism baptizes the culture of empire and calls it holy.

At its core, Christian nationalism is the belief that America is defined by Christianity and that the government should privilege and enforce that identity. It is an ideology of empire, seeking cultural dominance rather than Spirit-led transformation.

This is why movements like the so-called Seven Mountain Mandate resonate within its circles. This worldview teaches that Christians must "take dominion" over government, education, media, arts, business, family, and religion in order to establish God's rule on earth. At first glance it may look like cultural engagement, but in practice it is a quest for dominance. Instead of bearing witness through humility, service, and sacrificial love, it seeks to legislate and control. It replaces the way of the cross with the way of the sword. In doing so, it betrays the very Gospel it claims to defend.

It's important to note that much of Christian nationalism is fueled by misplaced zeal. In this, it resembles the zealots of Jesus' time—faithful people longing for a Messiah who would be a warrior-king to overthrow Rome. They were sincere, but horribly misguided. In the same way, many Christian nationalists today genuinely believe they are doing God's work. Their passion is real, but it has been misdirected.

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That zeal almost never stops to look in the mirror. Few ever ask, *What if the shoe were on the other foot?* The same voices demanding mandatory Bible courses would be outraged if high school students were required to take classes on the Quran or the Vedas to graduate. If instead of the Ten Commandments, courts were ordered to post precepts of Sharia law, they would protest and sue. When Christian holidays shape school calendars, it's considered normal. But if districts planned breaks around Eid or Diwali, it would be branded as cultural capitulation. However, Christian nationalists are so embedded in this worldview that they cannot, or will not, see these double standards.

This zeal often expresses itself in recognizable patterns such as habits, symbols, and rhetoric that reveal the underlying beliefs of the movement. Common features of Christian nationalism include:

Fusion of faith and patriotism: Churches adorned with flags, patriotic hymns, and sermons equating military strength with divine blessing send the message that loyalty to God and country are interchangeable. What begins as gratitude can morph into idolatry when the cross and the flag are indistinguishable. Faith framed as a tool to preserve national greatness reduces the Gospel to civil religion.

Demonization of opponents: In this worldview, political adversaries are not simply people who see things differently; they are enemies of God. Such rhetoric makes compromise and dialogue impossible. When opponents are vilified rather than loved, the command to love one's enemies is replaced with a mandate to destroy them—both literally and figuratively.

Mythologizing of America: The nation is cast as a new Israel—uniquely blessed and divinely chosen. This requires selective memory: ignoring genocide of native peoples, minimizing slavery, or glossing over Jim Crow. By scrubbing the hard parts out of our story, Christian nationalism preserves a myth of moral superiority. This is not only bad history; it is bad theology, confusing God's Kingdom with a single nation's fortunes.

Anointed leaders: Politicians are treated as God's chosen vessels, shielded from critique as long as they serve the preferred tribe. Moral

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failings that would disqualify others are excused in the name of “God’s bigger plan.” This is not discernment, but expediency— and it leaves the church complicit in corruption.

Conflation of culture and faith: Here, *true Christianity* is measured not by love, joy, or mercy but by partisan loyalty and cultural adaptation. Following Jesus becomes synonymous with voting records and sidetaking in a culture war, overshadowing Christ’s radical, boundary-breaking love.

Together, these patterns reveal that Christian nationalism is not simply personal faith expressed in public life. It is a system of power, seeking to advance God’s Kingdom through dominance rather than love.

At the same time, we cannot ignore one of Christian nationalism’s deepest roots: racism. At times it has been overt—defending segregation, slavery, white supremacy, or bans on interracial marriage. At other times it has been more covert, expressed through coded language and cultural appeals that mask the same underlying sentiments. For this reason, scholars Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, in *Taking America Back for God*, describe the movement more specifically as *white* Christian nationalism. That language matters.

Christian nationalism in America has always been entangled with whiteness. It emerged from the worldview of European settlers, not from Native Americans (who were displaced and massacred under “manifest destiny”), nor from enslaved Africans (whose backs built the American empire). In modern times, its growth has been fueled by racial fears, especially the so-called “great replacement theory” which proposes white Anglo-Europeans will one day become a minority and lose their cultural dominance. In this way, white Christian nationalism is not about promoting “faith and values” in government, rather it is about preserving racial hierarchy and social privilege under the guise of religion.

In his book *American Idolatry*, Whitehead also states, “Christian nationalism is not about following Jesus. It’s about maintaining a certain social order.” That social order is not neutral. It has been

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designed to protect whiteness, power, and control. And once it's in place, questioning it becomes dangerous.

This does not mean every individual who supports Christian nationalism is motivated by racism. Many are sincere in their desire to protect faith and family. But at the macro level, its leaders and guiding ideologies have long drawn strength from anxieties about cultural and demographic change, whether voiced openly or through dog whistles that link national identity to whiteness.

I know conversations about racism are uncomfortable for many. But part of Christian discipleship is bringing sin into the light, not hiding it. We cannot seek reconciliation while ignoring the fractures that have shaped us. In an era where some prominent voices rage against “wokeness,” claim that Black people somehow benefited from slavery, or dismiss people of color in positions of leadership as mere “DEI hires,” the temptation is strong to look away. Yet, if we are going to repent of this sin as a nation and as the Church, we must have the courage to stare it directly in the face. Putting our skeletons on display and letting them “dance” is the only way the body of Christ can be healed and made whole.

When Politics Hijack the Sacred

The shift is slow. Words and images that once lifted hearts toward God's Kingdom get quietly repurposed for something else.

Titles like King of Kings, once meant to proclaim Christ's supremacy over every earthly ruler, become twisted into a justification for authoritarian power.

The armor of God, intended to describe a life rooted in truth, righteousness, and peace, is recast as a license for cultural combat.

Even the blood of Jesus, the symbol of reconciliation and mercy, gets reduced to shorthand for tribal loyalty.

In this environment, biblical values are cherry-picked to uphold political ideologies, while the weightier matters of compassion, mercy, and justice

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are quietly ignored. Spiritual language becomes a mask for partisan agendas. Prayer turns into performance; a way to show which side you're on. Sermons morph into political commentary. Evangelism, once an invitation into new life, begins to sound more like recruitment for the culture war.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann helps us name what is happening here: empires are always built upon false promises of false gods. Empires promise security but deliver violence. They promise prosperity but produce exploitation. They promise order but thrive on domination.

The very idea of building a “Christian empire” through political power is not only a misstep, it is anti-biblical. The God of Scripture consistently resists empire, from Pharaoh's Egypt to Babylon to Rome. And when the church endorses empire and calls it “the Kingdom,” it participates in idolatry.

And if you dare to question this drift? Some might brand you as divisive. Suggest nuance, and you'll be labeled weak. Try to re-center the conversation on Jesus' teachings, and you'll be accused of compromise.

The irony is painful: those who cling most tightly to Christ over party lines are often the ones treated as unfaithful. But the record of Scripture is clear. Jesus never sought political power; He rebuked it. He didn't bless imperial strength; He subverted it. When Satan offered Him control over the kingdoms of the world, He refused. Yet today, many voices that proclaim His name say yes to that very temptation. They confuse empire with Kingdom and mistake control for faithfulness.

This is how politics hijack the sacred. It begins with small shifts in language and ends with a faith that serves sociopolitical dominance rather than Christ.

The Cost of Confusing Kingdom with Country

This isn't just a misunderstanding, and it isn't a minor slip. Confusing the Kingdom of God with the empire of man is nothing less than a theological emergency. One that carries devastating spiritual, moral, and relational consequences.

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When the church drapes the cross in stars and stripes, it doesn't merely decorate it with patriotism; it risks burying the Gospel under the weight of national identity. The good news that once proclaimed freedom for the oppressed and grace for sinners becomes entangled with a political platform. And when that happens, the message of Christ is no longer heard for what it is.

Loving your country and engaging in politics can be good gifts. But when those loyalties are elevated above Christ, they become idols. That's the danger I'm naming here.

The casualties of this confusion show up in the hearts of ordinary believers who are taught to equate loyalty to Jesus with loyalty to a nation. They show up in divided families, where allegiance to political ideologies eclipses the call to love one another. They show up in churches split apart, where those who dare to speak against the merging of faith and nationalism are treated as traitors rather than siblings. They even show up on the global stage, where the witness of American Christianity is compromised. In the current culture, brothers and sisters across the world struggle to recognize Jesus beneath the symbols of empire we have wrapped Him in.

This distortion seeps into the soul. It warps our vision of God into the image of power and control. It reduces sanctification to voting habits and undermines the radical, reconciling love at the center of Christ's teaching.

Those who cannot conform to the preferred political mold (e.g., immigrants, the poor, people of color, women, LGBTQ+ neighbors) often experience the sharp edge of exclusion. Instead of encountering Jesus' arms of welcome, they encounter a gate closed in His name. And those who leave such churches, weary of the distortion, sometimes walk away not only from nationalism, but from Christ Himself because they are unable to separate the two.

This is why confusing Kingdom with country is not just dangerous; it is deadly. It obscures the face of Jesus, replacing His perfect love with the machinery of power.

Spiritual Confusion

At its core, Christian nationalism distorts the face of Jesus. What should be radiant and clear—the compassion, humility, and disruptive love of Christ—becomes blurred behind layers of political slogans, culture wars, and patriotic fervor.

When church leaders elevate partisan loyalty over Christlike humility, when sermons morph into rallies and pulpits into platforms, the result is not faithfulness but fog. People confuse allegiance to a party with allegiance to Christ, and many lose the ability to tell the difference.

The fallout is staggering. In what has been called *The Great Dechurching*, upwards of forty million people have walked away from church. Not from Jesus, but from what has been done in His name. They are not rejecting the carpenter from Nazareth who touched lepers, lifted children, and restored the outcast. They are rejecting a weaponized version of Christianity that vilifies the least of these.

This is the spiritual confusion we face: a generation who longs for Jesus but cannot recognize Him in the church they inherited. They see caricatures promoting fear and control where they expected mercy and justice. They encounter propaganda when they came looking for good news. The tragedy is not that Christ has changed, but that His image has been so obscured that many cannot see Him clearly.

Moral Compromise

When power becomes the goal, righteousness becomes negotiable. Christian nationalism doesn't just blur the Gospel on paper; it eats away at the Church's integrity in real life.

A double standard quietly emerges. Sin is condemned with fury when committed by "outsiders," yet minimized or excused when found among "our own." This selective morality doesn't reflect the holiness of God; it reflects the calculations of politics.

We've all seen it: churches covering up abuse to protect reputations, leaders who once claimed "character counts" dismissing corruption for

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the sake of influence, racism downplayed to preserve alliances. Corruption is not confronted. Instead, it's rationalized if it promises access, protection, or power.

Jesus never blessed such compromise. He confronted hypocrisy, overturned tables, and resisted alliances that used religion as a cloak for control. His Kingdom was never advanced by backroom deals but by justice, humility, and love. Every time the Church excuses evil for influence, it tells the world that the cross is secondary to the crown. And with each compromise, we lose the moral clarity that once made us salt and light.

Loss of Witness

The Church was called to be a light to the world, a lamp that drives out darkness, a refuge for the weary. But when nationalism colors that light, it casts more shadow than illumination.

To a watching world, American Christianity increasingly appears less like a community of radical grace and more like a predictable voting bloc. What was meant to embody compassion, hospitality, and reconciliation is too often known instead for outrage, suspicion, and partisanship.

People don't see our mercy anymore. They see our militancy. Not our fruit, but our fury. What should be the household of God has, in many eyes, become another political machine.

This loss of witness shapes how people encounter Christ Himself. Marginalized communities often find churches unsafe, rather than a place of refuge. Young people, once drawn by hope, walk away because they cannot find the Prince of Peace amid ongoing culture wars. The sanctuary, meant to be a signpost of God's Kingdom, begins to feel like a rally for empire.

A lamp hidden under the banner of nationalism cannot shine. And when our witness dims, the world does not just lose respect for the church. It loses access to the Christ we were meant to reflect.

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Emotional and Relational Trauma

The fallout is not only cultural or public. It is deeply personal. Christian nationalism does not stay confined to theological statements or denominational platforms. It fractures families and friendships, leaving scars that shape daily life.

Many who begin to express doubts are not met with patient listening, but with suspicion. They are accused of drifting from the faith and branded with labels such as “woke,” “leftist,” and “wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

The cost is steep. Lifelong friendships dissolve. Families avoid talking with each other for dread of arguments driven by out-of-context Bible verses. People who once found their deepest belonging in church now feel like exiles from the very communities that baptized them, married them, and helped raise their children.

These are not just theological debates. They are relational wounds. Behind every story of church decline is someone carrying the ache of rejection and bewilderment. They leave not as cynics but as casualties, bearing scars that may take years to heal.

Theological Distortion

This is the deepest danger of all. Christian nationalism doesn’t simply nudge the Gospel off-center, it replaces it with a counterfeit.

The cross is overshadowed by the flag. Sacrificial love is drowned out by the drumbeat of power. Discipleship—the slow, humble formation into Christ’s likeness—is traded for conformity. Grace, which once tore down dividing walls, is replaced with tribal loyalty. Unity in Christ is substituted with uniformity of politics.

Even Jesus Himself is recast. His words are cherry-picked to endorse agendas He never championed. His Kingdom, defined by enemy-love and self-giving, is reduced to a cultural brand. What was meant to transform hearts through love is distorted into a mandate to control culture through dominance.

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It's blasphemy dressed up in church clothes. And when the Church succumbs to this distortion, its mission collapses. Instead of proclaiming good news to the poor and freedom to the captive, it becomes a megaphone for cultural supremacy and self-protection.

It cuts into the very heart of our identity. We don't just risk losing influence, we risk losing our soul. A Gospel stripped of the cross, of grace, and of Christ Himself is no Gospel at all.

What Does Faithfulness Look Like?

If Christian nationalism shows us what unfaithfulness looks like, then we must ask: what does true faithfulness to Christ actually require? To reclaim the beauty of the Gospel, we must return to the vision of the Kingdom Jesus announced and embodied.

True faithfulness does not grasp for national dominance. It does not rise or fall with election cycles, nor does it demand loyalty to Presidents, parties, or platforms. Faithfulness is not measured by political victories or cultural influence, but by whether our lives reflect the heart of our holy God.

The Kingdom of God does not arrive on Air Force One. It does not hold press conferences or enforce itself through Supreme Court decisions. Empires advance by coercion, but Jesus described His Kingdom in smaller, quieter images: like a mustard seed that's so small it can be overlooked, yet growing into a tree that gives shelter to many. Like yeast hidden and unseen, yet transforming the dough from within.

This is why the way of Jesus stands in such sharp contrast to the way of Christian nationalism. Where nationalism seeks to prove itself through grand displays of strength, the Kingdom advances through hidden acts of love. St. Thérèse of Lisieux called this the Little Way—a path of holiness discovered not in conquering culture, but in childlike trust, humility, and small, ordinary deeds done with extraordinary love. Her vision frees us from the exhausting need to win and reminds us that God's Kingdom is revealed in mustard seeds and yeast, not monuments and thrones.

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Faithfulness, then, looks like tables set for sinners, not platforms reserved for the powerful. It looks like feet washed in humility, not fists clenched in combat. It looks like power laid down in love, not hoarded for control. It looks like a community that welcomes the outsider, tends to the wounded, and loves even its enemies.

Jesus Himself modeled this. He did not establish His Kingdom by overthrowing Rome or seizing power. He established it by entering into suffering, refusing the shortcuts of domination, and submitting even to death on a cross. And then He rose with a power no empire could touch.

This is the scandal of the Gospel: that victory came not through domination but through sacrifice; not through taking life, but through giving His own.

So if your version of Christianity demands cultural victory, political power, or constant war against your neighbors (or perceived enemies), it may not be the Kingdom Jesus came to build. Faithfulness looks like cross-shaped love—humble, self-giving, enduring. It looks like trust in a Kingdom already breaking in, multiplying quietly in our hearts, even when the world insists on measuring strength by who sits on earthly thrones.

A Word of Hope

If something in you stirred while reading this, let me say as clearly as I can: it takes courage to see what you were trained not to see.

For many of us, the merging of faith and nationalism has been so normalized that thinking negatively of it feels sinful. Yet courage looks like refusing to ignore the Spirit's nudge, even when it unsettles everything you thought you knew.

It takes grace to speak truth when silence would be safer, and faith to follow Jesus when the crowd has turned away toward something easier, something more comfortable.

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You can love your country and pray for its good while still recognizing its flaws. But when nationalism asks for what Christ forbids, or when patriotism becomes a tool to excuse injustice and demand allegiance above love, remember this: only One is worthy of your ultimate loyalty, and it is not a flag.

As songwriter Derek Webb put it, “My first allegiance is not to a country or a land. My first allegiance is not to democracy or blood. It’s to a King and a Kingdom.”

Please hear this: this chapter is not written to fuel cynicism. It is an invitation to lament what has been lost, to repent where we’ve been complicit, and to rebuild a faith rooted not in empire but in the Kingdom of God.

That kind of faith sometimes begins with a scary confession: *I just want the real Jesus back.*

The Jesus who heals the wounded.

The Jesus who welcomes the outcast instead of casting them aside.

The Jesus who sees through our political games and loves us anyway.

The Jesus who died not to make a nation great, but to make all things new.

And the good news, the *best* news, is that He is still here. He has not abandoned His Church, even when parts of the Church have abandoned Him. He is still calling, still healing, still forgiving, still worthy.

If you’re tired, rest in Him.

If you’re disillusioned, find Him again.

If you’re ready for the scales to fall, you’ll see Him. Not draped in nationalism, but shining in the same grace that’s been there all along.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And He is enough.

Chapter 2 Reflection Questions

1. What messages did you grow up hearing about America's place in God's plan?
2. Have you ever felt pressure to vote or align politically to belong?
3. Which Scriptures feel out of sync with what you've heard about politics in church?
4. How has nationalism shaped your view of God—and what needs to be unlearned?
5. Where do you see more zeal for defending a nation or party than for reflecting Christ's love?

Chapter 2 Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Free me from loyalties shaped by politicians and slogans, and root me in your love.

Give me courage that comes not from crowds or parties, but from Your Spirit.

Teach me to lay down the sword and take up the cross,
to choose service over strength, and Your Kingdom over empire.

When truth is costly, make me brave enough to speak it.

When fear tempts me to silence, remind me that You are Lord.

You were never elected, and yet You reign.

My hope is not in nations, but in You.

Amen.