

## **A Biblical Response to the Christian Nationalism in Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) Movement**

The question of how people who aspire to follow Christ’s teachings should respond to the MAGA movement – and to the current Trump administration’s embodiment of that movement’s principles – is admittedly a polarizing one, but the aim here is to consult New Testament (NT) scripture specifically to find guidance and insight on how to do that.

We’ll look at some NT scriptural references framed within the principles that seem to unify each group of like-minded Biblical verses. We’ll also need to decide on a method of interpretation – or “hermeneutic” – to arrive at a unified conclusion about how a modern Christian can navigate the current political landscape with these scripture references in mind.

First, for context, a brief summary of MAGA principles is provided that are promoted by the “Christian nationalist” wing of the MAGA movement.

### **Principles of MAGA Christian Nationalism**

It has been well-established for some time that Trump has targeted white evangelicals for political support, and that he has, in fact, won the votes of over 80% of them in each of the last three presidential elections.<sup>1</sup> It has also become increasingly clear that [some two-thirds of those white evangelicals](#) qualify as Christian nationalist adherents or sympathizers. This is a sizeable portion of U.S. voters – about 18%. So what is a “Christian nationalist?” Multiple sources<sup>2</sup> summarize the core principles and ideological preferences of Christian nationalism this way....

One empirically supported definition reads: “Christian nationalism is an ideology that desires a close fusion of a particular expression of Christianity with American civic life. It demands our government, at all levels, vigorously defend this ideology as central to our national identity, public policy, and social belonging.”

More specific MAGA Christian nationalist ideals, principles and preferences include:

- God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society.
- Past traditional social hierarchies and gender roles should be restored, with men leading and women supporting them.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/30/most-white-americans-who-regularly-attend-worship-services-voted-for-trump-in-2020/>, <https://prri.org/spotlight/religion-and-the-2024-presidential-election/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://prri.org/research/support-for-christian-nationalism-in-all-50-states/>, <https://kettering.org/five-elements-of-christian-nationalism/>, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-nationalism>

- The U.S. government should declare America a Christian nation.
- There are only two genders, male and female.
- U.S. laws should be based on Christian values.
- Natural-born white citizens are the legitimate authors and inheritors of America, and non-Christian immigration and ethnic diversity weaken the nation.
- If the U.S. moves away from our Christian foundations, we will not have a country anymore.
- Free market capitalism is God’s preferred economic system, as it is grounded in meritocracy and personal responsibility.
- Being Christian is an important part of being truly American.
- Strong, authoritarian leaders are required who may violate norms or break laws to restore America’s greatness.
- Wealthy elites are responsible for creating a status quo that deprives white Christian Americans of their God-given birthright.
- Everything viewed as a past traditional “Christian” value should be taught in public schools and represented in government institutions.

In addition, [half of Christian nationalist adherents and sympathizers](#) believe “there is a storm coming soon that will sweep away the elites in power and restore the rightful leaders,” and one third believe that “because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence to save the country.”

**Before navigating scripture around these topics, we should probably address a significant and fundamental factual error in widely held Christian nationalist beliefs.** The U.S. was certainly influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs and ideals, but many of the Founding Fathers – who authored the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and other critical founding discourse around the creation of the United States of America – were strongly influenced by the Deism of the time. [Deism](#) arose out of the Enlightenment, and emphasized reason, rationality, natural laws, and scientific inquiry, aiming to reconcile those with religious faith. Specifically, though, Deism tended to “deny the existence of all supernatural aspects of traditional Christianity, including miracles, prophecies, angels, demons, and divinely revealed scriptures, such as the Bible.” This was a radical departure from the previous thousand years of European religious tradition.

This is not to say that Christianity was not in play, but there were both Christian Deists and non-Christian Deists, and [the Founding Fathers could be found in both camps](#). Although many American white Christian nationalists share a strong tendency to dismiss scientific and historical evidence that contradicts their views, the reality is that Christianity cannot claim exclusive ownership – or even majority ownership – in the birth of the American nation. And it should especially be noted that, in keeping with Deist leanings, the Founding Fathers enshrined both

freedom of religion and separation of church and state in the U.S. Constitution – and they did not employ the word “God” (or “Divine,” “Creator,” “Christ,” etc.) even once in that document. They were instead deliberately aiming to create a *secular* government, rather than a theocracy – a notable and earnest departure from the monarchical absolutism of the European “[divine right of kings](#)” they had left behind across the Atlantic. As is written in the second clause of the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the exercise thereof.”

It is also relevant that the introduction of much Christian religious language found in the U.S. government today [did not occur until much later in U.S. history](#). For example, “In God We Trust” did not appear on U.S. coins until the 1860s – and didn’t become the official U.S. motto until the 1950s. Likewise, “under God” wasn’t added to the pledge of allegiance until 1954. Remember that that post-World War II period was a significant hotbed of U.S. opposition to what was labeled the “godless Communism” of the Soviet Union, and part and parcel of that [Red Scare](#) was widespread propaganda about how America was aligned with Christian godliness, while the Soviet Union was not.

Okay then, let’s take a look at what New Testament scripture has to say about several central tenets of Christian nationalism....

## What New Testament Scriptures Say

There can be an unfortunate habit among Christian denominations to emphasize certain scriptural references and exclude others when trying to prove a point – that is, to cherry-pick supportive Biblical verses that favor their views. We’ll earnestly try to avoid that here by listing a variety of scripture that both supports and countervails Christian nationalist themes. Then we’ll take a deeper dive into a balanced interpretation of all of that scripture.

	Only Two Genders	Men Lead, Women Follow	Rulers, Governments, & Laws Should be Christian	White U.S. Natives Deserve Priority Over Immigrants	Christian Values Should be Taught in Secular Public Schools
<i>Supportive Scripture</i>	Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6	1 Timothy 2:11-15, 1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35	Acts 17:26-27, Romans 13:1-7	None.	None.
	1 Corinthians 6:9-10	1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-24, Titus 2:4-5	Matthew 28:18-20		
<i>Countervailing Scripture</i>	Matthew 19:12, Acts 8:26-40	Acts 18:24-27, Acts 21:7-9, Romans 16:1-7, 1 Corinthians 1:10-11	Luke 4:5-8, John 17:14-18, John 18:36, Acts 5:29, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 3:2, Philippians 3:18-21, 1 John 2:15-17, Galatians 1:10, James 4:1-4	Acts 2:1-13; Acts 8:14-17, Acts 10:34-45, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 2:9-11, Romans 10:11-13, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:11-22, James 2:1-9	1 Corinthians 5:9-13
	Galatians 3:28	Mark 7:24-30, Luke 7:36-48, John 2:1-11, John 4, John 8:1-11, John 11:1-44, John 20:11-18	Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:35, John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 1 Corinthians 10:25-33, Galatians 6:10, 1 Peter 3:13-17	Matthew 8:5-13, Matthew 15:21-28, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 5:1-20, Mark 7:24-30, Luke 9:51-55, Luke 10:30-37, John 4, Revelation 7:9-10	Mark 9:33-37, Mark 10:41-45, 1 Corinthians 9:19, <a href="#">Jesus’ unconditional healing and forgiveness</a>
	1 Corinthians 5:9-13		Mark 10:41-45, Philippians 2:3-4	Mark 12:28-31, 1 John 4:20-21	
			1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, 1 Peter 5		
			Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14, Titus 3:1, 1 Timothy 2:1-2		

All of these passages deserve more exploration and discussion – a lot more – and I encourage folks to carefully read through each of the references. And I think a critical principle to appreciate as we attempt this discussion is that the New Testament does contain contradictions. Some of these are contextual or nuanced, and others seem fairly stark and irreconcilable. That is just a feature of this ancient and complex literature, and so in some cases followers of Christ will want to hold those contradictions in prayerful consideration, and navigate their available interpretation and personal choices with discernment.

This begins to brush up against our guidelines for interpreting the Bible, so let's explore a handful of guiding principles for that before we delve any further.

## **Biblical Interpretation**

If we do not maintain a consistent method of interpreting scripture – a clear, well-developed *hermeneutic* – we will fall prey to the classic pitfall of [confirmation bias](#). That is, we will simply conform what we read in the Bible with what we either already believe or are predisposed to believe, and resist questioning our existing assumptions. So a critical element of a Biblical hermeneutic is *the willingness to revise our understanding based on scriptural evidence*, rather than holding onto convictions that actually run contrary to God's word.

So then, what are some guiding principles that can consistently aid our interpretation of scripture? Here is an initial list of factors we can combine together to arrive at a rigorous and spiritually grounded reading and understanding of the Bible:

1. An **analytical** approach, which explores
  - a. The author's **intent**
  - b. The historical, cultural, and situational **context** of the writings
  - c. Hints the original NT **language** (Koine Greek) reveal
  - d. A survey of **other NT references** to the same topic
  - e. Early Christian **acceptance and application** of scriptural principles
2. **Experiential** methods, which consult
  - a. Discernment through **practice**
  - b. What we learn through a Christian **discipleship** relationship
3. Guidance from **holy spirit**
  - a. Insight through the still, neutral openness of [contemplative prayer](#)
  - b. Prayerful **supplication** for Divine guidance
4. **Participatory** methods, such as
  - a. **Dialogue** with other Christians (informally, in Bible study, etc.)
  - b. **Communal experience** – how this scripture has manifested in our spiritual community

To explore all of these disciplines in detail would require a lengthy essay in itself, but if we engage in these approaches with openness and sincerity, I believe our understanding of scripture will inevitably deepen – and become more accurate over time.

One question that might arise before we examine some of the NT scriptural principles captured in the previous chart is why Old Testament references are not included. After all, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (ESV) There are several reasons for this, but most importantly I am aiming here at prioritizing the *new commandment* that Jesus offers his followers, that is: “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.” This is further amplified by what Jesus says are the most important commandments of the Old Testament in Matthew 22:37-40: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (NIV) By focusing on these essential, core tenets of Jesus’ message in the New Testament canon, we are centering Biblical instruction around what makes Christianity a powerful and unique set of beliefs – and elevating the most critical responsibilities of Christian faith.

I also feel we need to recognize another important principle when charting a course of fruitful, Bible-inspired conduct in the world: [not putting new wine into old wineskins](#) (Matthew 9:17). That is, not constraining, oppressing, or muting the grace and teachings of Jesus with previous religious traditions under the Mosaic (Jewish) law of the Old Testament. Why is this important? Because, as Paul writes in Romans 3:21-22 (my emphasis in **bold**): “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested **apart from the law**, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” As Paul discusses thoroughly in that chapter, Christians are no longer subject to Mosaic law as the Jews had been, but are justified by their faith in Christ. This is not to gainsay the plentiful and rich spiritual insight available in the Hebrew scriptures, but this is another reason we will not be including them in this discussion. The moral underpinnings of a Christian’s ethical conduct — personally, communally, and politically — are thoroughly explored in the New Testament, and Old Testament scripture, when it is consulted, would only be used to support those extensive moral underpinnings.

With that said, here is a brief exploration of the principles and NT verses cited in the previous comparison chart.

### ***Men Lead, Women Follow***

This has been a topic of passionate debate within the Church for a long time, but I would summarize the dominant cross-cultural narrative of that debate this way: *local culture always trumps scripture regarding gender roles*. In other words, whatever the dominant cultural attitudes are about gender roles in a given geography or era, Christian beliefs routinely conform to those dominant cultural norms, and contradictory scripture is either ignored, explained away, or minimized. One of the most potent examples of this is how women and girls are

treated in certain places. For example, we find that the same brutally oppressive and abusive practices exist in a number of African cultures, regardless of whether they are majority Christian (such as Ethiopia) or majority Muslim (such as Egypt). In both Ethiopia and Egypt, women suffer from honor killings, high rates of domestic violence, child marriage, [FGM](#), and other horrific cultural practices that centuries of Abrahamic religion have not reformed or corrected. So, when it comes to whether a given culture is patriarchal or misogynistic, Christian principles do not seem to inform or alter that culture's longstanding habits, regardless of how dominant Christianity may be there.

For the purposes of this discussion, although there is sufficient scripture to support both a hierarchical and an equal relationship between genders in the New Testament, there is a notable divergence depending on which passages we look at. For example, all of the non-Pauline scripture supports gender equality over hierarchy – not just most scripture, but *everything* we can find in the Gospels and Acts. Passages in Paul's letters support equality as well. For example, Paul himself lauded the participation of women in the early church as apostles, deacons, and authorities (Romans 16:1-7, 1 Corinthians 1:10-11) – and he implores the early Church to honor them. In Acts, Paul also observed women teaching men (Acts 18:24-27), or witnessed them being prophets (Acts 21:7-9), without criticism or comment on those roles. However, Paul's later missives seem to undermine his tolerance, with instruction that women should not have authority over, or have a role in teaching, any man (1 Timothy 2:11-15), and further that women should be submissive to their husbands (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-24, Titus 2:4-5) and to men in general (1 Corinthians 11:3).

When we focus our investigation on Jesus' actions and interactions in scripture, we find things heavily weighted in favor of gender equality. Jesus' repeated examples of liberating, honoring, and submitting to women (Mark 7:24-30, Luke 7:36-48, John 2:1-11, John 4, John 8:1-11, John 11:1-44, John 20:11-18) seem to pointedly undermine patriarchy in both His time and ours. Combined with the other evidence for gender equality in Acts and some of Paul's letters, this seems to soften or offset the harsh hierarchical gender language Paul uses later on. But our conclusions can't be definitive in either direction – we can't insist the NT exclusively supports gender equality, and we can't insist that it exclusively supports gender hierarchy or patriarchy. And perhaps that is the most important takeaway from this initial review on this topic: unless we are cherry-picking just the passages that support our position, we can't be inflexibly confident one view or the other is correct.

That said, this has only been an introductory *analytical* component of scriptural interpretation – with much more analysis available. Along these lines, I recommend the essay "[A Debate Over Gender Equality in Scripture and the Early Church](#)" for further reading. But we also need to apply all of our other hermeneutic tools: things like consulting *holy spirit* in prayer; *dialoguing* with our brothers and sisters; observing how our *spiritual community* operates; *discerning* truths through our personal Christian walk; engaging in a *discipleship* relationship that expands and deepens our understanding; and so on. These are our ongoing next steps, retaining an openness and willingness to evolve our understanding throughout that journey.

## ***White U.S. Natives Deserve Priority Over Immigrants***

There is really nothing in NT scripture that supports this Christian nationalist view – even if someone employs really creative filters on Biblical language. In contrast, there is a tremendous wealth of NT scripture that soundly contradicts it, instead promoting the following:

- God *does not differentiate* at all between races or nationalities, but views all people as equal inheritors of His grace and kingdom without favoritism. (Acts 8:14-17, Acts 10:34-45, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 2:9-11, Romans 10:11-13, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:11-22, James 2:1-9, Revelation 7:9-10)
- Jesus often makes a specific point of honoring and elevating Gentiles (foreigners whom the Jews reviled) and Samaritans (sharing common ancestry with the Jews, but also despised by them as outsiders) in his actions and parables. (Matthew 8:5-13, Matthew 15:21-28, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 5:1-20, Mark 7:24-30, Luke 9:51-55, Luke 10:30-37, John 4)
- And if Christians are not able to practice this unprejudiced attitude of all-inclusive love? Then they seem to be betraying their faith, the love of Christ, and what Christ Himself said were the greatest commandments. (Mark 12:28-31, 1 John 4:20-21)

Here again, we should also consult *holy spirit* in prayer; *dialogue* with our brothers and sisters on this topic; observe how our *spiritual community* operates; *discern* truths through our personal Christian walk; and engage in a *discipleship* relationship that expands and deepens our understanding; employing all of these tools in a spirit of openness and willingness to change. Lastly, it should be noted that, historically, there has always been prejudice towards newcomers in the U.S. – this seems to be a feature of American culture, or perhaps just human nature. It is not, however, something that NT scripture supports in any way.

## ***Rulers, Governments, & Laws Should be Christian***

I am a firm believer that Christians have a civic obligation to engage politically in governance and laws – especially in a democracy like the U.S.A. Unfortunately, there isn't a lot in NT scripture that describes how Christians should go about this, since the governments of that time were not democratic, and the leaders were not Christian. There are some important clues on how we can navigate this topic, however, so we'll explore those here.

Some prominent themes that arise in New Testament discussions around public conduct, government rulers and institutions, and laws are these:

- Christians are to obey and honor government leaders and authorities, pray and be grateful for them, follow the laws of the land, submit to government institutions, and pay taxes. (Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14, Titus 3:1, 1 Timothy 2:1-2)



- Christians are not to “lord it over” anyone, but instead treat others’ needs as more important than their own. (Mark 10:41-45, Philippians 2:3-4)
- The Christian’s challenge is a spiritual one *focused on a spiritual kingdom*, not a physical one focused on a physical kingdom, and our faith can be derailed if we forget this. Christians are to be *in the world, but not of the world*, willingly engaged in doing good, but not conformed to its cultural expectations, worldly power, or worldly priorities. (Luke 4:5-8, John 18:36, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:12, Galatians 1:10, Colossians 3:2, Philippians 3:18-21, 1 John 2:15-17, John 17:14-18, James 4:1-4)
- Christians are not to be concerned with the conduct of non-Christians, instead centering their lives around loving each other in Christ, demonstrating a Christ-like example of kindness and service to each other and nonbelievers without expecting anything in return, sharing the hope of salvation with anyone who asks, doing good to *all people*, and being willing to suffer for doing what is right. (Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:35, John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 1 Corinthians 10:25-33, Galatians 6:10, 1 Peter 3:13-17)
- Jesus also encouraged us to resolve disputes without going to court. (Matthew 5:25)

In reading through these Biblical references, it is extremely difficult to comprehend how Christian nationalists arrived at their conclusions about a flavor of Christian activism that reforms the U.S. government and rule of law to reflect a Christianity-centric model. For example, Christian nationalists promote a theocratic state with Christian strongmen leaders who “lord it over” women, workers, the environment, existing civic institutions, immigrants, and nonbelievers – at least as conceived in efforts like [Project 2025](#) and what is being implemented by [key members of the Trump administration](#). In support of their ideas, Christian nationalists do reference Acts 17, Romans 13, and Matthew 28, which refer to God’s establishing nations and governing authorities, and to Jesus’ great commission to make disciples of all nations, with the outcome that all people would seek God. However, for Christian nationalists, these passages have become imperatives to violate nearly every other spiritual principle in the New Testament. But the Biblical reality of God being sovereign over all Creation, and desiring that all people come to know Him, is not a directive for Christians to exercise dominion over the Earth and all its inhabitants. This is, I believe, one reason why so many faith leaders have been [speaking out against the Christian nationalist movement](#).

That said, we still need to consult *holy spirit* in prayer over these scriptural principles; *dialogue* with our brothers and sisters about them; observe how our *spiritual community* operates according to these principles; *discern* truths through our personal Christian walk while aiming to live according to scripture; engage in a *discipleship* relationship that expands and deepens our understanding of all of this; all while maintaining a spirit of openness and willingness to change.

Lastly, a critical caveat is that we cannot permit any of these subsequent elements of our hermeneutic to radically contradict the teachings of NT scripture, as that is succumbs to a level of false teachings Christians are warned to avoid: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to

suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4, ESV. See also: Matthew 7:15-20, Matthew 24:9-13, Acts 20:28-30, Romans 16:17-18, Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 2:8, Hebrews 13:9, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 3:12-17). This caveat applies to all such topics, but particularly those where there very sparse scripture to support a supposedly “Christian” position – *or where there no supportive scripture at all.*

### ***Only Two Genders***

On the surface, this appears to be pretty straightforward in NT scripture: God created people male and female, and that’s that (Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6). Further, the Apostle Paul uses the Greek word “μαλακοὶ” to denote those who are “soft, or effeminate,” whom he asserts will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Many translations struggle with this particular word, using different definitions, and sometimes even removing it from the verse altogether. In my own study of the Koine Greek, I think “effeminate” is a fair approximation, and here it seems to refer to men who act like women. It is also listed with other words that describe sexual immorality, so that gives us a hint at Paul’s intent.

So that’s one side of the argument.

But there is another side, a wrinkle discussed in the New Testament that muddies the waters a bit on this topic, and that is a discussion of *eunuchs*. Here is a full quote of Matthew 19:8-12 (RSV):

“He said to them, ‘For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.’

The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry’ But he said to them, ‘Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.’”

On its own, this doesn’t clear things up very much, but some additional verses about a eunuch may help. In Acts 8:26-40 an angel of the Lord directs Philip the Evangelist to travel to a specific road and join a eunuch in his chariot. After discussing a passage in Isaiah together, Philip preaches the salvation of Jesus to the eunuch, and the eunuch asks to be baptized right away. Philip then goes down into the water with the eunuch and baptizes him. After that, the eunuch rejoices.

I think you can see where this is going. If God specifically directed one of his twelve Apostles to preach salvation to a eunuch, and Philip then baptizes that eunuch into the kingdom of God, how can we insist today that a person whose gender has been altered through surgery is somehow unworthy, or cannot inherit the kingdom of God? Further, how can we condemn someone for actively choosing to become a eunuch because they personally believe this is *the best way they can serve God...?* Jesus seems to think such a choice is not only acceptable, but *preferable* – though this is a difficult teaching, and may be figurative rather than literal (those who are able to receive this, let them receive it). And, as we will see in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 in the next section, the individual choices of those *outside* of the church are irrelevant to Christian faith – it is not the responsibility of the Church to lord it over them or direct their lives.

Lastly, there is Galatians 3:28, which reads: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (RSV) This doesn’t contradict the existence of male and female genders, but surely it deemphasizes the importance of those genders in the kingdom of God – in the same way that it equates the status of a Jew and a Greek, and a slave and a free person.

Taking all of these passages together, navigating this topic becomes less and less simple or black-and-white. We certainly can’t insist that there are *only* two genders, or that the Bible condemns transgender individuals – even within the Church. So there is room here for *holy spirit* in prayer, *dialogue* with our brothers and sisters, observation of our *spiritual community*, *discernment* through our Christian walk, and deepening our understanding through *discipleship* – all helping arrive at a spiritually fruitful conclusion. Until that conclusion is reached for each of us, I would encourage folks to hold this issue as lightly as possible, in a neutral and open space, and to resist reverting to what may be traditional or cultural norms, rather than scriptural principles.

### ***Christian Values Should be Taught in Secular Public Schools***

This is another Christian nationalist ideal that appears to profoundly contradict the relevant teachings of NT scripture. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, Paul writes (my emphasis in **bold**):

“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; I did not at all mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler— not even to eat with such a person. **For what business of mine is it to judge outsiders?** Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the evil person from among yourselves.” (NASB)

This scripture invites careful examination. Paul is clearly stating that Christians are not supposed to judge those outside the church, nor apply any of his written guidance around

fruitful conduct and right relationships in the church to relationships with nonbelievers. Pointedly, conforming the world to Christ-like standards is not our purpose as Christians.

And, in fact, Jesus often demonstrates this same principle in how he interacted with others: being forgiving, kind, considerate, healing, and compassionate toward them *without demanding they conform to his expectations, or his religious tradition*. He might exhort them to “sin no more,” but he did not frame his acts of love as conditional on recipients’ conformance to his standards, beliefs, or demands. He healed everyone who asked – both those with faith and without faith, those who asked and those who didn’t ask, those viewed as outcasts and sinners, those possessed by demons, and Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus preformed this [unconditional healing and forgiveness of sins](#) so often that the religious leaders of his day reviled him for it, seeing such gracious gifts as a contradiction to their legalistic religious dogma.

Lastly, we also see that Jesus didn’t want his disciples to “lord it over each other” as was observable in secular culture at that time. (Mark 10:41-45) Instead, they needed to become servants of each other – and indeed servants of all, just as Jesus exemplified. (Mark 9:33-37, John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 9:19). *This is the Christian way*, as opposed to forcing nonbelievers to submit to a Christian’s will. Profoundly, this same principle applies to nearly everything the Christian nationalist movement aims to achieve through political means: *it is simply not Christ-like to impose Christian values and beliefs on the rest of secular society*. Those who are outside of the Church, God judges.

### ***The Appearance of Reasonableness in the Amplification of Lies, Hatred, Anger, and Violence***

This topic deserves careful and meticulous examination. When listening to the language of various advocates of Christian nationalism over the past few years, a pattern emerges about the style of rhetoric and debate being used that causes a fair bit of consternation for its critics: *an appearance of reasonableness that conceals the promotion of nonfactual, socially toxic narratives*. This style is so reasonable-seeming, in fact, that individual statements, taken on their own, do not appear all that nonfactual, caustic, or destructive to the untrained ear. And, as a consequence, opponents of Christian nationalism can often appear unjustifiably strident, histrionic, or reactive. So it seems prudent to illustrate this pattern, carefully define its characteristics, and only then explore what NT scripture might have to say about it. We’ll begin with some of the [more influential Christian nationalist figures](#).

### Marjorie Taylor Greene<sup>3</sup>

In a 2024 Fox News appearance, Ms. Greene asserted that “Democrats are going to bring in millions and millions of illegals and turn them into Democrat voters, that’s their plan, to replace Americans with millions and millions of illegal aliens.” Further, in an “America First” policy platform that she co-authored, she claims that “common respect for Anglo-Saxon political traditions” are being threatened when “foreign citizens are imported en-masse into a country.”

In a Right Side Broadcasting Network interview, Ms. Greene said: “We are producing fossil fuels. That keeps people's houses warm in the winter. That saves people's lives, people die in the cold. This Earth warming and carbon is actually healthy for us. It helps us to feed people, it helps keep people alive. The Earth is more green than it was years and years ago, and that is because of the Earth warming.”

Tweeting a photo taken of her in front of a Union Army monument, she wrote: “Tonight, I stopped at the Wilder Monument in Chickamauga, GA, which honors the Confederate soldiers of the Wilder Brigade. I will always defend our nation's history!”

On the website *American Truth Seekers*, she repeated several conspiracy theories, including that the 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville was an “inside job” to “further the agenda of the elites,” and that “John Podesta is a pedophile and pizza gate is real.”

In a Facebook post, she wrote that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was guilty of treason and should be executed.

She has asserted not only that there are just two genders, but that transgender people are “groomers,” education about LGBTQ issues is child abuse, gay men want to use women’s bathrooms, LGBTQ rights are aiming to “erase and attack God’s creation,” and so forth.

In 2019 Ms. Greene insisted Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib were not legitimate members of Congress, since they swore their congressional oaths of office on a Quran instead of a Bible. She also claimed in a Facebook post that “Muslims do not belong in government,” and repeated the false claim that Barak Obama was Muslim.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://7newz.com/politics/marjorie-taylor-greene-sparks-controversy-with-great-replacement-rhetoric/>, <https://www.americanprogressaction.org/article/a-list-of-maga-republicans-who-took-the-great-replacement-theory-mainstream/>, <https://www.newsweek.com/marjorie-taylor-greenes-10-most-outrageous-quotes-this-year-1769407>, <https://www.indy100.com/news/marjorie-taylor-greene-impeachment-biden-b1791283>, <https://www.mediamatters.org/congress/marjorie-taylor-greene-visited-capitol-and-tried-get-reps-ilhan-omar-and-rashida-tlaib>, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/25/politics/kfile-marjorie-greene-spread-conspiracies/index.html>, <https://glaad.org/gap/marjorie-taylor-greene/>

On the surface, most of these claims may just seem bigoted, silly, uninformed, or perhaps deliberately sensational to garner media attention. To many people, though, these statements may also appear reasonable, potentially true, and sometimes even *probable*. That these ideas are frequently repeated topics of other Christian nationalists also imbues them with a kind of performative, virtue-signaling groupthink – in other words, Ms. Greene may in part be broadcasting that she is a supportive member of the Christian nationalist tribe.

But let's recap the central themes being highlighted in Ms. Greene's quotes:

1. Foreigners are deliberately being brought into the U.S. en-masse to replace "real" Americans (language that evokes the "[Great Replacement Theory](#)" conspiracy).
2. Climate change is good for people.
3. Confederate soldiers should be celebrated and honored as part of American history.
4. Pizza gate was real.
5. White supremacist violence has been staged by liberal elites.
6. A prominent Democrat is treasonous and deserving of execution.
7. LGBTQ-related rights, information, and education should be rejected and disallowed.
8. We should be suspicious of Muslims and not allow them to serve in U.S. government.

What most folks who follow both mainstream political discourse and right-wing media will immediately recognize is that these ideas are not restricted to Christian nationalism – many are in fact frequent talking points of conservative talk show/podcast hosts, politicians who support Trump, and the MAGA base. This is an important consideration, as it indicates clear cross-pollination between the Christian nationalist worldview and agenda and the beliefs of the much broader MAGA infosphere. We should also add that the one additional talking point that has unified some [63% of folks on the political Right](#) is the debunked claim that the 2020 election was "stolen" through voter fraud – and of course Marjorie Taylor Greene has [promoted this falsehood](#) as well.

Initially, I had intended on documenting the countless correlations between the expressed views of other prominent Christian nationalists, but the reality is that all of these talking points are not universally held – and, regardless, supportive quotes would take up dozens of pages. Instead, I will offer quotes on just one controversial topic – one that has been an effective propaganda tool for [Trump's presidential campaigns](#):

***Liberal elites are deliberately replacing white American voters with immigrants***

[In multiple social media posts](#), **Mike Johnson**, the current GOP majority House Speaker, has repeated claims that Democrats "want to turn illegal aliens into voters." [In a Fox News interview, he opined](#): "Why would the president allow this? Because they wanted

to turn these people into voters. That’s plain. And they want to change the outcome of the Census in six years. It sounds sinister, and it is, and they’ve exacted untold damage on the country.”

[Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA, stated in a 2024 Instagram post](#) that 7.2 million illegals entered the U.S. under Biden administration, demonstrating that “the ‘Great Replacement’ is not a theory, it’s a reality.”

[Lance Wallnau, a prominent Christian nationalist televangelist, promotes the same narrative in this video](#), entitled “*This is how the elites plan to replace your vote...*”

**Stew Peters**, of ReAwaken America rally fame and self-avowed Christian nationalist, has hosted multiple “The Stew Peters Show” videos about Great Replacement Theory. Peters’ video titles have included:

- “*DEI for White guys*” Group Goes Viral to End WHITE Replacement
- *Snow White REPLACEMENT*
- *White Replacement ACCELERATES*
- *Full-Scale White REPLACEMENT Underway*

**Andrew Torba**, founder of the far-right Gab social network, and author of *Christian Nationalism: A Biblical Guide for Taking Dominion and Discipling Nations*, has [bragged about using his social media platform to propagate the Great Replacement Theory](#), and promoted other baseless anti-immigrant smears.

When we examine some additional, frequently touted conspiratorial themes, we find similar correlations with widespread use by prominent Christian nationalist activists and politicians. These might be conspiracy theories about vaccines or wealthy Jews, the villainization of liberals as Satan’s minions, or QAnon messianic fantasies about Donald Trump. As diverse and bizarre as these narratives are, they all share a prominent feature: **they are all deliberately fabricated falsehoods presented as unquestioned and immutable truth**. Further, these lies are also frequently tinged with righteous and retaliatory anger, and sometimes seem to be justification ever-increasing levels of hatred as well. We will circle back on these features in a moment.

But...*how do we know that all of these talking points are lies?* That is easy to prove, using overwhelming amounts of credible evidence, and excellent debunking work has been conducted on websites like [snopes.com](#), [factcheck.org](#), [politifact.com](#), [mediabiasfactcheck.com](#), and [several others](#). We merely have to do a topic search in any of these websites, and examine the evidence with an open mind. However, patient debunking appears to be a challenge for many Christian nationalists, whose suspicion of fact-checking organizations has been stoked by their own conspiracy narratives. Irrefutable evidence is often feverishly resisted when folks have doubled down on false beliefs over time, and resisting the truth often results from [a combination of psychological factors](#) and the “[sunk cost fallacy](#).” An endless stream of

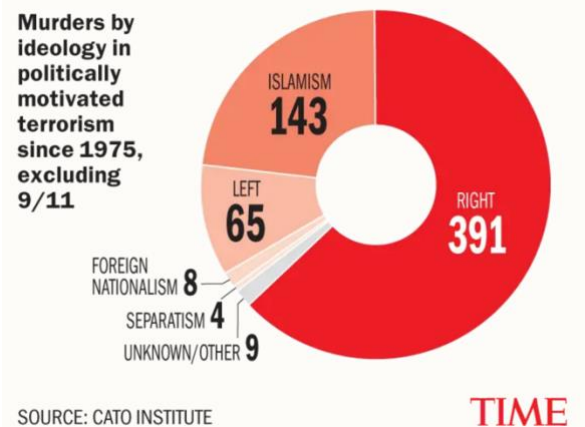


conspiracist interviews, doctored media clips, painstakingly “spun” arguments, and nonfactual reporting from right-wing media also persistently reinforces these pernicious falsehoods.

As mentioned, not all influential Christian nationalists parrot all of these extreme fabrications – for example, Russel Vought, an [instrumental champion of all things Project 2025](#), seems more laser-focused on the destruction of a secular U.S. government, elimination of Muslim mosques in U.S. cities, and ending gender transition at any age. But we do find many of the fabricated Christian nationalist talking points in the rhetoric of [other movers and shakers](#) in the movement – folks like Lauren Boebert, David Barton, Nick Fuentes, and [The Ziklag Group](#). [The article linked here](#) also offers an extensive list of past and present organizations and influential supporters aligned with Christian nationalism.

Nevertheless, the *consistency and relentless repetition* of these themes is a big deal, for a few reasons. The first is [the illusory truth effect](#), which is the flaw in our human brains that we tend to give more credibility to something when we hear it repeated over and over again. Even intelligent, well-educated experts in a given field, who may have solid research backing up a contradictory view, can fall prey to the illusory truth effect. The second reason is that [right-wing conspiracies have motivated repeated acts of political violence – despite attempts to blame that violence on left-wing extremism](#). In fact, we can draw a direct line from the rhetoric promoted by Christian nationalists to mass shootings targeting black people, Paul Pelosi being assaulted with a hammer in his home, a gunman charging into a Washington, D.C. pizza parlor in search of pedophiles, and countless other violent and threatening incidents.

But a drumbeat of excuses is used by right-wing media to cover for hateful and deceptive narratives, seemingly to make them both socially acceptable and reasonable-seeming. Some of the common refrains are: “They weren’t serious, it was just a joke,” or “it’s just politics nowadays,” or “hey that’s just click-bait,” and so on. More alarmingly, some Christian nationalist supporters and sympathizers who’ve fallen into *the illusory truth effect* trap actually believe that these absurd fabrications reflect reality. That many manipulative deceptions are energized by various intensities of hate and anger – against people of color, Jewish people, Democrats, government employees, women, liberals, judges, prosecutors, transgender folk, and so on – is unquestionable. That this hatred and anger has galvanized support for Christian nationalist political agendas such as Project 2025, helped Donald Trump into a second term as President, and further polarized the U.S. electorate into extremist factions is equally obvious. As captured in the graphic on this page, [lethal violence from right-wing extremists](#) accounts for the majority of politically motivated murder in the U.S.



So then...with all of this in mind, what does the New Testament say regarding manipulative lies about, hatred of, anger toward, and violence against those we view as enemies...?



## ***NT Scripture Addressing Hate, Lies, Anger, and Violence***

As someone who has been a member of both conservative and progressive Christian denominations over many years, I can attest to the following principles being fairly universally accepted across most of the modern Church:

**Lying** is not something Christians should do – not to others, not to themselves, and not to holy spirit – *and not even a little bit*. In fact, lying is considered especially toxic and destructive to the Church and our spiritual life, and is often a characteristic attributed to Satan. Lying is also described as part of our “old self,” which we set aside in favor of our new creation in Christ, so that we may worship in spirit and truth. (Matthew 15:18-20, Luke 16:10, John 4:23-24, John 8:43-47, John 17:13-19, Acts 5:3, Ephesians 4:17-32, Colossians 3:5-10, James 1:26, James 3:5-18, 1 Peter 3:8-17, Titus 2:7-8, Revelation 22:12-15)

**Anger** can and does bubble up inside us, but we shouldn’t dwell in it for long – or even let the sun set on it – instead being quick to forgive, patient, kind, gentle, humble, and self-controlled. (Matthew 5:21-24, Romans 2:1-9, Romans 12:14-21, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 2 Corinthians 12:19-20, Colossians 3:5-13, Galatians 5:19-23, Ephesians 4:1-32, Ephesians 6:4, Philippians 2:14, James 1:19-20, James 4:11, 1 Timothy 2:8)

**Violence** is also something NT scripture frequently discourages Christians from engaging in – and in fact it never allows for lethal violence to be justifiable...even in the context of avenging evil. Violent thoughts are also discouraged, along with harshly judging others. (Matthew 5:21-22, Matthew 5:38-39, Matthew 7:1-2, Matthew 26:52-54, Mark 7:21-22, John 8:43-47, John 18:36, Romans 12:17-21, Hebrews 12:14-15, Titus 1:7, Titus 3:2, 1 Peter 2:12-23, 1 Peter 3:9, James 3:17)

**Hatred and contempt** are other responses that are firmly and repeatedly disavowed in NT scripture. Christians are supposed to love and forgive, not be arrogant or hateful – even when someone is hating or belittling them. This is the very essence of Christ’s message and ministry. (Matthew 5:43-45, Matthew 6:15, Matthew 10:22, Luke 6:27-36, Luke 18:9-14, Romans 14:10-13, Ephesians 4:31, Galatians 5:19-23, 1 John 2:7-11, 1 John 3:13-15, 1 John 4:20, Titus 3:2)

As we can readily observe, there is an enormous disconnect between the attitudes, language, and beliefs of those who espouse or support Christian nationalist rhetoric, activism, politics, and policies, and the principles exhorted by the New Testament. This disconnect is so profound, in fact, that it greatly informs a Christian’s response to Christian nationalism, as we shall see.

## Conclusion: How Should Christians Respond to MAGA Christian Nationalism?

Remembering that Christians expectations of – and responsibilities to – other Christians has different standards than interactions with nonbelievers, let’s examine NT scripture’s guidance in *five distinct situations*, each of which can be viewed as an escalation in one Christian observing another Christian’s falling short of a Christ-like example.

Level	When Christians Fall Short	A Fellow Christian’s Response
1	When a Christian speaks or acts in sinful error.	<p><b>Luke 17:3-4:</b> “So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.” (NIV)</p> <p><b>Galatians 6:1-2:</b> “Brothers and sisters, even if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you are not tempted as well. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” (NASB)</p> <p>(see also <b>1 Timothy 1:12-14</b> regarding forgiving sins of ignorance)</p>
2	When a Christian’s actions or speech inadvertently cause other Christians to stumble in their faith.	<p><b>Romans 14:13-15:</b> “Therefore let’s not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this: not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s or sister’s way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to the one who thinks something is unclean, to that person it is unclean. For if because of food your brother or sister is hurt, you are no longer walking in accordance with love. Do not destroy with your choice of food that person for whom Christ died.” (NASB)</p> <p>(see also <b>1 Corinthians 8:13</b> regarding ceasing activity that causes others to stumble)</p>
3	When a Christian is being a poor or divisive example in their community and among nonbelievers.	<p><b>1 Thessalonians 5:13-15:</b> “...Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.” (ESV)</p> <p>(see also <b>Titus 1:10-13</b> regarding instances of “sharp rebukes”)</p>
4	When a Christian persists in immorality, repeating false teachings, or causing division and strife in the Church.	<p><b>Romans 16:17-18:</b> “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” (ESV)</p> <p><b>1 Corinthians 5:1-2:</b> “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and sexual immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, namely, that someone has his father’s wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.” (NASB)</p>
5	When a Christian persists in sinful behaviors (greed, sexual immorality, drunkenness, thievery, etc.)	<p><b>1 Corinthians 5:11-13:</b> “But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you.’” (RSV)</p> <p>(see also <b>Hebrews 12:14-16</b> regarding no one falling short of the grace of God)</p>

In the more general sense, Jesus offers us a parallel escalation of interventions in **Matthew 18:15-17** (NIV): “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” These are certainly helpful instruction – *even in the most egregious situations*.

Are there more egregious situations than the five listed in the chart above? Well there is the event of someone falling away from their Christian faith entirely – the condition of *apostasy*. We gain some insight regarding this condition in **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**. Here we see that those who fall away from the faith will be judged by God – effectively echoing the sentiment of 1 Corinthians 5, where we are exhorted not to judge outsiders, because God will take care of that. We also learn from scripture that some believers turning away from Christ’s truth is, unfortunately, an inevitable condition of the end times. (Matthew 24:9-11, Acts 20:29-30, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, 2 Peter 2:1). In **Hebrews 6:4-8**, we learn that, once someone has accepted the grace of Christ and received holy spirit, if they then fall away from the faith we cannot restore them to repentance, “since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame.” This is a harsh teaching, but it echoes Paul’s other instruction about God being the judge in such situations, rather than Christians.

Lastly, we also learn that “blasphemy against holy spirit” is a sin that will not be forgiven. (Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-30, Luke 12:10). In the original Koine Greek of the New Testament, the word translated “blasphemy” is often βλασφημία. At that time, this word generally meant to defame, slander, revile, or speak evil against someone. So is this referring to a believer’s willful rejection of their own faith, as in Hebrews 6? It seems likely this is at least one form of blasphemy against holy spirit – depending on the depth and breadth of that rejection – but I suspect there are other forms as well.

So where do Christian nationalism’s mistaken beliefs land in our list of falling short, and a Christian’s responsibility to skillfully respond to them? Honestly, I think it will depend on each unique situation – for each individual, it could be any level of falling short, from “Level 1” to “Level 5.” What is clear is that if we follow Jesus’ instruction on how to lovingly approach our brother or sister, the extent of the error will eventually become evident, inviting further escalation if necessary. Here are those steps as outlined in Matthew 18:

1. One-on-one discussion in private.
2. Three-on-one intervention – again seemingly in private.
3. The entire congregation intervenes.
4. The errant and unrepentant member is avoided by members of the congregation.
5. The errant and unrepentant member is asked to leave the congregation.

Clearly, Paul warns us repeatedly in such situations to examine our own motivations, attitudes, and methods with great care, lest we ourselves fall short of an embodiment of God's grace and love. Our role is not to spiritually police our brothers and sisters, or lord it over them, but to treat them with gentleness, patience, forbearance, kindness, and a readiness to forgive. **Our objective is not punishment, after all, but restoration.**

And, as informed by the additional hermeneutical practices described earlier (consulting *holy spirit* in prayer, *dialoguing* with our brothers and sisters, observation of our *spiritual community*, *discernment* through our Christian walk, and deepening our understanding through *discipleship*), that is all we can do. Through such restorative efforts, it may be that our Christian nationalist brothers and sisters will find their way back to a Christ-centered, scripture-based faith. But the ultimate outcome of that process will be between them and their Lord Jesus Christ.

### Some Final Notes

In writing this essay, and practicing the multiple methods of interpretation along the way, I discovered that I had some prejudices, bias, and unskillful habits of my own to correct. As a progressive who believed he had a spiritually-grounded, solidly Biblical approach to politics, I was surprised, chagrined, and humbled that I had missed the mark on some of the very aspects of Christian conduct elaborated upon here. If nothing else, this has been a worthwhile exercise for my own faith. I hope it may be for yours as well.

For additional reading on this topic, and to explore the larger picture of conservative Christian activism in America, I also recommend perusing "[Christianity, Neoliberalism & Right-Wing Populism: A Faustian Bargain.](#)"

To close, I'll leave you with what was the most impactful scripture for me as I revisited it in the context of these topics. From **Ephesians 4:17-32** (NASB):

"So I say this, and affirm in the Lord, that you are to no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their minds, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves up to indecent behavior for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Therefore, ridding yourselves of falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, because we are parts of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let

the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. The one who steals must no longer steal; but rather he must labor, producing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need. Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but if there is any good word for edification according to the need of the moment, say that, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

If I can consistently practice *just this one passage* from day to day in the context of my attitudes and conduct, I feel I will be honoring in some small way the limitless holy gift of grace I have been given. I plan to reread it each morning, and then, every night before I go to sleep, reflect on how I was able to align my thoughts and actions with the Word of God over the course of the day.

Lastly, I have attached what I believe is a helpful historical companion document to this essay. “The Barmen Declaration” was authored in 1934 by a group of church leaders (see [Synod of Barmen](#)) in response to the doctrines of the “[German Christian Faith Movement](#)” – a Christian nationalist movement of that time. The Synod of Barmen included representatives from the Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches. The Declaration speaks for itself, but the parallels between how it responds to the challenges of that time and place, and how we must respond to the challenges of our time and place are, I believe, very instructive.

## THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN<sup>1</sup>

### I. An Appeal to the Evangelical Congregations and Christians in Germany

- 8.01** The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church met in Barmen, May 29–31, 1934. Here representatives from all the German Confessional churches met with one accord in a confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, apostolic Church. In fidelity to their Confession of Faith, members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches sought a common message for the need and temptation of the Church in our day. With gratitude to God they are convinced that they have been given a common word to utter. It was not their intention to found a new church or to form a union. For nothing was farther from their minds than the abolition of the confessional status of our churches. Their intention was, rather, to withstand in faith and unanimity the destruction of the Confession of Faith, and thus of the Evangelical Church in Germany. In opposition to attempts to establish the unity of the German Evangelical Church by means of false doctrine, by the use of force and insincere practices, the Confessional Synod insists that the unity of the Evangelical Churches in Germany can come only from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit. Thus alone is the Church renewed.
- 8.02** Therefore the Confessional Synod calls upon the congregations to range themselves behind it in prayer, and steadfastly to gather around those pastors and teachers who are loyal to the Confessions.
- 8.03** Be not deceived by loose talk, as if we meant to oppose the unity of the German nation! Do not listen to the seducers who pervert our intentions, as if we wanted to break up the unity of the German Evangelical Church or to forsake the Confessions of the Fathers!
- 8.04** Try the spirits whether they are of God! Prove also the words of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church to see whether they agree with Holy Scripture and with the Confessions of the Fathers. If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he himself has said: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Therefore, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from *The Church's Confessions Under Hitler* by Arthur C. Cochrane. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962, pp. 237–242. Used by permission.

## II. Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Evangelical Church

**8.05** According to the opening words of its constitution of July 11, 1933, the German Evangelical Church is a federation of Confessional churches that grew out of the Reformation and that enjoy equal rights. The theological basis for the unification of these churches is laid down in Article 1 and Article 2(1) of the constitution of the German Evangelical Church that was recognized by the Reich Government on July 14, 1933:

Article 1. The inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is attested for us in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation. The full powers that the Church needs for its mission are hereby determined and limited.

Article 2(1). The German Evangelical Church is divided into member Churches' (*Landeskirchen*).

**8.06** We, the representatives of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches, of free synods, church assemblies, and parish organizations united in the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church, declare that we stand together on the ground of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of German Confessional churches. We are bound together by the confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

**8.07** We publicly declare before all evangelical churches in Germany that what they hold in common in this Confession is grievously imperiled, and with it the unity of the German Evangelical Church. It is threatened by the teaching methods and actions of the ruling church party of the "German Christians" and of the church administration carried on by them. These have become more and more apparent during the first year of the existence of the German Evangelical Church. This threat consists in the fact that the theological basis, in which the German Evangelical Church is united, has been continually and systematically thwarted and rendered ineffective by alien principles, on the part of the leaders and spokesmen of the "German Christians" as well as on the part of the church administration. When these principles are held to be valid, then, according to all the Confessions in force among us, the church ceases to be the church and the German Evangelical Church, as a federation of Confessional churches, becomes intrinsically impossible.

**8.08** As members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches, we may and must speak with one voice in this matter today. Precisely because we want to be and to remain faithful to our various Confessions, we may not keep silent, since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation. We commend to God what this may mean for the interrelations of the Confessional churches.

**8.09** In view of the errors of the “German Christians” of the present Reich Church government which are devastating the Church and are also thereby breaking up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths:

**8.10** 1. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6). “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” (John 10:1, 9.)

**8.11** Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

**8.12** We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.

**8.13** 2. “Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (I Cor. 1:30.)

**8.14** As Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God’s mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

**8.15** We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

**8.16** 3. “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together.” (Eph. 4:15, 16.)

**8.17** The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

**8.18** We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.



- 8.19** 4. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Matt. 20:25, 26.)
- 8.20** The various offices in the church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation.
- 8.21** We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give to itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers.
- 8.22** 5. “Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (I Peter 2:17.)
- Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which the Church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfills this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the Kingdom of God, God’s commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things.
- 8.23** We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the church’s vocation as well.
- 8.24** We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.
- 8.25** 6. “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matt. 28:20.) “The word of God is not fettered.” (II Tim. 2:9.)
- 8.26** The church’s commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ’s stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and Sacrament.
- 8.27** We reject the false doctrine, as though the church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.
- 8.28** The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it sees in the acknowledgment of these truths and in the rejection of these errors the indispensable theological basis of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of Confessional churches. It invites all who are able to accept its declaration to be mindful of these theological principles in their decisions in church politics. It entreats all whom it concerns to return to the unity of faith, love, and hope.