

# Christianity, Neoliberalism, & Right-Wing Populism: A Faustian Bargain

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This has been a difficult piece to write. Not for lack of conviction – the principles and contrasts outlined here have been profoundly evident to me for some time – but because over time I’ve come to believe that broader, collective healing is most often inspired through reconciliation, empathy, and forgiveness, and that brutal honesty or critical exhortations should be reserved mainly for those close relationships that can bear it – where both parties know that a conversation issues from a place of genuine affection and compassion. In my case the main departures from this have been performative and impulsive social media rants, but this isn’t one of those. There are also ways to sweeten and soften the truth, to make it more palatable and conversational, and my training and experiences with therapeutic dialogue, compassionate support, nonviolent communication, and validating language or those with mental illness have all informed my approach to being more skillful and effective in conveying difficult information when required. This has been most evident in my Integral Lifework coaching, at times in my career when I have managed large teams, and whenever I have held some sort of voluntary or elected office (as a board member, etc.). In addition to this, there is clear instruction in **Galatians 6:1** to restore any fellow believers who have gone astray in a spirit of gentleness – and to guard against thinking I am better than they are in some way. We all have the capacity to fall short, after all. But what we’re about to explore in this essay simply can’t be sugar-coated. It can’t be made warm and inviting, or particularly gentle. It is instead challenging and unpleasant insight about the state of Christian politics. It simply needs to be said, and in the spirit of **1 Timothy 5:20**, some rebukes must be delivered publicly, in the presence of all.

First, I’ll offer some introductory notes to frame the context of these observations. I discovered a deep and abiding appreciation for the teachings and stories in the New Testament when I was in my late teens, and committed to living a spiritually-centered life with Jesus as my guide when I was nineteen. For a few years after that, I remained a committed member of a Church of Christ in Seattle, Washington, where I was able to participate in good work – with a lot of good folks. But I eventually found the dogma of that denomination’s leadership too restrictive and misguided, often seemingly more informed by socially conservative culture than by New Testament teachings. In the decades that followed, I would explore many different congregations and denominations in an attempt to find a spiritual home. I spent time among Presbyterians, Methodists, Churches of God, some New Age movements, and then finally with Unitarian Universalists – which ended up feeling like the closest thing to home for me. I have never relinquished my certainty that the example of Jesus is my spiritual ground and center, but my understanding of Christian “faith” has evolved a great deal over time. As I wrote in [Faith as an Intentionally Cultivated Quality of Character](#): “The Christian demonstrates their faithfulness by welcoming and maintaining *agape*’s residence at the core of all sincere intentions, all confidence and credence, all allegiances and loyalties, all trust, and all beliefs. For any belief (or faith, or trust, or fidelity, or commitment) that does not flow from love is empty and pointless – a gong clanging soundlessly in the void.”

A few years ago, when I felt that I had navigated some of the nuances of my own convictions and arrived at a more mature understanding of New Testament principles, I wrote the book [A Progressive’s Guide to the New](#)

**Testament.** For anyone who wishes to understand exactly where I am coming from – including my approach to interpreting scripture, and indeed how the New Testament advocates politically “progressive” views in many areas – that would be a good place to start.

Lastly, I may paraphrase passages from the New Testament, but where I quote directly I will use the English Standard Version (ESV).

## Where to begin?

This could become a very long and rambling narrative, as it encompasses some 35 years of pondering, meditation and prayer – and I want to avoid that. So, for brevity’s sake, I’m including graphics and tables to elaborate on the basic concepts involved. Some of these will be self-explanatory, and some will require further clarification, so stay tuned for that.

### **Table #1: Values Disparity**

The following table is a straightforward way to illustrate the current problems with modern Christian politics, most notably in the U.S. but also to be found all around the globe. Central to this comparison is the idea of “political praxis;” that is, how values are expressed and reified in consistent actions over time in the political sphere. In order to understand all the parameters involved, we’ll begin by listing some universally understood values and ideas that the New Testament teaches. These include the primary values hierarchies (or “virtue groupings” if you will) of *agape*, *trust*, *peace*, and *righteousness*. A more detailed **Reference** section provided at the end of this essay will map those values and ideals to the scripture that supports them. For now, however, we will entertain them as self-evident teachings of Jesus and his Apostles found throughout scripture. Then we will list the equally self-evident political praxis of various political tribes that either aligns with or contradicts these fundamental Christian values and ideals. As for metrics and evidence used to support those descriptions of praxis, that work has already been done by others, so I will list some resources in the end **Reference** section to help folks reach their own conclusions.

First some definitions.

By “**Christian Right**” I am referring specifically to a coalition of socially conservative religious organizations and alliances that gained prominence and increasing political influence in the U.S. during the late 1970s. This includes conservative white evangelicals and other conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons. It has manifested in political activist institutions such as the Christian Coalition, Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, and the Moral Majority. The more notable figureheads of the movement in the U.S. include Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Francis Schaefer, and Phyllis Schlafly. The Christian Right’s agenda centers around anti-abortion activism, opposing LGBTQ protections and equality, reducing the influence of government over private life, eliminating sex education and promoting creationism and prayer in K-12 education, science skepticism and denialism, and a robust Christian persecution complex.

By “**neoliberal**” I am referring to the laissez-faire market fundamentalist philosophy championed by Milton Friedman, James M. Buchanan, and Friedrich Hayek, and then popularized and mainstreamed by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Neoliberalism’s aims have been to deregulate industry, eliminate international trade barriers, privatize all publicly owned assets and industries, and manipulate government to serve corporate interests (often described as “crony capitalism”). The primary impacts of neoliberal policies have included weakening unions and collective bargaining; strengthening corporate control over elections, political candidates, and legislation; regulatory capture; elimination of any government programs and policies that create a “halo effect” of perceived positive benefit of government for the electorate; extraordinary increases in wealth inequality and elimination of the middle class; and general weakening of civil society and democratic institutions.

By “**right-wing populism**” I mean the recent rise of nationalist, nativist, anti-immigrant, anti-globalist, anti-government, anti-environmentalist, anti-welfarism, anti-democracy, science denialist, fascist-leaning, racist-leaning political activism around the globe. We often find many intersects between right-wing populism and various far-right conspiracy theories (i.e. the “deep state,” Jewish globalists and the “New World Order,” false flag operations, immigrant election fraud, etc.). Right-wing populism’s most recognizable cheerleaders include the UK’s Independence and Brexit parties, the National Front/Rally in France, the Sweden Democrats, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation in Australia, and of course Trumpism in the U.S.A. Although the seeds of this movement have been around for decades, here we are specifically referring to the global rise of right-wing populist leaders, parties and policies since about 2014. Right-wing populism’s primary accomplishments have been to block immigration, dismantle government safety nets and successful government programs, eliminate taxes on corporations and the wealthy, cancel international trade agreements, and interfere with democracy – all while restoring a both perceived and actual loss of status to the white male natives of a given country.

It should be noted that, in the United States, these first three groups have found their primary home in the Republican Party. It can further be observed that these three groups share much of the same rhetoric and polemics. For example, they will all tend to invoke vilification of liberals and progressives, conspiracies about an imagined “cultural Marxism” in higher education bent on brainwashing young people, conspiracies about “the liberal media” perpetuating mass deception and ideological inculcation, perpetuation of science skepticism and denial, hostility to cultural and religious diversity, a spectrum of racist and misogynistic biases, and an unshakable commitment to market fundamentalism that frequently manifests as, once again, crony capitalism.

By “**progressive**” I am referring to the latest expression of left-leaning political ideals since about 2008. Progressives are most interested in promoting strong civil society, voting rights and protections, social safety nets, environmental protection and preservation, corporate regulation and accountability, worker protections and unions, consumer rights and protections, protections and equality for people of color and LGBTQ folks, pro-choice reproductive rights for women, and a generally more egalitarian society where control of government – and control of wealth production and accumulation – are highly diffused and democratic. As a consequence, progressives are, quite understandably, diametrically opposed to nearly every objective, policy, principle and perspective generated by neoliberals, right-wing populists, and the Christian Right.

And now please spend some time with the comparison table on the next page before reading further.

Central Christian Values & Ideals		“Christian Right” Political Praxis	Right-Wing Populist Praxis	Neoliberal Political Praxis	Progressive Political Praxis
Guiding Value/Ideal: Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind		1978 - 2020	2014 – 2020	1980 – 2020	2008 – 2020
AGAPE	Inclusive and unconditional love, kindness, respect, and forgiveness towards all (neighbors, enemies, other races, Christians, non-believers, sinners, the poor, the unclean, outcasts, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oppression and persecution of GLBTQ</li> <li>• Opposes women’s and minority equality/rights</li> <li>• Hostile to other religions - tribalistic</li> <li>• Opposes federal programs to help sick, disabled, poor, elderly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active exclusion, vilification and hostility toward vulnerable</li> <li>• Hate speech targeting victims, “liberal elite,” Muslims, outcasts</li> <li>• Authoritarian persecution and oppression of immigrants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disregard for plight of poor and vulnerable</li> <li>• Disregard for well-being of workers and consumers</li> <li>• Exclusion/suffering for everyone except wealthiest</li> <li>• Dismantles or defunds social safety nets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety nets for poor, sick, disabled and vulnerable</li> <li>• Protection and advocacy for victims/outcasts</li> <li>• Equality/rights for women, minorities</li> <li>• Collectively shared burdens and benefits - nontribal</li> <li>• Inclusion, diversity</li> </ul>
	Caring and advocating for those who are vulnerable or in need (women, sick, injured, disabled, orphaned, widowed, victimized, etc.)				
TRUST	Worshiping only God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prosperity theology, wealth-worship, acquisitive, proprietary</li> <li>• Disenfranchises voters of color</li> <li>• Hostile opposition to secular power; attempts to capture/coopt it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Strong man” leader-worship</li> <li>• Weakening of democratic institutions</li> <li>• Emphasizes individualistic liberty (anti-tax, anti-government) and materialism</li> <li>• Proprietarian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrates avarice/wealth</li> <li>• Crony capitalism/ regulatory capture</li> <li>• Voter suppression</li> <li>• Economy-over-people (anti-tax, anti-government)</li> <li>• Market worship</li> <li>• Proprietarian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willing sacrifice (taxes and submission to government) to help others</li> <li>• People-over-economy (anti-greed/plutocracy)</li> <li>• Pro-voting and pro-democracy</li> <li>• Commons-friendly</li> </ul>
	Renunciation of worldly wealth and materialism, and practicing unconstrained generosity (commons-centric model within Church)				
	Submitting to secular power (leaders/justice/taxes)				
	Seeking out God’s will instead of our own				
PEACE	Having contentment and joy in all situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stridently critical of “liberal” economics, media, science, evidence, education, etc.</li> <li>• Violent/lethal confrontations with opposition</li> <li>• Willing pawns of gun lobby</li> <li>• Pro-military/war</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generates conflict and division</li> <li>• Violent/lethal confrontation with opposition</li> <li>• Impatient and arrogant rhetoric</li> <li>• Seeks vengeance on detractors</li> <li>• Willing pawns of gun lobby</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition and winning more important than cooperation</li> <li>• Increases class conflict and wage/ debt slavery</li> <li>• War profiteering</li> <li>• Divisive polemics promoting agenda</li> <li>• Pro military/guns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursues cooperation, reconciliation</li> <li>• Stridently critical of status quo and far Right opposition</li> <li>• Aggressive defense of the vulnerable</li> <li>• Anti-war</li> <li>• Gun control advocacy</li> </ul>
	Seeking peace, cooperation, and reconciliation – and relinquishing anger and vengeful desires				
	Exercising patience, gentleness, humility, acceptance, and self-control				
RIGHTEOUSNES	Living an honest, moral, upright, honorable life that is “beyond reproach”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive imposition of pseudo-Christian ideals on non-believers</li> <li>• Stridently self-righteous and judgmental</li> <li>• Frequently seeking personal gain/status</li> <li>• Not discerning of deception and falsehoods (Reagan Cheney, Cruz, Gingrich, Trump)</li> <li>• Malicious propaganda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persecution of Muslims and poor immigrants</li> <li>• Aggressive imposition of individualistic liberty on others</li> <li>• Excessive corruption</li> <li>• Profound lack of discernment about effective policies and actual threats (e.g. fascism)</li> <li>• Personal gain and status are critical</li> <li>• Malicious propaganda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-serving ends justify any means</li> <li>• Strong-arming the privatization of public assets</li> <li>• Controlling capital flows at all costs</li> <li>• Personal reward/ gain is central</li> <li>• Imposes economic will on others</li> <li>• Arrogantly self-important</li> <li>• Excessive corruption</li> <li>• Deceptive manipulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocates for fairness and justice equally for all</li> <li>• Less judgement about cultural and religious differences</li> <li>• Less corruption and deception</li> <li>• More discerning about effective policies, evidence, and metrics</li> <li>• Expects Christ-like standards from Christian Right</li> <li>• Evidence-based flexibility</li> </ul>
	Avoiding hypocrisy, arrogance, and self-righteous self-importance				
	Restraining from imposing Christian standards of conduct on non-believers, lording it over others, or judging others				
	Being humble and not seeking personal gain, status, or reward				
	Developing discernment through practice				

When reviewing the chart, several things surge to the foreground. Here are the ones I think are important to consider from the perspective of Christian theology:

1. The affinity between central Christian values and ideals and the political praxes of neoliberalism, right-wing populism, and the Christian Right is heartbreakingly sparse if existent at all.
2. The strongest affinities in this chart can clearly be seen between progressive political praxis and central Christian values and ideals on the one hand – and the overlapping political praxis of neoliberalism, right-wing populism, and the Christian Right on the other.
3. There are some Christian values and ideals which do not appear to be clearly or markedly represented in any of the praxis columns. These include having joy and contentment in all situations; worshiping only God; renunciation of worldly wealth and materialism; seeking God’s will instead of our own; and exercising patience, gentleness and humility. Some of these virtues are likely to be more personal and less public, so that may explain their apparent absence in collective political praxis – at least in part.

Due to the large number of folks who self-identify as Christians in the U.S., we would hope that a percentage of each group is genuinely aiming to “love God with all of their heart, soul and mind,” but that intention is also not something we can readily discern – it is an internal process that won’t always be evident in someone’s choices and actions in the political realm. Which leads us to another notable contrast that isn’t captured by the chart: an individual who identifies with one of these groups may lead a very different life personally and interpersonally than they do via voting, making purchases, or contributing to political campaigns. In fact, when I recently engaged an evangelical Christian acquaintance of mine around the observation that voting Republican in the U.S. during the last few decades has routinely opposed most New Testament principles, he defended being Republican with anecdotes about actions in his personal life, and the equally personal choices of his Republican Christian friends. In his and their private lives, there was clear evidence of alignment with *righteousness, peace, trust and agape* – and that was more important to him than how he or any of his friends might vote or show public support. He did not dispute the observed incompatibility between Christian virtues and GOP policies and politics, he just believed it wasn’t as important as personal and interpersonal choices.

And therein lies the central difficulty: the translation of Christ-like attitudes and behaviors from the private and interpersonal to the public and political spheres is simply not something the New Testament extensively delineates. The cannon was, after all, written at a time when democracy was not widespread. There are inferences and extrapolations anyone who carefully studies scripture can make, but those are subtle and debatable in ways that do not stand up well to strong or pervasive cultural, familial and tribal values and memes. For example, if we grow up with thriving gun culture and a worshipful and self-righteous fervor about the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, **that cultural experience tends to override the New Testament encouragements** for Christians to be peaceful and nonviolent, to turn the other cheek, or subject ourselves to secular authority – especially in the political sphere. Likewise, if our family and culture is fundamentally and vehemently opposed to women or non-white minorities sharing white male status and privilege in society, the New Testament’s clear encouragement of gender and racial equality, unbiased generosity, and acceptance of all people will tend to be suppressed at the ballot box. And if our culture’s primary mode of economic productivity

involves the celebration of aggressive competition, acquisitiveness, exploitation, and a perpetual orientation of *caveat emptor*... well then **how can we permit our spiritual beliefs to interfere with that cultural norm**, either in our own chosen profession or in how we vote?

Adding tribal constraints and pressures to this mix – loyalty tests, expectations of lockstep conformance, ostracization for acting outside of the status quo or even questioning it, rewards of approval and social capital for adherence, etc. – mean that fear of losing one’s community and sense of belonging loom large for anyone seeking to be ‘renewed in the spirit of their minds’ and attempting to don a new self. Even so, applying Christian values and ideals to personal habits and relationships is not easy either – as one older Christian soberly opined to me when I was considering committing myself to the Christian faith: “It’s no bed of roses.” It requires vigilance and effort to be compassionate, kind, honest, patient, generous, humble, discerning, non-judgmental, forgiving and so on. It’s not second nature for most people – and some of these things are certainly not reflexive for me. So when my evangelical acquaintance defended his Republican voting record here in the U.S. by alluding to the choices of his personal life – and the private efforts of many people he loves and respects – that really seemed reasonable argument to my mind. What matters most in life, after all, is our example from day to day, and our living “above reproach” in all of our relationships.

Except...there is a real problem with that position, and that involves the issues of scale, impact, civic responsibility, and legacy. Let’s say a Christian attorney has committed herself to helping desperate immigrants seek asylum in the U.S., but voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. She may indeed help dozens – perhaps even hundreds – of immigrants navigate the challenging asylum process. But if she voted for Trump in 2016, it certainly also means that she facilitated the denial of thousands of immigrant asylum claims because of Trump’s draconian anti-immigrant tactics. In the same way, if a Christian is personally charitable with their time and money in helping the poor and vulnerable, but has a career at a large and influential bank, law firm, retailer, oil and gas company, etc. that routinely expands the number or deepens the suffering of these groups, that Christian is attempting to heal with one hand while perpetuating grievous injury with the other. And in this way the scales become profoundly imbalanced across the spectrum – eliminating food programs for the poor, healthcare for the sick, quality education for all children, etc. How can one person’s personal volunteer efforts or charitable giving ever hope to offset activities of massive corporations that worsen these societal problems, or government policies that actively and aggressively undermine such programs across the entire country, just as the Trump administration has done – and indeed the G.W. Bush and Reagan administrations before that? It certainly seems deliberately self-defeating, doesn’t it? In reality, each vote is a proxy for our conscience and the spirit of Christ to percolate through civil society, amplifying the impact of public good in our time, and in some cases for many generations to come.

And, to reiterate, this isn’t just about the Trump administration – as neoliberalism and the Christian Right have both been associated with the Republican party in the U.S. since at least 1980. Even before Donald Trump, Republicans were vehemently opposed to Obamacare, which provided health insurance to millions of previously uninsured people, even though those same Republicans did not have a single viable counterproposal – *not one*. In similar fashion, Republicans have been opposed to the Head Start program, even though it helped poor kids do much better in school; opposed to Planned Parenthood, even though it has routinely reduced abortion rates

wherever its clinics are established; opposed to voting rights and protections, even while trumpeting rhetorical lip-service to freedom and democracy; opposed Medicaid funding, even though Red States disproportionately benefit from Medicaid programs; opposed to worker and consumer protections – and environmental regulations – for industries like coal mining and natural gas fracking, which again have disproportionately caused injury and suffering to Republican constituents. And all of this, really, epitomizes the longstanding patterns of the GOP: through legislation, Executive actions, and judiciary appointments, Republicans have sought to deprive, ostracize, exploit, oppress, and harm the very populations Jesus sought to heal, lift up, honor, and serve – such as the sick, the disabled, the poor, outcasts, the stigmatized, and the vulnerable. Have there been occasional Republican exceptions? Sure, but only occasional, and dwarfed by what Republican majorities have accomplished over time.

In contrast, since at least the 1970s, Democrats have nearly always on the other side of those same debates. When Democrats have been in power, they have been the chief architects and drivers of legislation that protects and serves the poorest, most vulnerable, and most oppressed populations in the U.S. Democrats have championed voting rights, affordable healthcare access, consumer rights, worker protections, social safety nets, GLBTQ rights, women's rights, environmental regulation, and necessary oversight of unethical, abusive, and exploitative businesses. But then, whenever Republicans have regained a majority, they have worked hard for precisely the opposite outcome, making sure that corporations gained more and more power with less and less oversight, while the rights and protections for workers, voters, consumers, minorities, women, and the poor languished. **The contrast is exceedingly stark.**

What explains this contrast? There have been many attempts to ferret out the underlying reasons why conservatives think, act, and vote in one way, while progressives think, act, and vote in an entirely different way. For example, there have been explorations of differing moral values and priorities that appear to ground the two groups (Haidt's [moral foundations theory](#)); the impact fast and slow thinking ([Kahneman](#)) on political discourse and decisions ([Stoker, Hay & Barr](#)); how dominance of either the right or left hemisphere of the brain influences ideological preferences and praxis ([McGilchrist](#)); [research](#) that indicates innate psychological differences between conservatives and progressives in terms of tolerating ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty, etc.; and many other interesting speculations. In 2016, I proposed in a [blog post](#) that one driving force in Left/Right political divide arises from traditional culture that promotes testosterone-dependent dominance systems and fosters a deep mistrust of feminine power. In a more recent and nuanced examination, I wrote an [essay](#) about **cultural disruption of personal and collective agency** that infects both conservative and progressive ideologies, which has led to some of the more extreme cognitive distortions and convictions, and which we need to reverse in order to heal society.

But what else might be at the root of these divisions? There is a rich array of possibilities to consider. Could it be expressions of something like Nietzsche's "[will to power](#)?" Could Freud's "[death drive](#)" explain some of the divergences we see? What about levels of education, exposure to cultural and racial diversity, childhood trauma, level of affluence and position of privilege in society, native ability to think critically, and so on? Well, I suspect that everything mentioned so far plays some part. However, my current thinking about this has distilled the primary dichotomy down to underlying contrasting views about **freedom and equality**. This may be just one more oversimplification, but here are the basic propositions:



1. Progressives view freedom and equality as collective agreements, supported by evolving cultural norms and the rule of law, that facilitate the most comprehensive collective benefit possible for everyone in society. In other words, progressives view equality between all citizens, and the maximization of freedom for each individual, as a consequence of mutually agreed societal expectations. And why are those agreements important? Because they can achieve egalitarian outcomes across all of society. Importantly, the equality and freedom of all people are predetermined assumptions about both ideal individual rights and the ideal conditions in which they ought to live. Therefore, progressivism tends to view itself as inherently aspirational, aiming for “life as it could be,” in perpetual opposition to a flawed status quo.
2. Conservatives view freedom as a natural right of every person that facilitates their ability to pursue beneficial outcomes according to their skills, aptitudes, and capacity to compete with others. Equality is likewise viewed more through a lens of merit – it is less a predetermined assumption about all people being equal, and more a possibility of achieving equal standing in society that can be earned through demonstrated effort. And what is the presupposed outcome? That some people will be winners, with a greater experience of equality and freedom, and some people will be losers, with less of that experience – but the conservative accepts this as the natural and somewhat fixed order of things. Therefore, conservatism tends to view itself as inherently pragmatic, embracing the status quo of “how things are” – a static view of cultural norms that benefit those who achieve privilege and position – and defending ways those norms can predictably continue.

Much time and effort could be spent appreciating the subtleties of this topic – details like equality of outcome verses equality of opportunity, facilitation of agency verse extinguishment of agency, positive verses negative liberty, and so on – but it seems to me that this boils down to different approaches to **ending poverty, deprivation and oppression in their many forms**. The conservative views the world as rich with opportunities, with the only major barriers to actualized freedom and equality – and the consequent attenuation of poverty, deprivation, and oppression – being interference or competition from other individuals, and interference or competition from civic institutions. The progressive, on the other hand, views the world as encumbered with many structural and pervasive cultural barriers (racism, sexism, classicism, ageism, tribalism, etc.) that need to be removed through collective agreements – most often embodied in civic institutions and the rule of law – in order for freedom and equality to be actualized, and for poverty, deprivation, and oppression to be vanquished. At its core, therefore, this remains a diametric opposition.

But which approach does the New Testament endorse? What does Jesus promote? For me this is where things get really interesting. Because the New Testament consistently presents very much the same contrast we see embodied in progressivism and conservatism. With regard to “the world as it is,” there are frequent reminders in scripture that the world cannot be changed, that its machinations, power structures, oppressions, arrogance, striving, and injustices must be accepted and its burdens dutifully borne. At the same time, *the kingdom of God* is promoted as “the world as it should be,” full of compassion, forgiveness, kindness, humility, generosity, and mutual aid. Christians are encouraged again and again not to conform to the world’s values, priorities, and divisive norms, but instead to evidence the fruit of the spirit of Christ (**Gal 5:22**) by reforming personal priorities and values – and the collective priorities and values within the Church – to reflect a new way of being. In fact,



such reformation is itself proof of the kingdom of God's establishment in the world. And what characterizes that new way of being? The virtues of *righteousness, peace, trust, and agape* that we explored in the earlier table, and which are embodied in progressive praxis.

This contrast between the way of the world and the way of the spirit **is really the central drama of all New Testament scripture**. As Jesus personifies the way of the spirit in all of his interactions and pronouncements, he is confronted with antagonism from the status quo – from those who wish to preserve the way of the world and their own places of power and privilege within it. Jesus and his Apostles become ambassadors of a more egalitarian ideal, an aspirational vision of “life as it could be” in the kingdom of God, and thereby encounter tremendous resistance and resentment from those who currently benefit from the status quo, and therefore feel threatened by anything that challenges its power structures. This is why the Pharisees and Sadducees were enraged by Jesus' pronouncements, why the Romans were concerned by Jesus' rise in popularity, and what ultimately resulted in Jesus being condemned to death by crucifixion. Jesus was the radical progressive visionary of his time, while the pragmatic and entrenched conservatives were, in fact, the ones responsible for his death.

So what do Christians have to say about this contrast? First, it should be noted that white male Christians have ascended to prominent positions of power, wealth and privilege for many generations now in the U.S., and thereby came to represent the status quo in America. This ascension to power and privilege is an important historical context to appreciate. Still, many I have interacted with are not blind to the tensions between the New Testament example and modern conservative Christianity. If they are conservative, however, this inherently means they prefer to defend a self-serving status quo – and maintaining a pragmatic approach to “how things are” – rather than desiring to reform it. And so they remain deeply committed to *never voting for a liberal, progressive, or Democrat, or even helping them get elected*. And, out of loyalty, they often won't even speak out against what they see as corruption and malfeasance in both the politics and business dealings that the Republican party supports. This is happening right now among many Republican voters who privately disdain or disagree with Donald Trump: they remain publicly silent. In fact, the most effort many are willing to entertain is simply not to vote, or not to participate in politics at all. We'll discuss the reasons why so many are committed to never vote for Democrats, progressives, or even liberal Independents in a moment, but, essentially, the best many conservative Christians are able to do is imitate Pontius Pilate, washing their hands of the whole political affair.

Another frequent reaction I will hear from non-progressive Christians is “[whataboutism](#),” or the logical fallacy of false equivalence, which has been a favorite tactic of Donald Trump. Here again, they won't defend or disagree with a characterization of unsavory Republican misdeeds and machinations, but they will immediately point out how “liberals do the same thing.” Now this does bring up one important point: **neoliberalism has made significant inroads into the Democratic Party over the past four decades**. It is relatively easy to cite examples of neoliberal legislation and policy that has been supported by at least some – and sometimes many – Democrats in Congress, and sometimes even championed by Democratic leaders, including recent Presidents. It's a long list, but includes neoliberal victories like NAFTA, the War in Iraq, IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies, welfare reform, tax cuts to the wealthy, major industry deregulation, financial deregulation, lax antitrust enforcement, incompetent SEC oversight, increases in corporate welfare, increases in private contractor and no-bid military spending, and frequent capitulation to corporate special interests. Democrats have not gone

completely down the rabbit hole of neoliberalism – and we’ll discuss some important exceptions in a moment – but they have too frequently capitulated to its concentrations of wealth and political power. [As an aside, all of this has been, I believe, strong evidence of a desperate need for campaign finance reform in the U.S., as it has become mired in crony capitalism and clientism – but that is a broader topic for another time.] On the other hand, Democrats have also been the leaders in attempting to reverse many of these highly destructive neoliberal coups, while Republicans have enforced lockstep support among their ranks for neoliberal proposals. Therefore, while corruption in this arena is shared across the political spectrum, there are some important differences – and it would be a false equivalence to say “liberals do the same thing.”

How so? Because most Democrats, liberal Independents, and progressives have not allowed themselves to be completely hoodwinked by the neoliberal propaganda machine. A potent example of this is [neoliberal science skepticism](#). This is a longstanding, well-coordinated, terrifically well-funded effort to discredit science in the service of corporate profits. It has been a well-documented phenomenon ever since the publication of [internal documents from the tobacco industry](#), and continues to be easily identified just by following the money involved. The design is simple: any time scientific research uncovers data that could substantially threaten the profits of a large industry, **the neoliberal anti-science propaganda machine kicks into gear**. A graphic on the next page illustrates the time-proven process:

- Threats emerge that indicate a product, practice, or manufacturing process is dangerous.
- Neoliberal think tanks strategize about how to counter or undermine the science.
- Marketing and PR firms are tasked with creating effective anti-science messaging.
- The same posse of hired-gun experts and research organizations, often with credentials and expertise that isn’t relevant to the fields being researched, will generate contrarian “alternative science.”
- Neoliberal media and politicians will propagate the pronouncements of these experts and research.
- Republican voters accept this propaganda, propagate it amongst themselves as truth, and vote against any government regulation or restrictions – with the predictable consequence that either corporate losses are mitigated, or profits are restored.

Tragically, we can observe a similar approach to scientific research and government responses around COVID-19 at the present time. Although there hasn’t been sufficient time to generate “alternative” science, the same players – the Scaife foundations, Koch foundations, etc. – are hard at work [funding the “Liberate!” astroturfing efforts](#) that challenge conventional medical wisdom. These are desperate attempts to end community lockdowns and businesses closures and disrupt other COVID-19 suppression efforts much more quickly than is prudent. And the other neoliberal usual suspects are also in attendance. For example, the American Legislative Exchange Council (A.L.E.C.) [is also leveraging the chaos](#) with its “Save Our Country Coalition,” using fear and confusion around COVID-19 to cement self-serving legislative agendas of **tax cuts, deregulation, and lawsuit reform**, and striving to “immediately reopen the economy.” We are also seeing a broad array of conservative *credentialed contrarians* on right-wing media who loudly question or dismiss the data, science, and respected institutions

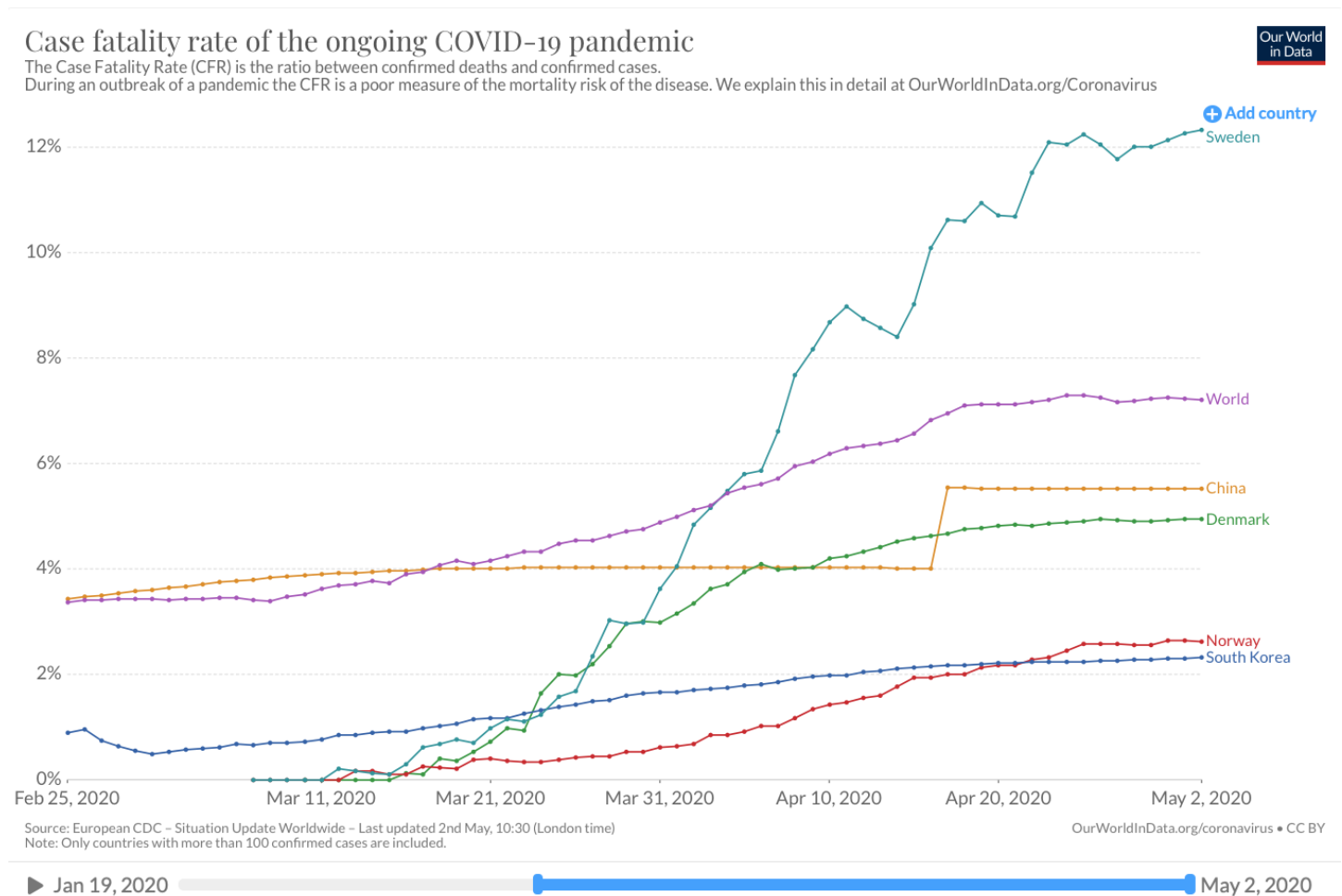
driving our current “flatten the curve” COVID-19 mitigation objectives. Why? All of this is to jump start the economy, of course, in order to get those capital flows moving back into the coffers of wealthy owner-shareholders. Just as with all previous science skepticism campaigns, it’s really all about keeping the gravy train of corporate profits flowing.

## The Neoliberal “Self-Protective” Anti-Science Propaganda Process

*(often utilizing the same players & resources...funded by the same individual & corporate stakeholders)*



At this point it should be noted that Sweden, among others, has attempted a more voluntary approach to suppressing the spread of COVID-19. However, as of this writing Sweden's death rates are still rising, and the negative economic impact has not been stopped or even curtailed to a significant degree. A May 2, 2020 chart of Sweden's comparative case fatality rates is included below, courtesy of [Our World in Data](#). And yet, despite all of the available data and instructive examples, including South Korea's much more successful contrasting approach to containment and management of the pandemic, the neoliberal science skepticism machine is hard at work to disprove good science at the cost of human lives. And sadly, as has been the case for the last forty years, a majority of the Christian Right, right-wing populists, and other conservatives are buying into that deliberate deception without hesitation.



This isn't the only con-job that has successfully sunk its talons into a majority of right-leaning voters. One of the most distressing and damaging examples of lockstep ideological groupthink is also how the Christian Right, right-wing populists, and neoliberals have rejected Russia's ongoing interference in U.S. media and elections. Even though a [Republican-led U.S. Senate panel](#) recently confirmed Russian interference in the 2016 election; even though the Robert Mueller (a Republican) investigation resulted in the [criminal indictment of](#) multiple U.S. citizens for "unregistered foreign lobbying" for Russia, along with twelve Russian intelligence officers, the Russian Internet Research Agency, and many other individuals for obstruction of justice and financial crimes that related



in some way to Russian election interference; even though Russia has a decades-long confirmed track record of disinformation “active measures” campaigns in the U.S. and all around the world; and even though Russia was once Enemy #1 of the Republican establishment for decades...the most loyally unified rank-and-file Trump supporters constituting the party’s current base **will not allow the truth to penetrate**. In a [2017 survey](#), Pew Research found that only 48% of Republicans believed Russia was behind the 2016 DNC hacks. And [2019 survey](#) still found that 31% of Republicans in the U.S. believed Vladimir Putin would “do the right thing” in world affairs. In a [2020 survey](#), only 59% of Republicans expect Russia to interfere in the 2020 election. This is a truly stunning example of willful ignorance, but really it is a consequence of the very same disinformation techniques that neoliberal science skeptics have used to persuade right-leaning voters for many years.



(Russian “Active Measures” Chart)

To be fair, as the above Russian “active measures” chart implies, there are indeed folks on the far Left who also have been hoodwinked. **But there is no real equivalence here, either.** Even if every person who ever voted for a U.S. Green Party candidate adhered in equivalent lockstep to Jill Stein’s coziness with Russia (and of course that’s not likely the case), that would represent only a few percent of the U.S. electorate. Certainty very few

progressives, democrats, or liberal Independents have allowed themselves to be similarly duped. According to the previously referenced surveys on confidence in Putin and Russia's election interference, **the numbers of hoodwinked liberals remain consistently  $\leq 16\%$** . Not every Republican or right-leaning voter always drinks the Cool Aid, either: there is a significant minority that resist the propaganda, dismiss conspiracies, and are appalled by Donald Trump. It was also a lone Republican, John McCain, who saved Obamacare in 2017. But such exceptions have become rarer as more extreme right-wing candidates and policies crowd out common sense. And those Republican politicians who have held onto their office are loath to oppose the populist groundswell – here again, just like Republican voters, [these politicians remain publicly silent](#). Effectively, it simply doesn't matter that some Republicans are not deceived – because there are too few of them to make any difference to the majority's underhanded strategies, corrupt policies, and highly destructive outcomes.

In addition to succumbing to such relentless hoodwinking, the Republican majority's abuse of power – usually for the benefit of their own party and the wealthiest owner-shareholders in society – has been second to none. Donald Trump is understandably the poster child for self-serving corruption, deception, and greed, and few other Presidents come close to his disregard for the rule of law, reckless expansion of Executive power, disrespect for the other branches of government, lack of morality, disregard for the Constitution of the United States, and enrichment of select industries and the wealthy elite in service to himself. He's also done tremendous damage to the perception of America's trustworthiness in the world, to international trade relationships, to nuclear proliferation and instability, to any hope of mitigating the climate crisis, and most recently to managing the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that reduce sickness, suffering, deaths, and economic uncertainty. No previous American President of either party has come close to this level of narcissistic, sociopathic incompetence. Even so, white evangelicals have christened Trump “[the Chosen One](#)” of God, and in their eyes he can apparently do no wrong. Trump's approval ratings from this group remains high – around 70% – from one disaster to the next. Trump is clearly an outlier – certainly more clueless and incompetent than George W. Bush, and more paranoid and unethical than Richard Nixon – but we should not forget that these have all been Republicans.

There are many other areas where Republicans outperform Democrats in self-serving corruption and abuse of power. For example, Republicans are the primary target and partners of A.L.E.C., which writes cookie-cutter legislation to support corporate agendas all around the country that Republican legislators then rubber stamp into law. Republicans across the U.S. have engaged in gerrymandering, voter suppression, and other flavors of election interference far in excess of Democrats – at a ratio of approximately 10:1 (for more on this, see [REDMAP project, voter suppression](#)). Republicans are also more culpable than Democrats for the divisiveness and polarization in American politics, owing mainly to the efforts of [Newt Gingrich](#) and [Dennis Hastert](#) to end cross-the-isle relationships, cooperation, and compromise in Washington DC. In addition, the decades-long campaign of “[alternative” right-wing media](#) to vilify liberals and any Republicans who work closely with them has poured additional icy water on bipartisan efforts. In addition, Republicans like Eric Cantor and John Boehner gave extraordinary heft to the meaning of “obstructionism.” Republican administrations of the past thirty years have also had more criminal indictments and started more wars than Democratic administrations. [Right-wing violence](#) and [counter-factual media](#) on the Right has also far outpaced anything issuing from the Left. And so on – when we look at the actual data, there is simply no comparison – *and certainly not equivalence*. The graphic on the following page from [realmajority.us](#) illustrates a number of these false equivalencies.

# The Destruction of America Does Not Share Equal Blame

## Don't Be Fooled by False Equivalence

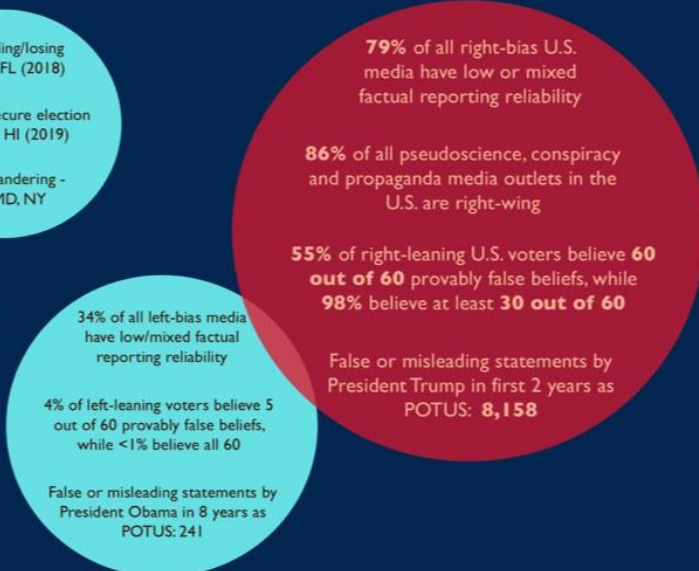
● Democrat/Left-Wing - 50% of Total Voters

● Republican/Right-Wing - 40% of Total Voters

### ACTIVE OR PASSIVE EFFORTS THAT HAVE UNDERMINED PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN U.S. DEMOCRACY



### THE WAR ON TRUTH HAS ALSO CRIPPLED U.S. DEMOCRACY



### ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE BY PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION

### DESTRUCTIVE, LETHAL & CRIMINAL ACTS



Primary Sources (note: this group of sources is rated "high" in fact-based reporting reliability by mediafactcheck.org, and includes "least biased," pro-science, and left-leaning sources): gallup.com; pewresearch.org; ncbi.nlm.nih.gov; bloomberg.com; politifact.com; factcheck.org; snopes.com; washingtonpost.com; mediabiasfactcheck.com; nytimes.com; brennancenter.org; cookpolitical.com; realeclearscience.com; pri.org; time.com; latimes.com; npr.org; thebureauinvestigates.org; abcnews.com; nbcnews.com; splcenter.org; vox.com; cjr.org; businessinsider.com; thehill.com; nymag.com; inthesetimes.com; rollingstone.com; rantz.com; adl.org; washingtonmonthly.com; newamerica.org; wikipedia.org.

Additional Sources (rated "mixed" in fact-based reporting, or are pending review, and include those with right-leaning bias): forbes.com; nypost.com; americanprogress.org; worldatlas.com; thecapitalist.com; sun-sentinel.com; collegeofcomplexes.org; doa.com.

### Ranking U.S. Prosperity

Best-to-worst economic performance, 1977-2019, under seven presidents

	Clinton	Obama	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Carter	Trump	G.W. Bush
OVERALL RANK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Deficit as share of GDP*	1	2	4	5	3	6	7
S&P 500 Index	1	3	5	2	6	4	7
Nonfarm payrolls	2	5	3	6	1	4	7
Home equity	5	2	3	6	1	4	7
Manufacturing jobs	3	5	4	6	2	1	7
Dollar value	2	1	3	4	7	5	6
Gross domestic product	1	7	2	4	2	5	6
Auto sales	3	1	2	5	7	4	6
Gap between U.S. and global stocks	2	3	7	1	6	4	5
Debt-to-income ratio*	7	1	6	3	1	4	5
Disposable income per capita	2	6	1	7	4	3	5
Bond performance	3	5	1	2	6	7	4
Hourly wages	2	1	5	6	7	4	3
Productivity	3	5	4	1	7	6	2

Source: Bloomberg

Rankings based on annual percentage change. \*Annual percentage-point change



However, to really drive home a central theme, let's return for a moment to an important area of focus in the New Testament: feminism. By any standard – certainly in Jesus' time, but also in many cultures today – **Jesus was a radical feminist**. I dedicate a chapter of my book on the New Testament to elaborating on this, and you can read that excerpt here: [The Liberation of Women](#). There is also a helpful overview on [this Wikipedia page](#). Examples of Jesus' liberating attitude towards women are plentiful and indisputable, and we know from both Acts and Apostle Paul's epistles that women continued to have places of honor, position and authority in the early Church. Jesus trusted women, praised their faith, honored them, protected them, acceded to their requests, and deferred to their choices repeatedly *even over the complaints of his male disciples*. In stories such as his interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well, and his appearance to Mary Magdalene outside the garden tomb, Jesus chose women to be the very first recipients of his most sacred and important news. Jesus also performed the two greatest recorded miracles prior to his crucifixion on behalf of grieving women: resurrecting Lazarus and the widow's son at Nain. And Jesus forgives an adulteress, heals a chronically bleeding woman, and even refers to a woman he heals on the Sabbath as "a daughter of Abraham." Given the Roman and Jewish cultural and religious attitudes and practices of the time, Jesus esteemed women much more than those cultures and religions did – and, at least according to the Gospels, he made deliberate and frequent efforts to demonstrate that women were equal to men in God's eyes.

Why is this important? Because Christianity has not been very consistent in its liberation of women and championing of their equality over the centuries – and particularly not among the more conservative cultures and denominations. And this tragic inequality still persists today. Whether it is [female genital mutilation](#) in Ethiopia, or [child brides](#) in the U.S., or [domestic violence](#) in Ireland, Christianity as the dominant religion has done little-to-nothing in many cultures to end violent abuse and oppression of women. In the United States, women were not granted the right to vote until the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 1920. And when there was a meaningful opportunity to elevate women to the same sociopolitical status as men via the Equal Rights Amendment, it was vehemently opposed – and arguably defeated – by a conservative Christian movement lead by Phyllis Schlafly. The proposed Amendment reads simply: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." But Schlafly reframed the ERA as an assault on traditional gender roles and traditional family values – a defensive framework that would be incorporated into the Christian Right's platform. And this is exactly the sort of reaction Jesus' attitudes and actions towards received from the misogynistic religious conservatives of his day: 'Why is Jesus talking to that woman at the well? Why did he heal that woman on the Sabbath? Why didn't he stone that adulteress? Why is he letting that woman anoint his feet with perfume? Why did he let that unclean woman touch him?' *And so on*. The parallels in more recent times of conservatives refusing women's rights to vote, denying them equal pay, preventing them access to healthcare, and opposing the Equal Rights Amendment are all unmistakable echoes of that same oppressive prejudice towards women.

Again referring to my testosterone [blog post](#) from 2016, I believe a significant reason that Donald Trump won the 2016 election is because American culture only appreciates and respects masculine power; it doesn't yet know how to understand, respect or embrace feminine power. And this is all to inform a particular observation about the impact of religion on culture: **culture nearly always wins**. Perhaps this is why the New Testament focuses on

creating a new way of being in our personal lives and within the Church, and accepting that secular culture will not change. As alluded to earlier, the modes of conduct and relationship perpetuated and inculcated by culture and family generally cannot be revised or reshaped by spiritual convictions alone. If a Christian grew up in a misogynistic household, they likely will be a misogynistic Christian. If a Christian lives in an individualistic, economically materialistic culture, then they are much more likely become a self-absorbed, acquisitive Christian. And if we grow up surrounded by socially conservative Christian Republicans, then we are much more likely to associate Christianity with those examples. This is just how human beings learn. Look at me: I grew up among professors, artists, hippies, and liberals...and my own Christian beliefs conveniently align perfectly with that upbringing. I happen to think the vast majority of New Testament teachings correspond with this progressivism...but I can't dismiss my cultural programming either.

Which means, essentially, that cultural bias is powerful enough that, if we really want to change it, we will need to consciously confront it. We will need to take a long, hard look at why we prioritize certain values, and decide whether those are really aligned with the spiritual tradition with which we choose to identify. Christians need to decide whether they want to live in the kingdom of God, or be conformed to the world of culture. Personally, after years of research, study, meditation, and prayer, **I do not believe it is possible to vote Republican and be an authentic or intellectually honest Christian today** – and I believe that this has been the case for some time. The two ideologies have, through a Faustian bargain that pursues power at any cost, become utterly incompatible. That hasn't always been true, and it may no longer be true in the future, but at this point in American history, the triad of the Christian Right, neoliberalism, and right-wing populism have made reconciling genuine, scripture-inspired Christian values with right-wing political praxis decidedly impossible. It very much seems as though the prophecy quoted below has come true:

“In the last days terrible times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, without love of good, traitorous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.” **2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)**

## A Difficult Conclusion

Much of the **progressive political agenda** in the U.S. is closely aligned with the character, intentions and compassionate actions of Jesus Christ, while the priorities of neoliberalism, right-wing populism, and the Christian Right are willfully opposed to Christ's teachings and example. Yet there is one further and indeed remarkable feature to this right-wing opposition to Christ's message, and that is that conservative Christians have actually gone so far as to accuse liberals and progressives of being Satan's mignons on Earth, and have motivated their followers to work tirelessly against progressives and a left-leaning agenda *specifically because it represents the influence of God's adversary*. To illustrate this pattern, I'll offer these representative samples:

1. As far back as July of 2001, [we heard Rush Limbaugh repeatedly accuse](#) Democrat Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of being the Devil – not figuratively, but literally – because of his opposing and criticizing George W. Bush. Limbaugh devoted an entire segment to this portrayal.
2. In a 2008 Ave Maria University speech, [Rick Santorum infamously claimed](#) that Satan was attacking American institutions. “And so academia a long time ago fell,” he said, which he claimed led to a domino effect of other American institutions succumbing to Satan’s influence – ultimately resulting in politics and government falling under his sway.
3. The 2008 election of Barack Obama led to a serial spree of accusations that Obama was either “paving the way for the antichrist” or the antichrist himself. This persisted for eight years – books were even written about Obama’s fulfillment of antichrist prophecy. By April of 2013, a headline in The Guardian would read: [“One in four Americans think Obama may be the antichrist, survey says.”](#)
4. In March of 2015, *Duck Dynasty* star Phil Robertson – an avid Ted Cruz supporter, then Trump Supporter, then American Legacy Center chairman – asserted in a [prayer-rally speech](#) that liberals were “controlled by the Evil One” and propagated Satan’s deceptions: “They champion perversion, they champion murder, aborting their children and they are champions of lies.” And later, “He was a murderer from the beginning, there’s no truth in him and when he lies he speaks his native language, the relationship between these guys and Satan.”
5. In 2016, while campaigning in Iowa, Ted Cruz himself offered that [“Satan is a Democrat”](#) in a follow-up to a comment he made earlier that “the overwhelming majority of violent criminals are Democrats.”
6. In February of 2017, Pat Robertson [opined on The 700 Club](#) in response to a question about why so many oppose President Trump: “There’s a desire on the part of some, and I think it’s satanic, it really is spiritual, to destroy America.” Saying further regarding that destruction that “Obama was bringing it on.” This exact same sentiment was then echoed by Franklin Graham and Eric Metaxas [as recently as November of 2019](#) in an interview with the *Atlantic*.
7. In October of 2019, evangelical pastor Perry Stone [said of Democrats](#): “They have demons in them. You can look at their eyes when they almost start foaming at the mouth. [Representative Adam] Schiff’s eyes get as big as saucers and it looks like he is having a seizure when you bring up [Trump’s] name.”
8. And this year, in 2020, Donald Trump Jr. [declared on Twitter](#): “Likelihood of [Democratic House Speaker] Nancy Pelosi praying for Trump is about the same as the likelihood of Satan running around quoting the Scriptures.” (Of course, we know that Satan is reported to have quoted Scripture, such as in **Matthew 4**...but that is beside the point.)

And these samples are really just the tip of the iceberg. Anyone who attended a right-leaning evangelical Sunday service during the Obama years will have heard allusions to Satan’s “winning the spiritual battle over America,” **because of Obama and liberals** – and such claims could issue either directly from the pulpit, or during fellowship. This belief, in nearly all of the non-progressive Christian folks I personally know and have dialogued with, is why they would *never, ever vote for a progressive*. Among conservative Christian Republican rank-and-file, the terms

“commie” or “socialist” as labels for liberals and progressives long ago became shorthand for “godless heathen who are doing the work of Satan.” How long ago? It likely arose in concert with the second [Red Scare](#) after World War II, when conservatives began using the “godless communism” rhetoric that peaked under McCarthyism.

Much earlier, though, in the first Red Scare after World War I, wealthy capitalists became increasingly worried about what was happening in Russia and the awakening of the labor rights movement in the U.S. So conservatives started carrying the “protecting the American way of life” torch, vehemently opposing all socialist-inspired corrections to worker exploitation and impoverishment by industrial capitalism, and conservatives continued this opposition for many decades. And we cannot forget that it was the socialists, along with the earliest progressive movements in the U.S., that really did provide the sole remedies for the worst abuses of capitalism (see [this essay](#) and this [Wikipedia page](#) for more on that topic). But it was during the second Red Scare after World War II that conservatives began to assert that a chief component of “the American way of life” required protection was Christianity itself. This was when, in 1954, “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and the U.S.S.R.’s atheism became a central focus of anti-Soviet rhetoric. This was when McCarthy began what really were *witch hunts* to persecute communist sympathizers, homosexuals, and any artists, writers or musicians deemed to be “subversive.” Here is some evocative language from his [1950 speech](#) in Wheeling, West Virginia: “Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity.” Sound familiar?

Years later, in the mid-1970s, Francis A. Schaeffer would publish his seminal work *How Should We Then Live*, about the decline of Christianity in the Western World and rise of secular humanism. This would become part of the inspiration for the conservative evangelical movement in the U.S., and a touchstone for leaders like Jerry Falwell. But what really galvanized the white evangelical Christian Right movement in the U.S. was a different spark. It centered around the 1971 *Green v. Connally* DC Circuit Court ruling that disallowed tax-exempt status for any religious colleges and universities that remained racially segregated. This infuriated Christian educational institutions in the South that refused to integrate blacks into their student populations. And evangelical furor would [come to a head in 1976](#), when the IRS refused to renew tax-exempt status for Bob Jones University in South Carolina based on this ruling. This deeply held racism is what framed initial evangelical Christian objection to the “government interference in our private lives” as a rallying cry.

A conservative political activist, Paul Weyrich, grabbed hold of this momentum and ran with it. He then injected the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling into this already agitated mix – a subject that had previously mattered more to conservative Catholics than to evangelicals – and proposed an anti-liberal, anti-government, “Christian nationalist” coalition he christened “the moral majority.” As the Equal Rights Amendment was scheduled to be ratified in 1979, all of this also coincided with Phyllis Schlafly’s tireless efforts to unify conservative Christians against such nastily progressive gender equality. And as icing on the moral majority cake, Francis Schaefer then lent his influence to the movement once more, this time touring the U.S. to rail against legalized abortion. So, by 1979, this was how white evangelical opposition to all “government interference,” and to all liberal Democrats, was fanned into a well-stoked flame. Corporate America and white evangelicals now shared a common aim: the defeat of any proposals that empowered government to constrain individual or institutional freedoms in any way – **be they economic or religious**. And this is how unfettered laissez-faire capitalism and fundamentalist

Christianity willingly and passionately bedded down together in the GOP – the Grand Old Party that mistakenly believes itself to be “God’s Own Party.”

It should be noted at this point that, despite voluminous propaganda to the contrary, socialism and progressivism do not equate atheism. It is true that the practice of religious faith in authoritarian Marxist-Leninist regimes like the U.S.S.R. and China was greatly oppressed, and that atheism was indeed the favored “state religion” in those places. But socialism has existed in many other forms and times where Christianity and other religions are openly practiced. These include [Rojava](#) in Northern Syria, the [Zapatista municipalities](#) in Mexico, [Marinalda](#) in Spain, and countries where [social democracy](#) has taken root in Europe – among many others. In fact, some of the most famous socialists, social democrats, and progressives throughout history have self-identified as Christians. Among these are Étienne Cabet, Francis Belamy, John Malcom Ludlow, Susan B. Anthony, Dorothy Day, Herbert Croly, Mary White Ovington, George Washington Woodbey, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Henry James Sr., Tommy Douglas, Walter Nash, Kevin Rudd, Desmond Tutu – *all Christians*. A list of folks that identified as “American Christian Socialists” can also be found at this [Wikipedia link](#).

To conclude, this brings us to an especially critical focus in this essay, and that is understanding what the tactics, goals and policies of non-progressive Christians really represent in a New Testament context. Here is a relevant excerpt from **Mark 3:22-30** (ESV):

“And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.””

The implication of this account is that there is a sin that is so dire it cannot receive forgiveness – an “eternal sin.” And what is that sin? *It is ascribing satanic or demonic influence and authorship to the authentic workings of holy spirit.* And, if our conclusions are correct about progressive values, policies and objectives aligning closely with the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles – guided as they are by holy spirit – then what is such opposition from the “Christian Right,” neoliberals and right-wing populists all about? **It approaches equivalence to opposition to holy spirit itself.** And if those same detractors then go even further, and accuse liberals and progressives, who are indeed effectively fulfilling the will of God according to scripture, of being demonic and under Satan’s influence – or even that progressive leaders are antichrists – what have they done? **They have effectively blasphemed against holy spirit.** Those with adequate discernment will recognize this is not a stretch of the imagination, or a deceptive or dishonest false equivalence, but a grim indictment of Republican voters in the United States – and of conservative voters all around the globe who harbor similar distortions and delusions about progressivism. When

these citizens cast their votes with conviction against progressives, sincerely believing that progressives are satanic or demonic, and then support the “Christian Right,” neoliberals or right-wing populists whose attitudes and policies so oppose the teachings of Christ, *they are committing an unforgivable sin.*

Why is this an unforgivable sin? Although it isn’t explicit in scripture, this was likely because the scribes of Jesus’ time – the ones making the accusation that Jesus “had an unclean spirit” – would have been well-versed in Old Testament scripture, since they were the ones who painstakingly copied that scripture and drafted laws from it. They were the religious experts of the day. They would have known, for example, that a harmful lie that falsely accused someone or demeaned someone’s character would be “bearing false witness” against them, and therefore violate the 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment. And who are the loudest voices to bear false witness against Democrats, liberals and progressives in modern times? Who is most frequently accusing liberal-leaning good deeds, deeds of a quality and character that is sanctioned by holy spirit in the Word of God, of being influenced by Satan or under demonic influence? It is the Christian Right; it is the scribes and Pharisees of today – those who should know scripture, *and should know better.*

Is this an overstatement? In **Matthew 5** Jesus says: “everyone who looks on a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart;” and “whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.” Jesus raises the bar for the standard of moral rectitude to intent, going so far as to say “whoever says ‘You Fool’ will be liable to hell.” So how should we judge the intent of supporting Republican politicians and right-wing media that demean, revile and bear false witness about progressives? How should anyone judge the heart of someone who keeps voting for Republican policies that imitate what the ancient Romans would do, or what the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus’ day would do, *but never what Jesus himself would do?* Jesus implored: “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” Why would this not equally apply to every right-wing vote that rails against the fundamental principles of Christian faith? It sickens my heart, as I am speaking about those who claim to be brothers and sisters in Christ, but **this is the public rebuke they must hear.**

Each person knows what is in their own hearts, and I do not. Nor can I pass judgement on anyone, knowing full well my own inadequacies and shortcomings as a fellow human being. But it is nevertheless my responsibility to attempt to restore those who have gone so far astray *back to the faith that they claim* – to encourage and exhort anyone who believes in the teachings and example of Jesus and his Apostles to return to those teachings and example. It is simply time for all Christians to see ourselves in a mirror clearly, to give up childish ways, and to be free of any deluding influence. And it is time to start listening to the promptings of holy spirit instead.

With that said, it is clear that only some Christians subscribe to this blasphemous inclination. According to [Pew research on religious party affiliations](#) in the U.S., for example, there is a lot of nuanced political variation. First, the overall percentage of Christians who identify as Republican (43%) or Democrat (40%) [is nearly equal](#). Second, either a plurality or majority of Catholics (44%), Orthodox Christians (44%), and Black Protestants (80%) routinely vote Democrat in elections. Mainline Protestants are fairly evenly divided (44% Republican vs 40% Democrat), and only evangelical Protestants (56%) and Mormons (70%) favor Republicans by a significant margin. And despite right-wing populist candidates all around the globe aiming direct appeals at conservative



religious folks (see [Guardian](#) and [New Statesman](#) articles on this), additional [PEW research data](#) also shows that, for example, Trump's populism has once again predominantly captured only **white evangelical Protestants (77%)**, while at the same time [a mere 15% of those same white evangelicals](#) believe Trump is "morally upstanding." So it is really a fairly narrow slice of Christianity that is mired in this persisting hypocrisy – and it is that group, more than anyone else, who I hope will take the substance of this essay to heart. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

To close, as an invocation of the very heart of Christian values and ideals, here is **1 Corinthians 13:4-13** (ESV):

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. <sup>1</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”



## REFERENCE

### Christian Values & Ideals

Here are some representative New Testament passages supporting primary Christian values and ideals (Table #1, p.4). Each is linked to the full chapter of the ESV on biblehub.com.

*[Please note: these are not in any particular order, but added as they occurred to me.]*

#### ***Righteousness***

[Matthew 6:1-4](#); [Matthew 7:21-23](#); [Luke 14:7-11](#); [Galatians 6:9-10](#); [1 Peter 3:13-17](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:12-22](#); [James 1:19-36](#); [James 3:13-18](#); [Romans 2:1-5](#); [Romans 6:15-19](#); [1 Corinthians 5:9-13](#); [1 John 2:28-29](#); [Hebrews 5:11-14](#); [2 Peter 1:5-10](#); [Titus 2:7-8](#); [James 2:18-26](#)

#### ***Peace***

[Matthew 5:21-26](#); [John 16:33](#); [Romans 12:9-21](#); [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#); [Galatians 5:22-26](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:12-22](#); [James 3:13-18](#); [1 Timothy 6:3-5](#); [Philippians 4:4-13](#); [Titus 3:1-11](#); [1 Peter 3:8-13](#); [Colossians 3:12-17](#); [Ephesians 4:1-3](#)

#### ***Trust***

[Matthew 6:1-4,19-34](#); [Matthew 26:39](#); [Mark 4:18-20](#); [Romans 12:1-2](#); [Romans 13:1-7](#); [1 Timothy 6:6-10,17-19](#); [2 Timothy 3:1-5](#); [Titus 3:1](#); [Hebrews 13](#); [1 Corinthians 10:14](#); [2 Corinthians 9:6-9](#)

#### ***Agape***

[Matthew 5:43-48](#); [Matthew 6:14-15](#); [Matthew 8:1-13](#); [Matthew 18:21-35](#); [Matthew 25:31-40](#); [Luke 10:25-37](#); [Luke 6](#); [Luke 12:33](#); [John 4:1-30](#); [John 8:1-11](#); [John 13](#); [John 14](#); [John 15:12-17](#); [Acts 10](#); [Acts 20:35](#); [1 Corinthians 1:26-31](#); [1 Corinthians 13](#); [James 1:26-27](#); [James 2:1-9](#); [1 John 3:16-18](#); [1 John 4:7-21](#); [Colossians 3:11](#); [Romans 15:1-2](#)

### Evidence of Political Praxis

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### **Other recommended reading:**

[The Goldilocks Zone of Integral Liberty \(essay\)](#)

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