



CONFRONTING CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM



A state-of-the-art training program for faith communities, leaders and individuals that responds in faithful ways to the threat of Christian Nationalism in the United States of America.

THREAT **T**
of CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

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CONFRONTING CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Lesson One: Introduction to Christian nationalism



★ Section 1: Introduction

In this three-session study guide, you will explore an ideology known as “Christian nationalism.” You most likely have encountered the term in the press, on social media platforms, and in casual conversations in your workplace, school, neighborhood, or church. Christian nationalism is an ideology that threatens our faith and our pluralistic democracy, and it thus needs to be addressed by the church in the United States.

What is Christian nationalism in America, and how should Christians respond to it?

In this lesson, you will:

- discuss definitions of Christian nationalism
- explore some research-based characteristics of American Christian nationalism
- consider some Scripture passages on guarding our thoughts

To facilitate learning and discussion, you will watch and discuss short clips from a recent webinar series by Vote Common Good on the topic of Christian nationalism. Vote Common Good’s executive director Doug Pagitt leads the conversations about Christian nationalism with a host of experts, scholars, and religious leaders.



Presenters in the videos are:

- Doug Pagitt, executive director, Vote Common Good
- Amanda Tyler, executive director, BJC
- Andrew Whitehead, professor, author, and sociologist
- Samuel Perry, professor, author, and sociologist
- Christy Lubber Berghoef, author, speaker, contemplative photographer
- Michael Waters, pastor, professor, and author
- Katherine Stewart, author and journalist
- Kristin Du Mez, professor and author
- Shane Claiborne, activist and author
- Brian Zhand, pastor and author
- Stephany Spaulding, pastor and founder of Truth and Conciliation Commission
- Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, author and activist

★ Section 2: What is your current understanding of Christian nationalism?

Christian nationalism is an ideology embraced by many individuals and groups in America, especially by a large percentage white evangelical Christians.

- *How would you rate your current ability to define and recognize Christian nationalism?*
- *What words or images come to mind when you think of Christian nationalism? Where have you seen examples of Christian nationalism on display, either nationally or locally? Is your initial reaction to Christian nationalism positive, negative, or neutral?*
- *How often has your church or community of faith discussed the existence or the dangers of the ideology of Christian nationalism?*

★ Section 3: What does Christian nationalism look like in the United States?

VIDEO ONE: Doug Pagitt introduces and provides an example of Christian nationalism.

- *What are your initial responses — both thoughts and feelings — to the scene of the insurrectionists praying in the Senate chamber? What makes this image so troubling?*

Doug Pagitt says, “If you ever wondered what a Christian nationalist would pray, they would pray that. That this

country belongs to us and not to others. That it belongs to those who profess Christ and not to others. That the others are the enemies that we will drive out.”

- *In his observations about the video clip of the insurrectionists, what does Doug Pagitt suggest are some core beliefs of Christian nationalism? How were those core beliefs on display in the video?*

Christian nationalism can be seen in actions that are egregious, like the insurrection at the Capitol, and in more subtle ways. When and where have you heard these same core beliefs of Christian nationalism communicated in your context? How have you seen these core beliefs more subtly displayed in your local community or even in your church? Which individuals or groups promote these core beliefs in your local community?

- *If Christian nationalism holds that America belongs to Christians and that non-Christians should thus be marginalized or driven out from positions of power or influence, how does this ideology erode the American pluralistic democratic system?*

★ Section 3: What is a definition of Christian nationalism?

VIDEO TWO: Amanda Tyler provides a definition of Christian nationalism.

The Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement declares, “Christian nationalism is a political ideology that seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian.”

- *What does this definition mean when it says, “Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State”? In what ways could the U.S. government privilege Christianity over other religions? How is this definition like Doug Pagitt’s earlier characterization of Christian nationalism?*
- *What does the Christians Against Christian Nationalism definition mean when it says that Christian nationalism “implies that to be a good American, one must be a Christian”? If American citizens who are not Christians read this phrase, how might they respond? Name some examples of good American citizens who are not Christians. In what ways have non-Christians promoted the common good for all citizens of the U.S.?*
- *Why is it detrimental to merge Christian and American identities? What negative effects would this merging of identities have on American democracy? What negative effects would this merging of identities have on the Christian faith? What happens to a religious system when it is privileged by a government?*

- According to Amanda Tyler, of BJC, what is the difference between patriotism and nationalism? Why would nationalism that requires a love of country above everything else — including one's theology — be damaging to the Christian faith? How can Christians be patriotic without falling into the dangerous ideology of Christian nationalism?

★ Section 4: What are some defining characteristics of Christian nationalism?

VIDEO THREE: Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry describe their research findings about Christian nationalism.

Doug Pagitt emphasizes that Christian nationalists generally don't call themselves "Christian nationalists." To understand Christian nationalism better, there are some significant ideological and behavioral markers to consider. Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry discuss how their research helps identify those who embrace Christian nationalism. Andrew Whitehead in his presentation states that Christian nationalism: 1) does indeed matter; 2) is an actual thing; and 3) does not equal religiosity. In his perspective, Samuel Perry proposes that Christian nationalism is primarily about privileging power, boundaries, and order.

- From Andrew Whitehead's and Samuel Perry's presentations, what statement(s) best helped you understand the characteristics of Christian nationalism?
- What do you think Andrew Whitehead means when he says that Christian nationalism is a "key lens" through which people who adhere to this ideology see many different issues? What specific issues could be influenced because individuals look through the "key lens" of Christian nationalism?
- In attempting to create a "Christian nation," how does Christian nationalism use power, boundaries, and order to elevate its ideology? How do people who subscribe to Christian nationalism seek to disempower other groups to protect their own power?

VIDEO FOUR: Samuel Perry shares his personal experience of being raised in an evangelical home.

Samuel Perry shares his personal story to illustrate that not all Christians or evangelicals embrace Christian nationalism.

- What was your initial reaction to Samuel Perry's personal narrative? What were the key points about evangelicalism and Christian nationalism he communicated? How is your personal story similar or dissimilar to Samuel Perry's?

- *Do you agree or disagree with Samuel Perry's passionate statement that Christian nationalism is a lie that distorts true Christianity? Why or why not? In what ways would Christian nationalism distort true Christianity? How is Christian nationalism a threat to those who truly follow Jesus?*
- *How is Samuel Perry's personal narrative helpful in understanding who might and who might not embrace Christian nationalism? How can Christian parents and churches help educate children and youth about the dangers of Christian nationalism?*

VIDEO FIVE: Andrew Whitehead explains the findings of research about Christian nationalism in America.

Andrew Whitehead breaks down the U.S. population into four categories based on how they accept or reject some basic ideological frameworks of Christian nationalism.

“Rejecters” (21.5 percent of Americans): These individuals strongly resist the privileging of the Christian religion by governing authorities.

“Resisters” (26.6 percent of Americans): Like rejecters, these individuals oppose the government endorsing or advocating for the Christian faith or values. Unlike rejecters, they may be more comfortable with some public display or use of religious symbols.

“Accommodators” (32.1 percent of Americans): These individuals generally endorse the favoring of the Christian religion or values by governing authorities. They often hold that America was founded as a Christian nation.

“Ambassadors” (19.8 percent of Americans): These individuals support legislation and rulings that privilege Christian values and protect the public display of Christian symbols and activities. They fervently assert that America was founded as and continues to be a Christian nation.

According to the presented research, Christian nationalism is widespread. Nearly 52% of the U.S. population are “Accommodators” or “Ambassadors.”

It is easy to scapegoat one religious group or one region of churches as embracing Christian nationalism. Samuel Perry suggests that Christian nationalism is widespread across America.

- *Are you surprised by the percentage of Americans who accept and advocate for Christian nationalism? Why or why not? If you are surprised, what did you think the percentage would be? Why do you think so many individuals in America embrace at least some elements of Christian nationalism?*

- *Have you seen or interacted with individuals or groups who fit into any of these four categories in your community? Where does your community fit within these four categories? Where do you fit within these four categories?*

★ Section 5: How should the Christian church think about Christian nationalism?

VIDEO SIX: Michael Waters gives a passionate appeal to oppose Christian nationalism.

- *What are your initial responses — both thoughts and feelings — to the presentation by the Rev. Michael Waters?*
- *How did the Ku Klux Klan leverage religious language and beliefs to undergird their racist ideologies and practices? How is this similar to how Christian nationalism uses religious language and beliefs?*
- *Why does the Rev. Michael Waters say that we need to take full inventory of the roots of the modern Christian nationalism movement? How do you think racism intersects with Christian nationalism?*

★ Section 6: Why should Christians critically reflect on Christian nationalism?

Read the following Scripture passages:

2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV): We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Proverbs 15:28 (NIV): The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.

Romans 12:2 (NIV): Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Proverbs 4:23-27 (NIV): Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

- *What do you think it means to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"? What do you think it means to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind"?*

- In Proverbs, the word “heart” refers not just to the place of one’s feelings but also one’s thinking. *What do you think it means in Proverbs 4:23-27 when it says “everything you do flows from” one’s heart (i.e., one’s center of thinking and feeling)?*
- *How would you summarize the meaning and purpose of these four Scripture passages?*
- *Why is it important for Christians to think critically about the ideologies or viewpoints that they embrace? Why is it spiritually dangerous to accept an ideology without deeply reflecting on its theological foundations and implications?*
- *Do you believe that the American church, especially the white, evangelical church, has critically reflected on Christian nationalism? How can you prompt your church or community of faith to think critically about what it means to be a Christian in America?*
- *What do you think are some core ideologies or values in Christian nationalism that Christians should find concerning?*

★ **Section 6: What have you learned about Christian nationalism?**

- *Through this lesson, what have you learned about Christian nationalism?*
- *Are you more concerned now about the dangers of the ideology of Christian nationalism than when you began this lesson?*
- *How can you have discussions with those with whom you interact this week about the dangers of Christian nationalism?*

CONFRONTING CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Lesson Two: Expanding an Understanding of Christian Nationalism



★ Section 1: Introduction

In the first lesson, you explored a definition and some defining characteristics of the ideology of Christian nationalism. This lesson will deepen your understanding of Christian nationalism as you explore and discuss six distinct questions that the Vote Common Good webinars on Christian nationalism asked and answered.

In this lesson, you will:

- discover some additional core principles and behaviors of Christian nationalism
- explore several responses to Christian nationalism
- consider some Scripture passages reminding us of an important theological truth

To facilitate learning and discussion, you will watch and discuss short clips from a recent webinar series by Vote Common Good on the topic of Christian nationalism. Vote Common Good's executive director Doug Pagitt leads the conversations about Christian nationalism with a host of experts, scholars, and religious leaders.



★ Section 2: Is there a difference between conservative Christianity and Christian nationalism?

VIDEO SEVEN: Katherine Stewart talks about the difference between Christianity and Christian nationalism.

- *How does this presentation help you differentiate between Christianity and Christian nationalism? What are some basic differences between the two groups?*
- *Why is it important to note that Christian nationalism is not a religion or a religious movement, but it's instead a political ideology?*
- *What Christian groups did Katherine Stewart identify who might be attracted to Christian nationalism? What Christian groups did she identify who might reject Christian nationalism? Why might certain Christian groups be drawn to accept or reject Christian nationalism?*

Katherine Stewart asserts that a core principle for Christian nationalists is that the United States is founded, and must remain grounded, on the Bible.

- *Do you think that the United States was founded on the Bible and needs to remain grounded on Christian Scriptures? Do Christians generally have a single interpretation of the Christian Bible? If no, how would Christian nationalists determine which biblical interpretation to accept as normative for leading the country?*
- *In the United States, what would be the negative effects of our government privileging one specific religion?*

★ Section 3: Was America founded as a Christian nation?

VIDEO EIGHT: Amanda Tyler provides historical and legal arguments against the myth of America being founded as a Christian nation.

A core belief of Christian nationalism is that America was founded not as a pluralistic democracy that affords religious freedom for all, but rather that it was founded as a distinctly Christian nation.

- *How does Amanda Tyler explain from a historical and legal perspective why the founders were not seeking to form a Christian nation? Which elements of her presentation were most compelling?*

As stated in the presentation, Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states that there should be no religious test for

public office, meaning that no elected federal official can be required to affirm belief in any specific religious system or any religion at all.

- *How does this fact help you understand the mindset of the framers of the Constitution when it comes to the idea of establishing a Christian nation? Why would the framers not want to require a religious test for public officials?*

The First Amendment to the Constitution starts with the words, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...”

- *Why was it important for the original architects of our constitutional democracy to place constitutional restrictions against the establishment of religion?*
- *How do the principles of the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment stand in opposition to the desires for a Christian nation?*

★ Section 3: Is Christian nationalism embraced only by a fringe element in America?

VIDEO NINE: Samuel Perry discusses how the data demonstrates that Christian nationalism is prevalent in the U.S.

- *What does Samuel Perry say in this presentation about the pervasiveness of the ideology of Christian nationalism in America? How do his assertions make you more concerned about Christian nationalism? Why do you believe the number of those associated with Christian nationalism is growing?*

Samuel Perry states that more than half of white evangelicals believe that the federal government should declare the U.S. a Christian nation. He also notes that two-thirds of white evangelicals believe that the founding documents of the United States were divinely inspired.

- *Did either of these two statements surprise you? Why or why not? Where have you heard these types of statements in your personal networks or in your church? Why do many white evangelicals believe that our nation’s founding documents were divinely inspired?*
- *Why do you think Christian nationalism is so pervasive in America? What has prompted the growth of the ideology of Christian nationalism? How can the American church help to stop the growth of Christian nationalism?*

★ Section 4: What are the negative effects of Christian nationalism for our communities and our churches?

VIDEO TEN: Kristin Du Mez discusses how Christian nationalism affects communities and churches.

Kristin Du Mez says Christian nationalism is forming a significant rift in our nation, communities, denominations, churches, and families.

- *Where have you personally seen Christian nationalism forming rifts in families, churches, and/or communities? How do these rifts occur? Which of these rifts most concern you?*
- *In what ways can you take more courageous steps to speak against Christian nationalism as it influences your faith and your democracy?*
- *How do we put more pressure on institutions to take seriously the negative influence of Christian nationalism in their midst?*

★ Section 6: How should the American church respond to Christian nationalism?

VIDEO ELEVEN: Shane Claiborne presents how the church might respond to Christian nationalism.

- *What struck you in Shane Claiborne's presentation?*
- *Shane Claiborne reminds Christians that they cannot serve two masters. What happens to the Christian church when it prioritizes serving government power and privilege instead of serving Jesus? What happens to individuals when they prioritize serving government power and privilege instead of serving Jesus?*
- *How can Christians fully follow and serve Jesus and still be good citizens of the United States?*

★ Section 7: What do Christian Scripture passages say about making Jesus Lord?

Read the following Scripture passages:

Philippians 2:8-11 (NIV): And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming

obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Colossians 1:15-17 (NIV): The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

- *What is the central message of these two passages of Christian Scripture? What do you think they are trying to teach?*
- *How does the theological statement that “Jesus is Lord” provide an antidote against those who want the U.S. government to privilege Christianity?*
- *How did Jesus respond to Roman governing authorities? What might this teach us about our attitude toward governing authorities in our country today?*

★ **Section 6: What have you learned about Christian nationalism?**

- *Through this lesson, what have you learned about the dangers of Christian nationalism?*
- *What did you learn about the legal and constitutional history of our nation?*
- *What are some ways that Christians can respond to Christian nationalism?*

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Lesson Three: The Christian Response to Christian Nationalism



★ Section 1: Introduction

In the previous two lessons, you explored and discussed some characteristics of Christian nationalism. In this lesson you will discuss how Christians might best respond to Christian nationalism in our culture and ways we can interact truthfully with those who embrace it. In this lesson, you will:

- explore some ways to talk with those who adhere to Christian nationalism
- discuss how to best have conversations about Christian nationalism
- consider some Scripture passages that remind us how to interact with others lovingly, even when we do not agree

To facilitate learning and discussion, you will watch and discuss short clips from a recent webinar series by Vote Common Good on the topic of Christian nationalism. Vote Common Good's executive director Doug Pagitt leads the conversations about Christian nationalism with a host of experts, scholars, and religious leaders.



★ Section 2: What are some practical responses to Christian nationalism?

VIDEO TWELVE: Brian Zahnd talks about conflation Christianity with government power.

- *What responses, thoughts, or feelings do you have to Brian Zahnd's presentation?*

Brian Zahnd calls the evangelical church's association with Christian nationalism a theological failure because the church has lost its primary focus on Jesus. *Do you agree? Why or why not?*

Brian Zahnd asks whether the kingdom of God comes by the cross or by the sword.

- *How would you answer this question? Why is this question important when thinking about Christian nationalism?*
- *What happens to Christians when they merge their Christianity with the power of the state? What negative effects does this merging of Christianity with the government have on the church's worship, discipleship, evangelism, and service to the community?*

★ Section 3: How can Christians talk to those who embrace Christian nationalism?

Throughout the four-session webinar, Doug Pagitt asks various experts and leaders how to best talk to those who embrace Christian nationalism with the hope of turning them away from that ideology.

VIDEO THIRTEEN: Stephany Spaulding talks about when and how to talk to loved ones about Christian nationalism.

- *What were Stephany Spaulding's key strategies for engaging in loving and authentic conversations with others about Christian nationalism?*
- *How can you determine whether another person is ready for a meaningful discussion about Christian nationalism? How do you move someone into a more meaningful conversation about what they believe and why they believe it?*
- *Why is it important to remember that you can't "shift" someone else's mind for them when discussing an issue like Christian nationalism? Is this a freeing or frustrating reality for you? How might you best respond*

to someone in a conversation who advocates for Christian nationalism ideologies? What questions might you ask?

VIDEO FOURTEEN: Doug Pagitt talks about attitudes and approaches to difficult conversations.

- *How can you demonstrate that you care for someone amid very challenging disagreements over ideology and personal behavior?*
- *Why is it important to talk to people about their views of faith and their politics?*

Doug Pagitt advises using empathy while “breaking in” to someone’s mindset with new information. *What are some ways you can show empathy to those with whom you disagree? How best can you provide new information within a conversation?*

VIDEO FIFTEEN: Samuel Perry gives some additional input on how to confront Christian nationalism.

- *Why is it helpful to seek a wide variety of viewpoints and opinions when thinking about political ideologies and policies? How can you encourage individuals to seek multiple sources of information and viewpoints? How can you best challenge misinformation?*
- *What is the role of conservative Christian leaders in standing up for what is true and right when thinking about the lies of Christian nationalism?*

VIDEO SIXTEEN: Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove talks about a more collective approach to discussing Christian nationalism.

- *What were the main points that Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove shared? Were you surprised by any of these points? Why are his arguments important to consider?*
- *What does it mean to “remake the conditions” in which Christian nationalism thrives? How do we work to “remake the conditions” in which Christian nationalism shares or reinforces lies?*
- *How do we focus on changing the underlying culture that poisons the hearts and minds of many? How does the church “interrupt” the moral lies that have been told by the culture?*

★ Section 4: What does the Christian Bible teach about our attitudes toward others?

Read the following passage of Scripture:

Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV): Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

- *According to the passage, what are some of the key attitudes and core qualities of those who follow Jesus Christ? Why are these qualities important in today's polarized political environment? Are these the qualities you generally see in those who embrace and advocate for Christian nationalism?*
- *How could Christians best express humility toward those with whom they disagree, even those who adhere to different religious systems or no religious system?*

Christians are called to be cross-centered people who are willing to sacrifice themselves for others. *How does this cross-centered calling counter the ideology of Christian nationalism, which seeks the power of government to privilege someone's faith?*

★ Section 5: Why should Christians stand against Christian nationalism?

VIDEO SEVENTEEN: Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove calls the church to stand up against Christian nationalism.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove suggests that one of the challenges for many Christians is to take a stance against Christian nationalism.

- *Do you think this is true? Why is it difficult to get involved and stand against the ideology of Christian nationalism? What are the results when the church does not stand against Christian nationalism?*
- *How can the Christian church "reclaim the Jesus that disturbs the peace"? How would a church intent on this type of reclamation begin to think or act differently? How could your church begin to stand against Christian nationalism?*

★ Section 6: What have you learned about Christian nationalism?

- *Through this lesson, what have you learned about responding to Christian nationalism?*
- *What is your next step in taking a stand against the threat of Christian nationalism? What are some things you plan to do?*

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