

# OpenTheo

## Positive World, Negative World, and Christian Nationalism with Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen

November 8, 2022



### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

The three amigos enter into a meandering conversation about Christian Nationalism and try to discern the level of the world's hostility to the church in this cultural moment. They also make some political predictions and (most importantly) encourage Christian leaders that, whatever the winds blowing against us, the fundamental realities of ministry have not changed.

Timestamps:

Intro and Sponsor [0:00-1:30]

Sports Banter [1:31-2:51]

Election Predictions [2:52-10:35]

Christian Nationalism [10:36-33:12]

How Bad Are Things? [33:13-1:05:23]

Book Recommendations [1:05:24-1:13:44]

Books and Everything:

ESV Expositor's Commentary <https://www.crossway.org/articles/introducing-the-esv-expository-commentary-series/>

Ask Pastor John <https://www.desiringgod.org/ask-pastor-john>

Psalms Two Volume Set: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (EBTC)  
<https://a.co/d/d8zYc8m>

ESV Expository Commentary: Psalms-Song of Solomon Volume 5  
<https://www.crossway.org/books/esv-expository-commentary-premiumhc-5/>

Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas (America: a cultural history, Volume III) <https://a.co/d/eWuCXan>

Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture <https://a.co/d/aX6nKPZ>

The Case Against the Sexual Revolution <https://a.co/d/8f8LjBF>

The War on the West <https://a.co/d/8DA8NKv>

Albion's Seed (text only) illustrated edition edition by D. H. Fischer  
<https://a.co/d/3ZAT9Qv>

The Origins of American Religious Nationalism (Religion in America)  
<https://a.co/d/cUmSZVq>

The Myth of American Inequality: How Government Biases Policy Debate  
<https://a.co/d/5U3SoF9>

## **Transcript**

[Music] Greetings and salutations. Welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung joined here with the, it's not a fearsome forsome.

It's a triumphing triumvirate, I suppose. Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen, good to have you friends back. We'll let them jump in in just a moment.

Want to mention from Crossway the ESV Expository Commentary Series edited by Ian Doogood, James Hamilton, Jay Sklar, and then a team of renowned theologians to provide a new generation of biblical teachers around the world with a globally minded commentary series rich in biblical theology and broadly reformed doctrine. The ESV Expository Commentaries are accessible theological pastoral. I have several of them.

The entire series is almost complete. The complete set will be available about a year from now, but you can get, I think, 11 out of the 12 volumes. So check that out.

They really are, I don't know if I want to say they're sort of under the radar, but if you haven't heard of them or don't have them, they really are really good commentary series. I know there's lots of commentary series available, but do check them out. I have them and make use of them.

The ESV Expository Commentary Series from Crossway. Justin and Collin, everyone loves the sports banter. Michigan State One and Justin Fields is a real quarterback.

What's that like winning? Is that fun? You know, the Alabama fan. Oh, you poor Alabama fans. Yeah.

I've forgotten. I've forgotten what it's like. Yeah, you don't usually get two losses.

Oh, yeah. Actually look at a statistic that you can confirm if this is correct that Saban has not lost back to back regular season games since his first year at Alabama, which is an amazing statistic. That cannot be said of Nebraska or Northwestern.

Well, Mal Tucker worth every penny. Let's just all agree on that. Worth every penny.

The expectation is worth some time this year. And if we can beat Rutgers and Indiana, we can go six and six and go to the, you know, the Detroit Bowl? Yeah, the mining key car care bowl or the Turtle West Bowl or I don't know if they have the Little Caesars Bowl. Oh, the state alums are going to turn out in mass for December 26 in Detroit.

Sounds like screams big 10 to me. I know. So we're recording this on Monday, November 7. We're not.

This is not a political punditry podcast, but we could do just for posterity sake. This will probably come out tomorrow. Election Day here in the United States or election season as it has become.

And what's your prediction? We're not saying what you want to happen, who you want to win. Colin, I'm sure you paid attention. What's your prediction in the house and in the Senate? It seems, look, it's a low, the fundamentals are pretty clear.

It's a midterm election, first term incumbent president. The president's first midterm election, low approval ratings, almost always that signals loss. So given the way that the House of Representatives is designed, it seems like by simple virtue of the American political system and history and the fundamentals of our environment.

It seems like he loses the house and then we're going to be talking about articles of impeachment again. Now, the question about the Senate is simply that the Senate was designed to be different in our system. You have to go.

You have to win an entire state. It's six year terms. Everybody knows this.

But the point is that candidates like in gubernatorial races matter a lot. And Republicans, if they had gone across the board with your average normal Mike DeWine, Ohio Republican type, who's their governor running for reelection, probably they'd be looking at a pretty easy pickup as it is. It looks like it's going to be a nailbiter.

But I don't know. I mean, there are so many specific races that could go either way and where all kinds of different factors that you can't quite anticipate could be decisive. And we might not even know about because we're run off because, especially with the way Georgia's rules work.

So you should change those rules, Georgia. Yeah. So it's entirely possible that we'll be

talking about a Donald Trump presidential campaign starting as we're preparing for another Georgia Senate run off there for control of the Senate.

So I mean, I'm not going out on a limb here. I'll just say it just seems like there's not much that could change the Democrats from losing the house at this point. But it does seem like it's going to be a nailbiter one way or another on the Senate.

Justin, you want to make a prediction? No predictions for me. I mean, that sounds reasonable. I can't do the same sort of rank, quantity that the two of you can.

But I didn't note that Biden's lead pollster in 2020 said that he thinks this is going to be a paradigm shifting election that the way that Republicans are making inroads with Latino voters and even African American voters could shift the whole paradigm. We'll just plug one little podcast, not a Christian podcast, but revolution by Steve Carnegie, the political pundit for NBC has like a four episode podcast. Podcast out on Newt Gingrich and the 19 mid 1990s revolution and really interesting to if you're into politics and thinking about Republican takeover and what could go wrong.

It's a really interesting podcast to listen to. Remind me, Justin, was that your anti-Republican phase as a child or had you switched into the Republican camp by then? Yeah, I don't remember the years. I was certainly anti-Republican growing up hate listening to hate dash listening as my dad painted summer houses.

And I painted along with me had to listen to Rush Limbaugh all day long. So. Okay.

Well, I've been listening to that, Justin. It's really. Yeah, if you're into politics and Steve Carnegie is on MSNBC.

But he's he's a pretty straight shooter, I think, when he does. It's a really fascinating. On I'd wonder what someone else.

Yeah, I think he presents it pretty fairly. He's not trying to say. This is why where the Republicans were bad or Democrats were bad, but he does paint the picture.

His underlying argument is Newt Gingrich leading up to the 94 tsunami Republican election was bringing something new into politics, which we now take for granted in this. This very strident polarization. The arguments certainly make sense.

I wonder what someone would say who knows the ins and outs of politics, even better than the three of us would say to counter that argument. I'm sure you, there would be examples of, hey, wait a minute. Don't you remember in 72 and 76 and the 78 midterm.

Don't you remember how, how nasty it was and this is not new, but he tells the story really well. And if you're into politics, it is worth a listen. So thank you for recommending that Justin.

And that's why I started listening to it. Okay, you guys are not putting your, your, any numbers out in the line. I'm just going to say in the same.

I'm going to say R 53. Oh, okay. So you're seeing pickups in Nevada, and in Georgia.

I think it'll be 52 and then go to the runoff and I think the Republicans win Georgia. Okay, there it is. So not, you're not choosing New Hampshire, Ohio State's Republican.

Yeah, I think New Hampshire could flip Arizona, probably not, even if Pennsylvania goes Democrat and that's about a 50 50. I think there's enough other ones in play and I'll say at the house, I'm going to say. 236 to 199.

So that's an R plus how many? Yeah, 36. And R plus 36 up 36. Wow, I was going to guess closer to 23.

That's well, so I said, yeah. Well, well, we'll just, I think Jim Garrity said today he was, he was predicting around 235. So I'll just make it 236 and 199.

And I'll say a big, a big R night. Well, that's, I mean, that's where the, again, that's where the fundamentals of the election would ship would indicate from everything that we know this far. And plus, you often in politics have to look at what people are not saying as opposed to what they are saying.

You do not see any Democrats predicting anything positive. The big money dumps was going in over the weekend into some traditionally blue area areas and the vice president, I think today is campaigning in California. And Biden's Biden's last two campaign stops are for Maryland governor and a Northern Virginia House seat that he won by 18 points.

So we'll see. The three of us. The three of us don't believe in gambling, but we do hope that our would be sponsor Pizza Ranch would pony up and.

Award the winner here. Award the winner. And if we're picking Republican winners, they should be very nervous because we were rooting for Northwestern Nebraska.

In Alabama, Michigan State came through against the mighty line. I have my, I'm just grateful I had my chiefs sent off my son in a Patrick Mahomes jersey to school today called it good. Well, that is good for the, for the Chiefs fans.

So, okay, let's, let's talk about this somewhat related. Well, yeah, it's definitely related. There's been a lot of discussion about Christian nationalism.

See in trademark registered copyright. Part of the, the issue is, I'm joking with that, is that the term means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. I have a piece coming out.

I'm not sure when maybe this week or maybe the beginning of next week. I've already

written it, but at world opinions on Christian nationalism in my argument there is that while I'm sympathetic with some of the things that some strands of Christian nationalism are against, like a naked public square against the idea that liberty means we have to accept every kind of deviancy and degeneration. And that's just the blessings of liberty and there's no place for local communities to say, no, those don't meet our local community standards.

So I, if, if, if, if Christian nationalism, a Christian influence, certainly all of us are, are for that. But my argument in that piece coming out is that it is at fundamental odds with the founding and that the founders shared these three strands of political philosophy. This is not an original insight to me by any means.

Lots of people have said this, but the strands of Lockean liberalism, classic republicanism, and Protestant Christianity. And those three strands interwoven are what allowed people as different as John Adams and James Madison and Thomas Jefferson and John Witherspoon and Roger Sherman to, to sign the leading documents at the founding era of our country because for all the things they disagreed on and there was much, they shared those three strands. And Christian nationalism as an ism, my argument is, is, is bound to fail quite apart from the merits and demerits of it.

And there are, in my mind, some merits and demerits. But just as a name as an ism, it is at odds with the self conception. That term is, is foreign or almost entirely foreign.

I'm not aware of putting those two. I'm sure there are founders who spoke of a Christian nation. But Christian nationalism as a desired goal that government is ordered to the highest end of human beings, namely their religious ends.

And therefore, as Christians, the government should be so ordered to promote Christianity and Heaven is not how the American founding understood the purpose of government. So my argument in that piece is that their views were actually much more constrained and restrained seeing that, I think from good biblical anthropology, that the purpose of government is not so much what great end can government accomplish, whether that social justice or the exaltation of virtue or the promotion of Christianity. But rather they were animated by the concern.

What is the worst that we can do when we, when people have power and how ought government to guard against those eventual and always ever present corruptions. And so that's why the watch word of the founding was liberty. And I think there's biblical wisdom, let it land practical wisdom in ordering our government to that end.

That's that I hope to write a longer piece. But that's a short piece just seeing how it's, it's out of step with the American founding. And I think for that reason, it's as an ism at least now there's important parts of the discussion but as an ism, I think it's bound to fail.

I don't see how in America, something by that that doesn't try to root itself in some sense in the American founding. We've talked before, this was the genius of Lincoln and MLK, they go back to those founding documents and that and so they they have become, sure they have lots of critics too, but they have become part of the American experiment. They did that by by rooting their ideas in the founding principles.

And so, and I think that goes across the political spectrum where there are political movements, 1619 on the left, there's others on the right that try to get traction by fundamentally repudiating the founding can be a, you know, they can generate a lot of energy and be an active intellectual conversation. But I think in the end, they proved to be politically defeated. What do you, what chime in there and how do you see the conversation developing.

Can I ask a quick follow up question? Yeah, go for it. You want to go, Kyle? No, I had a follow up question too, but off just. It seems like I'm hearing two things, Kevin, and you're better read and probably more dialed in than I am, but on the one hand, it sounds like some people are saying we need to blow up the founding was wrong.

It got off on the wrong footing. There's too much lock in liberalism. We need to, they got it wrong.

We should start it over. Build it more upon biblical principles. On the other hand, it sounds like other people are saying, no, we just need to return to the founding fathers.

And the way that the early republic was set up and, you know, individual states had religious test for office and you had to believe in the Trinity or professor, you were Protestant Christian. So, which are you hearing more of or is that a, is there a self contradiction in the movement or is that just a sign that there's not just one movement or one ism, but multiple isms flying under one banner. And how do you respond to things like the religious tests? I mean, that sounds like what we're talking about somebody saying, you've got to believe in the Trinity in order to hold the statewide office.

Curious. I think you're right. Certainly in seeing that variance within the discussion right now.

So I, I, I jotted down six or seven different things people may mean when they say Christian nationalism. I won't rattle through all of them off the top of my head. But from the critic side Christian nationalism may mean, oh, that's what Putin's doing.

Christian nationalism may mean, that's what January six was, or sometimes Christian nationalism is just way of saying, well, that's, that's white conservatives. And it's a way of painting with the broadest brush to say shame on you, your white, you're a conservative, you voted for Trump. That's Christian nationalism.

For those who are owning the label, I think there's a fair amount of impulse that simply

says, own the label on the lives. Yeah, you, you, all right, fine. You think I'm a Christian nationalist, I will be.

If that's, if that's going to trigger you, then let's go all in on being a Christian nationalist because I really, I mean, I, we can certainly miss something. But I think the three of us pay probably too much attention to online discourse. But I don't remember even two years ago, anyone advocating, even a year ago, I'm not sure I heard people.

It seems like it's in the last year that people have started to say, okay, yeah, we'll take that term of an epithet of abuse and we'll, we'll own it, we'll claim it. And that happens in history sometimes that happened with the Puritans, it happens with various groups with Methodists. But I think as an ism, therefore, it's relatively destabil, unstable and not delimited.

So I think those who are owning it, some of it is just that impulse. And then there are, I think, I'll just say three things drop down in my drop down menu. One is people who really mean Christian influence.

What we mean is we want to, we want to influence Christians should have a voice. We don't want to make a public square. Yes.

Others who have a second one might be some version of this is a Christian nation, which I think there is an intellectually and historically defensible way to say that. Founded by Christian people, influenced by Christian principles. There's also a way to say, well, you don't mention God in your Constitution.

How can you say that this was founded to be a Christian nation? I think depending on that, that's a good historical debate. I think there's a way we can say that and a way that we wouldn't want to say that. And then moving forward, people say, well, we want this to still be a place that is privileges in some ways.

Christians gives churches certain benefits has a place for Christian virtue, all of that. So I think there's a lot there. That's good.

Then you have maybe the third one getting to your question, Justin, which is ought we to have a Christian establishment in an official way, a Christian state religion, if not federally, because the Constitution doesn't allow that. But then statewide establishments. Now, I think if that were the only conversation going on, it would be an interesting, good theological historical debate to have.

Personally, not persuaded that the Bible requires us or the Reform tradition requires us to have an established state religion. And I think there were good reasons why when the Presbyterians, for example, way back in 1729, I'm saying off the top of my head with the adopting act, that, you know, a generation before 1776, the Presbyterians here in America already stated that some of the statements in the Westminster Confession and



the larger catechism relative to the magistrates governing authority were no longer binding upon ministers here in America. So already then there was a sense that we're doing something different than most of the places that we came from in Europe.

But if that's just the conversation, I mean, I certainly acknowledge that many of my, I think our theological fathers in the faith and heroes from earlier centuries took for granted that there was an established state religion. I assign for my ecclesiology class James Bannerman's book, *The Church of Christ*, it's a great book. And he argues at length for a Presbyterian establishment in Scotland.

Now it's also two kings and two kingdoms, also not wanting to blur the ecclesiastical and the civil, but certainly saw Scotland as a godly commonwealth and established church. And I have my students wrestle with that and it's good to, because most Americans have not thought in those terms, to have a really good argument for it. In the end, I'm not convinced of it, but you can certainly, you have lots of good people, lots of brilliant people, maybe even a majority up until, certainly until the end of the 18th century might have seen an establishment.

But I do think it also goes farther than that. It's not just an intellectual theological debate about, should we have an established church. It's also a certain cultural mood, a, a pugnacity, which some would say yes, that's what we need and others would say, you're, you're not building any bridges.

It does have the conversation does feel like it has something of the, the benefit, those who are arguing for it, of never having to quite work out or live with the, the advocacy, meaning it's not going to happen. We are not. You know, if the question is, okay, Kevin, you and form a colony of people from Christ covenant church and other Presbyterians in Charlotte, and you go establish a colony on the moon.

And you got 5000 of you, do you have a Presbyterian establishment. I wouldn't, but I can see the arguments. All right, let's think about that.

But that's not, that's just not in the cards. I guess people could say, well, anything can happen that's true and little by little and God can do that. But there's nothing humanly speaking to think.

And I do think there's an irony, but also maybe it explains it, that it's at a moment where the church seems weakest and most oppressed that the strong, the arguments for the church's strongest amount of control are coming out. All right, that was a long answer to your question. What do you want to say to ask correct, Amanda, Colin? Well, I just think you're, that's very helpful, Kevin.

And that last comment, I think is, is important that there's, there's always a mood when you're talking about politics and trends within the church. And you're exactly right, that I,

I think it's not a surprise that as the church, church's influence seems to be waning in some significant ways and where cultural influence, broadly speaking for white evangelicals in this country appears to be almost exclusively wielded within politics. So more or less, it's out of entertainment, it's out of the academy, it's out of business.

So it's sort of like we're pushing everything into politics, because it's the only place that we can see having an avenue forward in. And the fact that the Republican party seems so destabilized right now at a time when the church's influence seems to be waning is a great time to be able to rethink some basic things, or to come up with a lot of new and even perhaps outlandish ideas because they're not realistic, but they can get a lot of attention. I guess, you know, the, the most helpful books that I've read recently, and I was going to ask specifically Kevin about the Protestant angle of it because I'm not sure what I'm seeing from the Christian nationalism discussion is primarily focused on those elements of Protestantism or Christianity in general, because it would seem especially implausible to be doing this as either just Catholics or just Protestants, yet at the same time, that's the whole point, I guess, of establishment is you can't have both.

So somebody is going to have to be dictating what kind of Christianity that it is, and you're exactly right because of historical concerns, historical realities, that was obviously Protestantism, not just for the founding, but for the vast majority of American history. And there was a Protestant establishment of sorts all the way into the 1960s, not exclusively so, and not formally so after the early 19th century in most states, but absolutely that's a de facto thing all the way into the 1960s. One thing I wanted to add is that almost helpful books, we're on life and books and everything that I've read recently, I can't matter if I talked about it before here, was Matthew Cottonheady's book *The Right, the Hundred Year War for American Conservatism*.

And I wanted to let me to understand because just like you said about Christian nationalism, Kevin, it can mean so many different things which is not only a truism but also just obviously makes things complicated for everyone. Well conservatism is the same way, and that book was very helpful for seeing all the different kinds of strands of conservatism there are, and how many of them I don't actually associate with, and also seeing that I as a child of the 1990s who came of age politically and election and beyond, and shaped to see conservatism a certain way that's not necessarily the same as it's been seen throughout history, especially strands of neo conservatism, which had come out of the Democratic Party during the Cold War. So that was really interesting to me, but one thing I wanted to add, and I think this is probably something where we would have a lot of agreement here, is that it really helped me to understand what kind of conservative I am.

And I realized that Kevin like the founders, I have an inherent distrust of political power, especially at the highest level, especially the federal level, and that's, I mean, only grown so much more exponential now that America has become so large and wealthy.

But I have instincts and history and theological and biblical judgments that make me inherently skeptical of political power, not to mention actual experience working in politics, make me skeptical. And what I want is a government that creates, well first of all, we know we need government for national defense that seems obvious.

I'm also not against nations. So, I mean, it seems like we have to be able to order ourselves in that way, and the nation has proved to be a fairly durable concept for how we how we organize ourselves. And one thing you didn't talk about here, Kevin, is the role that ethnicity plays in the Christian nationalist discussions.

That's a whole thorny question as well. And I think at the very least, I want a federal government that is intent on fostering and not conflicting with us, I understand separation of church and state, the mediating institutions that ought to be dynamic that really fuel our actual political life, the family, the community, and the church. I want a federal government that wants those institutions to be dynamic, not a federal government that is trying to restrict them or constrain them or even to obliterate them, which we know is the case with communism as an example, and it's not a coincidence.

A totalitarian state must eliminate the mediating institutions, or else it can't control people. You can see that in fascism as well. So, that's the kind of conservative I am.

It doesn't seem to be very popular right now, though. I think because everything seems to be nationalized, and we're all drawn toward the exercises of power, and you raise a really good point, Kevin, about the founding that I hadn't quite thought of in this discussion, but how important it is to see that we've shifted toward talking more about the positive ends that government can bring about when the founders were concerned about limiting the government so that other institutions could flourish. Yeah, and I get, you know, Thomas Sol talks about that in conflict divisions, but, you know, what I say in that article when it comes out, and I'll put it on the podcast once it comes out is that there are two fundamental sort of questions you can ask about government.

One is what is what is the best thing we can accomplish as a people if we come together in this ordered government. And most of the time that's been the sort of question that progressives would embrace, or different strands of populism, which are not the same, but related sometimes. And so, if government ought to come together to accomplish these great ends think of what we can do government is just plural for the people, as some have said.

On the other hand the question is animated by a fundamentally dimmer view of the human person which says, what is the worst so instead of what's the best we could do and how do we accomplish it. And what's the worst thing that could happen when people get power, and how can we try to so shape a government, you can never completely eliminate those realities, but to make them less likely to frustrate that natural inclination that human beings have to oppress to lord over other people and there's no doubt that

was the animating principle from the founders. Just a couple of historical points and you were you were getting at this column.

In one sense, now no Christian nationalism is not the same as a Christian establishment but that's that's a part of it in a lot of the argument. You could say that since the Reformation. I don't know, you know my knowledge is not limitless so perhaps there's counter examples to this, but I can't think of an actual Christian establishment meaning I can think of a Lutheran establishment, reformed Catholic Anglican.

And in a way, yeah that's your point is maybe some newer nation I don't know what Hungary has now in their constitution or something. Well it's reformed I mean the leadership is reformed. Yeah, but historically you just aren't going to find many examples, but they saying yes it's Christian it was a particular denomination we would say a particular branch of Protestant Christianity.

And I mean I suppose you could say, you know in the Roman Empire, it was and then through the Middle Ages was just was Christian but that's before you have Protestant Catholic and you have the various other strands that we have now so I think it's, it's one of here here's a question I want you guys to to think about because and it's related to Christian nationalism but it's bigger than that. There is a question that is also underlying a lot of this which is is are how bad are things, how bad are things in the world in America or in the West, and therefore what sort of response should we have. So I had Aaron ran on the podcast and we can you guys may not have, I don't know if you like the three worlds framework as much as I did I think there's, you know, just as a lens to put on.

I think it's helpful to think about, you know, are the dates as exact as he says, can you show elements where Christianity is still positive negative neutral yet but I think is a general heuristic device I found it helpful to say, we are in a different position now relative to Christianity's acceptance in the culture than we were in 1994 and then we were in 1976. So that's one. Now yesterday saw David French had an article that said, Christianity has always been in the negative world.

And there's, there's certainly, I mean, that is true in a way. So it's true. I mean, Paul says, anyone who desires to live a godly life and correct Jesus will be persecuted.

So here I am doing the the both and or the third way, which I'm so famous for. Thank you, Tim. But I think there's something to be said.

Now I don't, I don't agree with everything that David is trying to do over there. But it's certainly a theological truth that anyone who desires to live a godly life and correct Jesus will be persecuted and it's also a historical truth that at any time in America's history or throughout the world history. And when Christianity was ascendant, there were certain there were people who were oppressed sometimes by Christians.

So we shouldn't, if positive world is an unrealistic nostalgia, then we don't want that. I think it's, it, it isn't helpful to act as if nothing is has changed. I'm not saying that's the argument going on, but in an extreme form, either to say we live in a negative world therefore, you know, flight 93 the planes going down, anything you have to do now.

We're tired of being the nice guys fight with the weapons of the world and almost excuse anything. We don't want that. On the other hand, the here's where I think what the winsome discussion is sometimes about.

The winsome discussion sometimes can only win some this can be a unidirectional virtue, meaning when some and why it's become a watchword that some people want to own it and some people want to disown it. We should all acknowledge the Bible tells us to be gentle to be kind to be loving to other people. I think when there has been an appropriate reaction against some of the winsome this language is because it seemed to have only leaned toward the left that is when some doesn't mean how can we present things in a most appealing way to try to understand the concerns of MAGA voters.

No, that winsome means how might people generally to the left or who read the Atlantic or the New York Times or who have questions that don't don't agree with the Bible's view on LGBTQ issues. How can we present things most favorably so they'll be most willing to listen. And this is where I think the negative world conception is helpful to help us realize you can be on a lot of those issues as winsome as you want.

And if you still hold to biblical it's not it's going to it's going to buy you about five minutes of goodwill before they before they come after you before Princeton seminary won't give Tim Keller his preaching award. I want to know what I want to know what Justin thinks about this and then and then let's keep that conversation going and we're going to need a separate podcast for this one. But Justin I want to hear your thoughts here.

Well I know that you have more thoughts than I do. It's not true. I think one thing that David French was saying in his piece yesterday that I read quickly.

It's all anecdote I think all the way down which I think tends to be on both sides of the issue you know that let me prove to you that this is a negative world here six anecdotes. And that has its place because it's vivid and yet it has its limitations because it doesn't provide an overall view but I mean that the thing he's pointing to is. You know look at an African American girl in the 1950s in Arkansas was was that a positive world for her as a Christian.

Of course it was a terrible world it was a negative world. So in some ways we need to almost. Focus the question you know for for let's just say for white Protestants is has there been a shift over the past 50 to 75 years in terms of positive negative world.

Something like that I think in clarifying things and then I think we need statistics we need some objective measurable way in order to answer the question and not just does it subjectively feel more difficult for me to operate at work with my Christian convictions. And I think we could argue in a sense that it's it's more of a positive world in some ways for nominal Christians when you look at the President of the United States is a nominal Christian on both sides. You know the the most prolific podcasters or news commentators I mean Tucker Carlson is a I assume a professing Christian Sean Hannity's professing Christian so if we narrow it to those who advocate and embody orthodox Christian doctrine I think it's very hard to argue that this is a world that's more conducive and more positive and more encouraging.

But so I think we need to distinguish between anecdotes and some sort of statistical analysis and some sort of criteria and also a distinction between just kind of nominal professing God and country versus those who are advocating Christian doctrine, including Christian orthodoxy in terms of sexual ethics. I take to be the the central idea in the positive neutral negative to be look Christians in church if we think that just serving in enough soup kitchens and being intellectually plausible enough are that people will leave us alone and just say thank you very much that's great that more and more that will not be the case. I think that the positive negative is meant to be understood not as what was the experience that some Christian had so certainly it's right, you know, for white Christians to remember, you know the 1950s or not some golden era but it still was the case even when there was Jim Crow that Christianity as such had a privileged place we can say it was, you know, some people used it to abusive and oppressive ends is certainly true.

But as a religious identity as a force it was certainly viewed positively that it was something that in most parts of the country to say yes I'm a Christian is something that gives you cultural good, cultural capital. There's there's hypocrites so there's lots of bad things that go with it but just as an identity and expression of faith, it has cultural capital that still exists in many places. And that's what you're pointing out I think you're right Justin to say we can't just do it by anecdote it's easy on both sides to do that and just say here's how bad everything are drag queen, cake baker.

Now those are real things going on in not isolated measures but I think it's easy. Other folks would do it and say well look you got January six and you got, you know, this person who's saying that you know interracial marriage is bad or so and just line up four or five things and say there it is. That's what's going on so that most people the you know in a 50 50 politically split country.

It means that both sides feel like we're one election away from really winning and we're also one election away from the utter collapse of our whole civilization. And neither of those things are likely to be true but I've done a lot of talking Colin jump in here. Well let's let's do another podcast after we do endless text text messages to each other and

then further further discussions.

Now this is this is really helpful I think there's I think there's a way forward here and I'm going to drop a few things and then I get to leave and then let you guys sort out the rest of it. I just I agree something's changed absolutely something has changed I think it's it's clearly tied to the Obergefell decision related then to the way that that was not the end point that was merely facilitating the further move to the transgender question. At the gospel coalition we talked about that from the beginning and sure enough during that era transgender was the top search term on our site.

So there's something I think there's something fundamental there I don't actually think we have a sexual revolution way beyond transgender because I think that is the end not that means that's the only thing but that's the fundamental. I think there's something point even on that issue. Well I do think there is but that's why we need more attentiveness to moral foundations theory.

Jonathan Haidt of course is I think the most famous proponent of this but the reason transgender is not working the same way is because of the harm principle in moral foundations because the harm done to children and because of the because of the order principle because of the parents the parents rights who are abridged in that and then third there's another problem is fairness. The innocent women sports so there's homosexuality and transgender are very different in the American and largely Western understanding because homosexuality is not seen to harm anybody it's seen as fair and people should have the authority to order their sexual lives as they want. But transgender is not like that.

That's why we're seeing the divisions with feminists the divisions with homosexuals the divisions with JK Rowling the pushback politically they're not the same thing. So something has changed but the overall point and I want to commend people to to read or to watch Joe Rigny's message at the National Conservatives Conference because it was the most helpful explanation to me of a lot of the things that we're talking about. I still disagree and sometimes in fundamental ways with what Joe's arguing but now I understand why and I didn't understand why and I think it's this.

A lot of the arguments that you're relating here Kevin I think seem to assume that we're leaving kind of an era where people understood natural law and we're moving toward licentiousness we're moving away from that but I don't think we're moving away from it Kevin I think we're just moving toward a new legalism. Just a new law. I mean the cancel culture the push back against abuse the heightened sense of oppression all of these I think are pervasively Christian notions that only make sense in a Christian atmosphere but of course they're completely detached from grace.

They're detached from forgiveness they're detached from a lot of aspects of basic Protestant and Christian Orthodoxy and I was walking around Evanston Illinois one of the

kind of the most Protestant established communities in American history. It's one of those where you have like six churches massive churches on the town square but of course they're empty. Why are they empty? Well because the Protestant establishment didn't disappear it just left the church it just took over the whole culture but again but it took its version of legalism and law with a Christian kind of perspective on it and just established it among the elite culture outside of the church.

So the concern is I don't think we're moving back we're moving into a situation where we're just leaving behind Christianity and we're moving toward anything goes. It just seems what's changed is we've entered a whole different radically different form of Christianity which is equally problematic because again it's all law without gospel without grace. Now you can push back on that.

But that's how I see that. I think I largely agree with what you're affirming there I think my disagreement be whether what you're disagreeing with with is not something I think I'm saying and maybe other people are saying it I don't see the move into negative world if we use that terminology to one where we're moving from into licentiousness okay we've always had that or we're moving into anything goes moral relativism. Quite the contrary I think moral relativism was a stopping ground in the 90s and 2000s as we moved on to you know it's not relativism Twitter is not a place of moral relativism it's a place of hard moral absolutes.

I've referenced so many times Wilford McClay's article on the infinite extensibility of guilt so I think absolutely we have lots of law meaning moral demands upon people without any notion of forgiveness without any means of grace or real reconciliation. It's just all penance it's all groveling for your indulgence. So I agree with with all of that and I think it's a mistake if Christians think the boogeyman out there is just anything goes morality no it's quite the opposite.

Where maybe we disagree is I do think there is a so here's what I say there's a change in the culture but there's not a change in human nature and that means fundamentally ministry should look more similar to how it always has rather than more dissimilar. And maybe that's a helpful distinction. No I would agree with that Kevin and I think that's why I would argue against people on both sides that we don't need a radical winsomeness that has to bend over backwards on the left.

But we also don't need Christian Nash with them on the right to placate that side either but again we're doing the third way stuff so we better be careful. Well I'm yeah I'm saying that what is useful to real okay it's a truism everything's always changing the culture is always changing. Again this is an equal you talk to people doing campus ministry when they say something really it is a lot different than when we were in college.

It's a lot different than even 10 or 15 years ago. Now as a pastor I say well does that



mean we do things a whole lot different in the church. I don't think it does I think people are still sinners they still need to be born again they still need the word of God they still need us to preach and to pray and to minister to them.

But writ large part of it a lot of this has to do with a posture a culture to the posture to the culture to the culture and many of the people here's my country many of the people who would be most strongly advocating for a win some this toward the culture are often not very when some towards other Christians who disagree with their assessment of that culture. Now here's what I'll do the other side Colin. Yes it's certainly the case that too many people let's say on the right have that flight 93 mentality or that says that comes out just in that podcast you mentioned at least as cornaki tells the story that that Bob Michael was too much of just a nice guy in Newt Gingrich came along and said no we're not going to be the nice guys anymore.

That the stakes are too high for that they're absolutely diametrically opposed in every way. And I think that depends from from from issue to issue I mean I've written before that we need to as Christians need to both build bridges and build walls. And our first instinct I think you see this in the gospels Jesus for on a personal level so that's where I think we the conversation misses each other a lot of the time.

Are we talking about individually how I relate to someone but yes I'd know every Christian should start with if you're coming broken hearted and you're willing to hear the truth. I'm building bridges to you Jesus does that with with everyone who comes wanting to hear from him eager to to understand the truth but he or John the Baptist will also call people a brood of vipers and will also give people a great big stiff on the ground. And people a great big stiff farm and in fact the parables were meant to keep some people out and not getting it because they were wolves.

And everyone out there's not a wolf and everyone out there is not everyone is just a you know a bleeding heart sheep who if we just hug them tight enough they'd listen and they thank us. And I guess that's what I hope in Sainer moments that Christians would recognize that it takes discernment and the culture the culture is a really big thing that's not the same everywhere and there's 300 million people in this country and 300,000 churches so you can find just about any anecdote to describe your sense of things. And I hope that Christians in the church that's where Christians belong and pastors listening to this.

You know, one of the main themes I think in 20 years of my ministry is we don't have to reinvent the church. We don't have to reinvent what pastors are supposed to be doing. And that's true negative positive whatever world we think we're living in so on a on that human level.

It still takes a miracle of regeneration to cause someone to believe in Christ. Now going to Joe's piece is would it be better if there was a residual cultural Christianity that made

it more likely for people to believe in Christ. But yeah, I mean I think we just have knowledge there's there's trade offs I said this a few weeks.

All three of us and all three of us benefited from that. All three of us benefited from it. I mean all three of us lived in that kind of Christian culture.

Well, he didn't make us in different ways but all of us benefited from that. This is the this is the issue ever since Constantine. Is it better when there you have to pay a high cost to be a Christian or is it better when society makes you pay a high cost not to be a Christian.

And there's trade offs to either one. It's easier to do evangelism often or at least easier sometimes not easy to get people to see but it's easier to share it. The church is freer when you there's a cost to opting out.

And so I think some of the change is there's there's there's much more of a cost to being a Christian than there used to be in this country to being a biblical faithful Christian. There has always been one personal relationship. There's always been to really follow Jesus but to identify as a Christian to be a part of a church used to be more strongly.

There's a cost to not do that and now there's more of a cost to do that. And the the the people who say well praise the Lord. It's just amazing.

I'm so glad we got rid of nominal Christianity. I'm so glad we got rid of, you know, a civic Protestant sort of religion. But you know if only Constantine hadn't been converted the church would have been pure all of these years.

I want to say that's easy to say when you're not getting your head cut off. Right. Well I want to ask Justin a question here and then see what else your thoughts are but Justin.

Do you see a difference between moving from Chicago to Iowa with this for your family? Not necessarily. I mean I'm sure if I thought long and hard enough there might be some forms of differences but I'm probably not as sociologically oriented just my definition day to day that you are. I just wondered I mean that's just about that Christian culture thing if you see a difference with your kids whatnot.

It's certainly different. It's certainly different where we are in the show's suburbs and it was an East Lansing, Michigan. I think one helpful distinction to add into that is there's a difference between when talking about nominalism and Christendom is distinguishing between what sort of things we can analyze in the rear view mirror versus trying to proactively promote with the strategy and I think I'm probably more interested in the former like there's positives there's negatives there's you know it gives and it takes away but thinking of an intentional strategy by which nominalism becomes a stepping stone to make preconditions for being open to the supernatural more conducive seems more problematic to me though it's an interesting argument to have.

I just want to go back really quickly Kevin to something that you touched on which I think is really a heartbeat of your ministry and I think it's a characteristic of the three of us that it's part of why we do what we do. And that is that you're always going to be wowed and gilded by those saying the culture has changed therefore you need to contextualize and change your methodology G and these certain ways in order to keep up with the times and there's truth to some of what's being said there but just as a reminder for every listener and for pastors in particular the fundamentals of the faith and the dynamics of our context don't ultimately change. I mean God is the same creator we are still the same sinners every person born whether they're born in 2023 or 1953 comes into the world as somebody under Adam and lost in their sins in the need of regenerating grace.

The cross of Jesus doesn't change he is the same yesterday today and forever and we're moving by God's grace towards redemption towards the consummation. So those fundamentals don't change even though the context the challenges maybe the opportunities change but the dynamics of the faith from beginning to end from God to heaven to from sin to redemption are unchanging realities in the world. And so that can give us confidence to stick with the ordinary means of grace and pray along the way for extraordinary grace.

Yeah that's a very good word and it's not it's it's not surprising that sex and issues around sexuality would be such a flashpoint sex is such a powerful by God's design human desire and one that throughout the scripture mean the twin metaphors for sin are idolatry and an adultery. And I think you could make the case that no, no culture can long hold together with completely divergent views of sex and sexuality. I think it's that powerful.

And that's why you know a Christian view of sex was bad news, quote unquote it for certainly for acting on homosexuality. Stigmatized in some unhelpful ways but in a lot of helpful ways because stigmas, stigmas are stronger than dogmas and they are useful. At best they point people in the right direction and then the challenge is a larger stigma say against you know having sex outside of marriage and getting pregnant outside of marriage.

That stigma can reinforce good behavior. The challenge then is what happens when people run afoul of that stigma do you have grace and repentance and forgiveness to not just shun those people and their whole life is over, but to, and I think in many Christian communities they did have that sort of of culture but not always the case. So I think it is true that sex is such a powerful human emotion and engine that it remains to be seen whether we really can have in the West.

Just all right let LGBTQ be the dominant voice and you Christians go ahead and do your thing. If it's privatized but if you're going to argue for it publicly and so some of what I

want to do and I don't think we have a whole lot of disagreements here is as a pastor I want to make sure my people have their backs stiffened and just understand that they are going to have new cultural winds blowing against them and that if they just if their habit is to watch all the sports and all the commercials and binge watch all the same things and listen to all the same things and think and just receive all of that uncritically as many people do they're going to have a very hard time with standing that pole the world will squish us into its mold the world is cataclysming us every time you know the World Cup game and now they probably won't do it in Qatar but you know flying the rainbow flag having said that and this is your point Justin it's always been the case that Christians have had to be courageous not only when there's overt persecution or opposition but courageous when you know someone sins and you need to confront it courageous when you know a group of your friends are making some off color joke or putting someone down and you have to stand up to it or you know courage look different in the 1950s on different set of issues so Christians have always been had to be courageous there's always been the world pressing us into its mold and I want my people to realize that yes these things have changed in some ways and yet the overarching realities of what we're doing as Christians have not and and I think a lot of us probably saw going around the weekend that clip that the paper did on the Q&A panel at the Puritan Conference I was at a few weeks ago and just said yes there's there's a place for the litany of what's wrong but that should not be the church that should not be the dominant you know your people are leaving Sunday after Sunday just feeling man that's right how bad the work things have gotten so bad here's a list of how bad it is out there and it makes you anxious and makes you angry and pipe are so good to say we want our people to be feeling I'm ready to suffer if I have to and and crisis has died for sinners and I have a joyful message and perhaps my biggest concern and I think I've done enough articles and things over the years to hopefully have my conservative bona fides I'll put them up there with anyone but if I have a concern with some friends or colleagues on the right it would be that so animated by those sort of cultural concerns we lose the joy the Lord is my strength we lose that you know what's really holding us together it's a belief in the Nicene Creed and the Calcedon definition and the doctrines of grace and the glory of Christ when it's really a whole host of other animating concerns let me use that wind imagery for a second Kevin because I think that would be helpful at some level the culture whatever that is has always been blowing in our face okay and at some level other elements of the culture might be blowing at our backs if nothing else we know that the way we can face whatever is coming into our face is by the power of the Holy Spirit in the hope of the gospel and obedience to the Father that that's that's it that does not change it's always coming to our face some aspects in a culture some's good some's always bad you know but then the Holy Spirit is propelling us forward the only thing that I think the negative positive thing might be confusing on for people because it makes it seem like now we're getting it coming into our face before it was pushing us positive the only thing I'd want to change there is I want to what you know in addition what I just said there is I'd want to also then say the wind is just shifted

different tailwinds different headwinds now some harder some better now in some ways we've got more tailwinds against racism I know it's more complicated than that but some now we've got a little bit of that now we have a little bit more tailwind if you're a woman in an abusive relationship now there's a little bit more strength for you to be able to go on that but yes now we have different headwinds that's helpful for me at least to think about maybe disagree with that Kevin but I think that's but I like that that wind illustration helps me to visualize this stuff before you have to go we've gone past our our hour here we haven't talked about books let's just end by mentioning a few books and I want to just note here for good pastoral wisdom and thankfully the ask pastor john podcast isn't mainly about these things but about anything that people out there ask him so encourage you if you've never listened to a PJ ask pastor john podcast go there desiring God does so much good work and this is chief among their media content three times a week piper answers tough theological pastoral questions hosted by our friend Tony rank he's a bright well read really good author himself you can subscribe in your podcast app and there's 1800 episodes 1800 episodes of ask pastor john so alright we have four minutes give me a minute Justin any books you've been reading as a man as extensive lately because of some family health crises but I'll just put a plug in for reading commentaries if you read the right commentaries I really enjoy that in terms of helping my biblical knowledge and also devotional life so Kevin you mentioned at the beginning the expository commentary series by crossway the newest big thick one is on Psalms and on the salt or song Solomon and I think proverbs but reading Jack Collins commentary on all 150 Psalms just doing one a day and really enjoying it also looking at Jim Hamilton's new to volume commentary book that I just got I haven't really dipped into it more beyond the introduction I think all three of us revere David Hackett Fisher and he has a massive book on freedom and liberty and American history it's an illustrated history so one of those glossy books but the ways in it several hundred pages so look forward to dipping into that he has a mass David Hackett Fisher has a massive book that's a redundancy it's like churn out as the way does or Robert's he turns them off yeah all right Colin so if you like if you like Carl Truman's work which we do and have had some good conversations with him I actually think you would enjoy Christopher Watkins new book biblical critical theory how the Bible's unfolding story makes sense of modern life and culture essentially all it is is the kind of social criticism that Carl does but using a classically Australian biblical theology Genesis to revelation as the jumping off point for engaging and you know connecting and critiquing throughout the entire thing so I find in many ways it's more constructive than what Carl was trying to do in his especially first big book rise and triumph for the modern self but this is another big book but is very very helpful again similar social criticism but using a biblical theological framework to do it biblical critical theory Christopher Watkins all right here's a number of books I've been reading we haven't talked for a long time so I have a lot of books I'll skip over the ones I'm doing a church history class Sunday school class I'm reading lots of those books let's see Louise Perry the case against the sexual revolution not easy reading and talks graphically not luridly but about sex and one of what seems to me a

growing number of persons on the left who don't want to be classified as a conservative and really aren't and yet they're realizing the dead end that is the sexual revolution and as a as a feminist realizing how the sexual revolution privileges men and often male predatory behavior to great harm for women you know I find reading that book just I do I pray somebody in her life I don't know her at all can share Jesus with her and it's happening good it's happening good and help kind of bring all the way because the last where she gives ten pieces of advice it's like you know try to date someone women for a few months before you have sex and try to be real sure before you move in I just want to say you know what there there's an even better way out there so that along these themes Douglas Murray wrote on the west Murray's an interesting writer from the UK homosexual conservative in ways other than that but I did a quick read on the plane David Hackett Fisher is older book from 1989 Albion seed for British folkways in America I skimmed it it's a massive book but even just to be acquainted or I'm sure it's been summarized lots of times I'm sure he goes for British folkways so he says on you know he has a list of like 25 different things from sports to leisure to women to clothing to liberty these are for British folkways there's New England Puritan there's the middle colonies and the top of latte and forgetting what the fourth one is tidewater sort of Anglican Virginia establishment really helpful even if you say well it doesn't you know you don't buy it writ large it's really helpful you say oh yeah I can see those different folkways still in the country today two more books Sam Hasselby David Hackett Fisher's publicist earned his or her keep on this episode yes way to go Sam Hasselby the origins of America American religious nationalism from 2015 he's a thinker on the left but very astute and interesting work he's arguing that nationalism and religious nationalism is something owing to the 19th century more than the 18th century in America is one of his arguments and then lastly just finished on the plane last week and the myth of American inequality by Phil Graham former senator Robert Ekelin John Early it's a real wonky statistics economic book but I found other words your cup of tea yeah it was really their central argument is the you know at heart it's really pretty simple they say the census bureau statistics and other things that typically come out from official agencies don't include all the relevant information for really determining the state of inequality and when you factor into for example wealth transfers through entitlement programs which most don't include and when you include so transfers coming in and taxes going out and then also include cheaper goods over the last 40 50 years standard of living with phones and air conditioning etc they make the very counter cultural case that the last 50 years in America should be considered something of a golden age of prosperity and so much goes against what you'll hear from almost anybody whether you're convinced of it or not it was a real fascinating book all right guys thank you we got some books we got some internationalism out there and we'll cheer on whoever's playing on all right thank you all and until next time glorify god enjoy him forever and read a good book read a good book read a good book