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Jessica: Welcome to Tangible, Theology Learned and Lived. We're exploring the ways in which theology permeates all aspects of life.

Through conversations with various faculty here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, we will challenge you to deepen your theology and live out your faith in Christ.

I'm your producer and host, Jessica Bordeleau. I'll talk with a variety of professors on a variety of topics, something different every episode, but all pointing to the intersection between faith and daily life.

It's Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived. Today we're talking about Christian nationalism.

This is one of Dr. Joel Biermann's areas of interest and study. He's the author of the book Holy Citizens, God's Two Realms and Christian Engagement with the World.

Dr. Biermann grew up in small town America and served as a parish pastor in the Midwest for 11 years.

For the last 20 years, he's been professor of systematic theology here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis.

Dr. Biermann, welcome to the show.

Joel: Great to be here.

Jessica: Now, Dr. Biermann requested that Dr. David Adams join the conversation, and I can see why.

Dr. Adams spent four years in Washington, D.C., as the executive director of the Office of Government Information for the LCMS.

He is the co-editor of a book of essays on the subject of civil religion and American society.

That book is called The Anonymous God. Dr. Adams has spent time as a parish pastor, college professor and earned his Ph.D. from Cambridge University.

Now he serves as professor of exegetical theology here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis.

Dr. Adams, welcome to the show.

David: Great to be with you, Jessica.

Jessica: Dr. Biermann, you recently spoke at the Theological Symposium here at Concordia Seminary.

And your plenary presentation, which I was at and it was very good, was titled Luther's Two Realms and Christian Nationalism.

And you've presented on that topic, you've published a book on that topic. Why is that important to you?

Joel: The Two Realms is really important because it's one of the most substantial areas where we see the tangible reality of theology hitting life, because that's what it's all about.

And the Two Realms is really an aspect of Luther's teaching, which I would say is just basically Christian teaching, of the interface between following God and knowing God's forgiveness and knowing God is my Lord and Savior and actually living in the world

I think Luther is brilliant in his understanding of this and how he traces this through this interface.

And my prompting of getting really interested in this was being frustrated that so few Lutherans seem to really grasp the depth of this.

I encountered too many Lutherans who have the kind of a truncated understanding of two kingdoms as the kingdom of the left and the kingdom of the right.

One is God's and one is Satan's and we want to be good Christian people and we know our forgiveness of sins and then we go back in the world.

But that's kind of a separate thing and we need to have this wall of separation between them, kind of a Jeffersonian idea.

I found that idea quite widespread among Lutherans and just about all of it's wrong.

And that's one of the reasons why I tend to use the language realms instead of kingdoms because I try to open a new area of conversation under the idea of two realms instead of what people think they know about the two kingdoms.

Jessica: All right, tell me more about the Two Realms. Remind us.

Joel: Sure. So the Two Realms basically is the concept that, or the teaching, the truth that God is at work in the world in two very distinct ways.

And I find this duality, or there are many dualities in Lutheranism, this is one of the peculiar ones and it's not the same as law, gospel, it's not the same as two kinds of righteousness.

There's a lot of overlap. But the Two Realms is answering the question, how does God work in the world?

And he works in two distinct ways.

He works through the spiritual realm, what Luther liked to call it, the realm where he's bringing his grace to people and his forgiveness and that's the work of the church.

And he works in the temporal realm, Luther's favorite term there, which is the world all around us, the secular world.

And there God uses government to accomplish his purpose and to make sure things work well.

And the Two Realms then are in cooperation, they're not in competition.

They're working together to accomplish God's purposes, which is to sustain the world, hold things together, especially in the temporal realm, until Christ's return, when the Two Realms are united fully underneath the eternal reign of Christ.

Jessica: And why do you prefer the term realms over kingdoms?

Because Luther uses kingdom in realm, in German it's just regiments and it's kind of vague in what it means.

Sometimes Luther talks about the two kingdoms and he really means, and what he's talking about is God and Satan.

There's a kingdom of God and kingdom of Satan. And he talks that way.

Then you talk about, and God works in his two kingdoms and he means spiritual, temporal.

Well, those are two very different things.

But if you allied them, you end up confusing it thinking, well, there's a good kingdom and a bad kingdom.

No. And so that's why I think it's better to have different terms.

So I use kingdom for God, Satan, and I use realm for spiritual, temporal.

If that makes sense.

Jessica: No, absolutely.

I have a quote from your book, Holy Citizens, and it says,

The temporal realm focuses on the preservation of this world and the promotion of peace and justice within it.

The spiritual realm centers on the proclamation of the gospel and delivery of justifying grace.

Joel: Yeah.

Jessica: All right. So if there are two realms, is God in charge of both?

Joel: Absolutely.

So this is the driving point in so much of this.

This is God's creation.

This is God's world.

It's God's temporal realm, which is exactly how Paul talks in Romans.

And it's kind of like, whoa, can you do that?

And he does.

And so in other words, this is God's world and it's God's government.

And so God's in control.

And the old left hand, right hand thinking, which Luther uses a couple of times, captures this nicely because it's God's two hands, both God's hands.

Jessica: How is that tangible now for me?

How will this idea guide my involvement as a citizen?

Joel: Well, it starts with you looking at, as a Christian, as realizing that the temporal realm is more than government.

This is one of my things I try to push hard.

It's your family, it's your yard, your house, it's your friends, it's your job, it's caring about art, caring about music.

It's the whole world all around you is all temporal realm.

And the first move I try to make with people is to realize that's God's stuff.

God cares about it.

He gave it.

There's a Christian way to live in that stuff and a Christian way to enjoy that.

It's all cool.

And then the government is the thing that God has established to make sure all that stuff's working the way it should.

So are Christians engaged in that kind of world?

Yeah.

Do we care about the government?

Absolutely.

And so we can't not care.

Jessica: So talking about the tangible application of this, Dr. Adams, you spent four years in Washington, D.C.

David: Yes, I think almost five.

Jessica: How did you observe this?

David: My work in Washington was primarily communicating information about what the government was doing to the church

and occasionally, in appropriate ways, the concerns that the church had to the government.

And part of that was also then serving as a liaison with other Christian groups.

It was always a challenge to make them understand that, well, let me put it this way.

I remember attending a meeting and there was a prominent evangelical leader there with some members of Congress.

And the prominent evangelical leader made the point that all we want is a seat at the table.

And when it came around to me, I said, that's not what we want.

We don't want a seat at the table.

That's not the church's function.

It's the function of our members to be faithful citizens of America

and to live their lives in a God-pleasing way and to make their choices as citizens in a way that accords with Christ and his teaching.

But it's not the function of the church to take over the role of the government and tell the government how to govern.

So what I wanted was to be informed so that I could pass on to other people in the church appropriate information not driven by hysteria or panic or the need to do fundraising, but legitimate, accurate historical information about what was going on so that they could make proper decisions to carry out their roles as citizens.

So, you know, people think working in Washington, D.C., you must be a lobbyist.  
And that's not the function that our office had, not the function that I had.

Jessica: So the role of citizens to be part of influencing government, but not the church.

So does the church have a role in influencing how we as citizens interact?

Joel: Well, this is where you get some interesting kinds of things to sort this stuff out.

So what is the church? The church is people.

And yes, the church has institutions that are formal, but the church is fundamentally people.

And so to make a distinction between, well, that's Christians doing it, not the church doing it, it's a little bit arbitrary.

David: Yeah, I mean, the church as an institution.

Joel: No, I get that. Absolutely. I'm totally with you on that, David.

I think the critical thing is to recognize that there are some times when even church does step in with government,

not to tell government how to govern, but to say, right now you're doing something immoral.

Right now you're out of line with God's purposes.

And this is the biggest thing where I think Christians need to be saying, what is my role in government?

My role as a Christian citizen is to help this, especially in a democratic republic like the United States.

We are the government in a sense.

We can't stay not engaged.

And so I've got to be up to date on current events.

I need to vote.

If I want to contact my legislator because I think something's really going crazy, I can do that.

But see, my question should always be asking, is this government's action lining up with God's will for His creation?

Jessica: How could I be living this out in a way that's not helpful?

Joel: Yeah.

Well, see, so the goal then as a Christian is to live faithfully in God's world.

And I do that by making sure I'm living within God's purposes, letting God's will, His law direct how I do that.

And so I want to engage the world with that kind of thing.

When Christians start making mistakes, it usually falls into two directions.

And historically, you can see examples of both of these things amply illustrated in the history of the church.

So the one illustration is where you have the kind of, I'll go the checkout direction first.

And this is the sense of, hey, I'm a Christian.

Me and Jesus are cool, and I'm living in this world.

And these are two separate kingdoms, and I've got to keep them apart.

And so this is the Jeffersonian idea, and it was before Jefferson even, of the wall of separation, which he suggested that there was a wall of separation between church and state.

So it's my job to make sure I'm a good Christian, live that, but it's private.

In my public life, I've got to just leave that behind, and I'm just going to go and make sure the world is kind of doing its thing, and it takes care of itself.

And after all, God's put this government here, it's God's government.

And you see, people think, well, yeah, that's how I live.

That's a bad way to live.

That's known as quietism.

And the quietism can get you into deep trouble when the government starts doing things which are violating God's will.

You say, it's God's government, not my business.

I'm staying out of this.

The wall has to be built.

And this is what leads to things like the Deutschkreisten, which is the name of the Christians who are in Germany, who decided that, yeah, Hitler's our duly elected leader.

We should be following where he goes.

God put him there, and our job is just to follow where he goes.

And then the Deutschkreisten becomes this huge, tragic disaster of letting the Third Reich come to power, and they're actually complicit in it.

And the sad thing is you have the majority of Christians in Germany going along with it.

You have faithful people like Niemoller and Sasse and Bonhoeffer and others who say no, but the majority are going with this.

And it's just tragic.

And what's driving it?

It's a bad understanding of the two kingdoms.

The stuff matters.

Okay?

So that's one area, is the quietism.

Checking out.

The other area is the enmeshing.

I think I'm running them together.

And that's what we're starting to see a little happening, especially among evangelicals.

And evangelicals, as Dr. Adams was saying earlier, are notorious for this because their goal is nothing less than a Christian America.

And they want to establish a Christian nation.

They want to recreate like covenant Geneva.

Hey, we're going to have a Christian nation here.

We're going to have Christian principles.

That's what we're looking for.

And Lutherans have always been ambivalent at best about that and really pretty wary because we believe in sinful human beings.

We believe it's not going to happen.

And we believe when Scripture says it's not going to happen until the eschaton, we believe that.

Jesus says, my kingdom is not of this world because he knows better.

Sin is going to be in the way until he comes and reestablishes.

So, but you try to start running them together, you get into trouble fast.

And then this starts to fuel things even like the Christian nationalism, which I know is on the target for today,

where we start thinking that the goal of the church or the faithful Christians is to bring about a Christian nation and to make America Christian again.

And you get this sort of rhetoric and there's all kinds of problems with this.

David: Joel, if I can point out something.

I once had a conversation with a close friend who's evangelical.

Joel: Yeah.

David: And we got to talking about this.  
And I asked him why he thought that way.  
And he said, it's in the Great Commission.  
And I said, where?

Joel: Yeah, right.

David: And he said, well, you know, he said, go into all the world and teach them to obey all that I commanded you.  
And he was under, I skipped out from making disciples.

Joel: Yeah, yeah.

David: That part.

Joel: Right.

David: But the point is, he was interpreting the them in that, you know, teach them to refer to the whole world.

Joel: Yeah.  
And this notion that somehow this is a divine mandate, the mission from God to make the world Christian or make the world obey God's law.  
You know, would I love it if the world was obeying God's law?  
Well, yeah, it would work better.  
It'd be a great thing.  
But my goal is to make disciples.  
And my goal is to hold the world accountable.  
And when the world's going off the rails, I can say, hey, stop going off the rails.  
And I can call it a task.  
But my goal is not to then make it a Christian country or Christian government.

David: There's a tremendous difference between bearing witness and controlling.

Joel: Absolutely.  
Absolutely.

David: You know, and in a democracy especially to teach our members, to teach Christian disciples what it means to live as a responsible citizen.

Joel: That's right.

David: You know, that's different from the church controlling the world.

Joel: That's a very good distinction.  
And I completely agree with that.  
Yep.

Jessica: Dr. Bierman, what are the dangers of blurring the lines between the two realms?  
Well, the dangers basically fall into two categories.  
One way of getting it messed up is by dividing them too overzealously, putting that wall there like Jefferson talked about.  
So Thomas of Jefferson famously said that there should be a wall of separation between church and state.  
You can go do your religion thing.  
And then the state over here is doing a state thing.  
And the church thought, oh cool.  
See, the problem is what Jefferson's motivation is, we'll keep the religion over here safely out of the way so the big boys can go do the state stuff.  
And that was Jefferson's motivation.  
He was not a fan of the church.  
He was a fan of morality.

And so long as the church is giving or creating morality, fine.

So anyway.

Jessica: He was a deist, not a Christian, right?

Joel: Oh yeah.

Oh absolutely.

David: Well, he did create his own version of the New Testament, you know.

Literally cutting and pasting.

Literally.

I'd say the original.

Joel: Literally cut out the miracles and the divinity and the stuff he didn't like.

Jessica: So the idea that this is a Christian nation and that's why we have the...

Joel: It's problematic at the least.

Jessica: Ah ha.

That changes things a little bit.

Joel: It changes things a lot.

You know, if you go back to the history, this is a sidebar question, but you know, the idea that this is a Christian nation.

This is a nation that was founded by many Christians and a lot of Christian principles which happened to overlap nicely with enlightenment principles at that time.

But the primary architect of our Constitution was not a Christian.

There were others involved who definitely were and I don't want to minimize that.

But I would say that if you look at the documents we actually have which govern this nation, like the U.S. Constitution, at a core it is an enlightenment document more than it is a Christian document.

There are Christian ideas in it and Christian ideals in it, but it is an enlightenment concept of humanity and of government.

It's an enlightenment document.

So the wall of separation parcels everything out into nice new categories.

Well, see, the problem with that is you can start having Christians who think, I'm a Christian, I go to church, I believe in Jesus, it's great.

What do I do in the world?

Well, that's different.

See, that's the left-hand realm.

That's the government.

The church doesn't have any business over there.

Private life, Christian.

Public life, things are different.

And people operate that way all the time.

This historically has created disasters.

The greatest disaster being Germany in the 1930s when you have Hitler elected as the new democratic leader, a chancellor.

Great, he's democratically elected.

And so the government is doing its thing and the church says, he's our government.

And so everything's fine.

But see, now when the government starts saying, maybe we Jews aren't really full citizens, the church says, well, he's the elected government.

Got to obey him.

And away you go.

And the sad, tragic thing is you have the majority of the church in Germany going along with this. And what's fueling a lot of it, and this is one of the complaints Karl Barth had later is, and it has to be admitted,

what's fueling a lot of it is this misunderstanding of Luther's teaching.

It's not Luther's teaching that's the problem.

It's the misunderstanding of it into this division and it creates something called quietism, which I just have to stand back and let the government do its thing.

That's wrong.

When the government is disobeying God, it's the job of the church and of Christian citizens to step in and say, stop what you're doing, government.

You can't do that.

Now, that's one danger.

The other danger is where you start collapsing them into each other.

Where you start thinking that the government and the church need to work together.

The goal is to have them unified.

We're going to have a new theocracy or, as it gets said these days, a new Christian nation state.

And Christian nationalism becomes a huge driver in that, where the goal is a Christian America, an America that is we're all honoring Jesus and we're all praising him.

And wouldn't that be great if we have church services in the capital like they did in the old days?

And this is the kind of goal you start getting, this notion of this is what we're looking for, a Christian America and the Christian nationalism.

And the problem with that collapsing of the two things together, you say, well, what's wrong with that?

Well, what's wrong with that is inevitably the gospel ends up getting buried.

This is just what happens again and again, that people get so worried about right behavior, right living.

Where's the gospel of proclamation, proclamation of the gospel of forgiveness happening and it doesn't.

It gets subverted, it gets lost.

David: And it's almost inevitable because government is about law.

Joel: Exactly.

David: You know, it's about regulating society.

Joel: That's right.

David: Which is inevitably, from a theological perspective, a legalistic approach.

Joel: Yeah.

David: So it's almost inevitable, it's almost built into the system that the gospel is irrelevant to that.

Joel: That's just right. This is the old problem of law gospel confusion.

When you try to run law and gospel together, what ends up losing, the law never loses, the law always triumphs over.

Because we are people who like the laws, we like rules, and the gospel gets subverted.

Which is why we have to be so zealous in holding onto the gospel and making sure the church never forgets its number one task to do the gospel.

And I want to make that clear here because you see, a lot of what we're talking about today is should Christians be involved in the temporal realm?

Yes.



Should Christians care about government?

Yes.

Can the church even speak to the government?

Yes.

And that is never the first task of the church.

And if that becomes the first task of the church, we have forfeited the very thing that makes us who we are, which is the gospel people.

And if we're not doing gospel first, foremost, number one, we have failed in doing what the church is supposed to do, that's a huge mistake.

David: It is.

And the fundamental problem with Christian nationalism, the idea of a Christian nation, misses the point that there's only one Christian nation, and that's the church.

Joel: That's exactly right.

David: Right.

Because in any republic, in the history of the world, there's never been any nation in which everybody agreed on everything.

Joel: Right.

David: And there never can be.

So that's why we had this old saying that politics is the art of compromise.

Joel: Yes.

David: The art of the possible.

And yet, that's something, when we get to a certain point, that Christians can't do.

There are certain things I can't compromise on.

Joel: Precisely.

And the challenge arises for me as a Christian citizen, I can't compromise on this point.

And yet, I'm living in a society in which the only way it can function is if society as a whole compromises.

And this creates a tension and a stress for us.

Joel: It absolutely does.

David: And we have to learn how to navigate that.

And that's why I think the distinction is important between saying it's our task to bear witness, not our task to control.

Joel: That is such a critically important distinction.

David: In the late 1980s, I was visiting Sudan with a group, and we were invited to speak to the man who was prime minister, in effect, not the president.

They had a separate administrator, but he was the prime minister.

He was also on the United States top ten list of terrorists in the world at the time.

And so, there were five or six of us.

We met him in his office and talked for a while.

And I raised the point of the persecution of Christians in Sudan.

This was before the division between Sudan and South Sudan.

And Darfur.

So there was a lot of persecution of Christians going on at the time.

And I appealed to him to help create a more tolerant society, at least in terms of religious diversity.

And he looked at me and he said, remember, he's Muslim, right?

So he said, God is one, so the people must be one.

So this was his theological principle.

But it—and I realized that he was assuming, not just Muslim theology, but he was assuming the point that governments always have assumed about religion.

That religion is going to serve as a unifying force in society.

And in our day, that's increasingly not so.

Joel: Correct.

And see, what's interesting to me is in the 20th and the 21st century, you actually start seeing that democratic republics thrive best when people become irreligious.

And they actually do better.

The more that religion doesn't matter to people, the better the nation does, because the nation state starts to become the center of people's lives instead of their religion.

And I think that might actually account for why they have successive democracies in places like Europe and North America where religion increasingly goes down, down, down.

And it struggles in places where people still are invested in these things, because when you're invested in your faith, it's really hard to figure out how to cooperate with these people from other faiths.

David: Yes, and that's that tension that was—

Joel: That's right.

David: —that's funny about that, that Christian citizens have to learn to manage.

Joel: That's right.

David: And it's very difficult to put into practice.

Joel: Yes, it is.

Because on one hand, all of our instincts are to say, this is what God's word says, this is the right thing, this is what I'm going to do, what I'm going to promote.

On the other hand, you have to realize there are limits to the authority that God has given me.

Joel: Right.

David: You know, I am not the president, I'm not the whole of the government.

Joel: Right.

David: So I'm going to live my life, according to God's word, I'm going to encourage and promote other people to do so.

Joel: And provide that witness.

David: And provide that witness.

At the same time, I have to recognize that in a fallen world, some people are going to go astray.

Joel: Absolutely.

David: And that means some segments of society are going to go astray.

Joel: And it might mean the whole—the majority of the people are going astray.

David: Might very well.

Joel: And that's frustrating.

And you're right to stress the tension, the tension, the tension.

I'm learning to live with this.

Because good Christian theology parks your right intentions all the time.

And when you want to resolve the tension, it always puts you in error.

And so you've got to hold onto the tension, because if you try to resolve the tension, now it feels better, you're probably making a mistake.

Either quietistic or confusing them is resolving the tension.

Holding the tension is always uncomfortable.

But that's where we need to stay.

David: I was in another meeting once talking about religious persecution in China.

Joel: Yeah.

David: And a member of the staff of a prominent congressman, in whose offices we were having breakfast, you know, said—  
he finally got very frustrated by our conversation.  
And he said, well, this is all the fault of those Christians.  
If they would just sit in their rooms and believe whatever they wanted to believe, they wouldn't have a problem.  
It's their fault.

Joel: Wow.

David: You know.  
And this is what happens when you, as a Christian believer, you live your life in public in a way that bears witness to your faith.

Joel: It will always make an impact.

David: Right.  
So the protection of religious liberty serves the state's interest in reducing conflict.

Joel: Right.

David: Or at least potentially.  
It intends to do so by saying, we're going to equally protect legally everybody's opinions, so that the state is not going to weigh in on whether, you know, you should baptize children or not baptize children.

Jessica: It seems mutually beneficial to me.

David: Yeah.

Jessica: Are you saying there's a better way?

David: I'm saying the state does it because it serves the state's interest.

Joel: Right.  
And is there a better way?  
Probably not.  
Especially not in a democratic republic.  
It's probably the best way you can do it.

David: Remember, it's a fallen world.

Jessica: And so we go for the second best.

Joel: That's right.

Jessica: The best that we can do before Jesus comes again.

Joel: While we're waiting.  
That's right.

David: The other thing that I would say about Christian nationalism is that it interferes with the church being the church.

Joel: That's correct.  
You know.

Jessica: Let me pause for a second.  
Give me a really succinct definition of Christian nationalism.

Joel: I would say that Christian nationalism is the goal, the desire to create a nation that is founded completely on Christian principles and is essentially one with the church.  
And they become together.  
And there's no distinction clearly between them anymore.

And so while I'm talking hard about, yes, they work together and we would love to have a Christian government, the reality is we have to take into account the brokenness of the world.

And so Christian nationalism's biggest mistake is it tends to ignore the reality of sin and the fact that Christians aren't in control and we don't want to be in control.

If the government looks to us and wants our input, great.

So Christian nationalism, in a nutshell, is trying to make a Christian nation state when the people don't all want to be a Christian nation state.

David: Yeah.

It's doing what my friend argues a great commission said that we should do.

That's right.

We're trying to make all nations obey God's laws.

Joel: But they haven't made them disciples first.

But they haven't made them disciples first.

Right.

Joel: So in other words, what I'm saying is the church needs to remember we're here to proclaim the gospel and God's law as well.

But you see, we don't start enforcing Christian laws on everybody when they're not recognizing they want to follow Christ.

We need to deal with these things first.

David: But there is a kind of unacknowledged fourth use of the law.

And that's law as microscope by which we examine the lives of others.

Joel: Yeah.

David:

And this is kind of where the Christian nationalist part of where the Christian nationalist movement goes wrong, wants to use the law not to tell me my need or not even just to curb evil in the world by the way the law works on the conscience and is written on the heart of man.

Joel: Yeah.

David: But rather by the church dictating to the world what the world has to do to conform to God's law.

So it's again, it's a matter of control versus witness.

Joel: Yeah.

So whether it's fourth use as a microscope or maybe a club.

David: Or telescope or a club.

Joel: Yeah.

David: That would be club would be the fifth use.

Joel: Yeah.

Yeah.

Joel: You would do something.

You would do something with it.

David: Then you beat them into shape.

Joel: That's right.

Jessica: How would you answer a Christian who said, as a conservative Christian, I need to have conservative politics?

Then I would say, make sure that you're following Christ first.

And Christ may lead you into places that are maybe not traditionally conservative.

He might lead you to challenge status quo.

He might lead you to things that are even progressive because following Christ is always kind of a radical adventure.

Conservatism has a different agenda.

Conservatism by definition wants to hold on to what has been, which is fine in many places we agree with that.

But see, it's a different kind of thing.

Hardcore conservatives are even prone to use the church or use religion for their purpose, which is to promote traditional values.

And see, and we think, oh, traditional values, those are Christian.

Not necessarily.

If the tradition is lousy, you're promoting lousy values.

So you have to make a distinction between following Christ and following mere tradition or precedent or being conservative for being conservative.

And I think a lot of Christians, especially in our circles, tend to make the mistake of thinking Christians are by definition conservative.

Now, Christians by definition are followers of Christ.

And then that leads us into things that are important to our confession of following Christ, which can be very right in line with the conservative agenda or might be totally at odds with the conservative agenda.

That's reality.

Jessica: So as Christians, we want to fulfill our citizen vocation, right?

What would be wrong with us trying to protest and vote for laws that we feel promote the common good?

Joel: Nothing wrong with that.

Nothing wrong with that at all.

In fact, Christians should be very engaged in what's going on in the world, pay attention to current events, vote accordingly, try to influence things.

They want to get out and protest in the streets.

Go for it if you're motivated to do that, if something is that important.

And the Christians have done this historically countless times, and it's not a bad thing.

The key here is, am I doing it to serve self or am I doing it to serve neighbor?

David: And the real challenge here is that this would be very easy to do if we only had to deal with one issue at a time.

Joel: Yeah, that's right.

David: The world in which we live, we're forced to make choices about a variety of issues.

Joel: Yeah.

David:

Some would be domestic, economic, some would be foreign policy, some would be social policy.

Joel: Yeah, yeah.

David: And the tension, again, arises because often there's a candidate, and we think the candidate might more closely align with what I think God's will is in this area.

Joel: Right.

And not in that area.

That's correct.

David: Because of the complexities of modern life in the world.

Joel: Yeah.

David: And so how do I balance my judgment with saying, you know, this candidate, he or she, will be good for other people in some areas but not in others?

And how do I prioritize those?

Joel: Right.

David: And often conflict arises for Christians in the political arena because they prioritize the goods differently.

Not because somebody is for something good and someone is for something evil.

Joel: That's right.

David: But that I prioritize, you know, good number A and someone else prioritizes good number C.

Joel: Yeah.

David: And if you think that candidate X would do better for this issue, candidate Y might do better for that issue.

Joel: Yeah.

David: And not only that, it becomes more complex when you realize that most of the time government is not about the what but about the how.

Joel: Yeah.

David: You know, I have never, you know, I spent a number of years in Washington, I never heard a politician on either side of the aisle argue for worse education.

Right.

All members of both parties want better education.

They disagree about how to get there.

Joel: Yeah.

David: About whether central government control is best to bring about good education or local government control is best to bring about good education.

Joel: Yeah, that's good. Exactly.

David: So in that case, it's not a choice of one good over another.

It's a choice of one means to accomplish the good over another.

Joel: Yeah.

David: And there's certainly room for Christians to disagree in that area.

Joel: Yep.

David: One of the theological issues at stake here is that the whole idea behind Christian nationalism is really ultimately utopian.

Joel: Exactly.

David: You know, it's that somehow by our efforts we're going to bring about the kingdom of God in the here and now.

Joel: That's correct.

David: You know, and that's often the underlying theological problem.

We are not ever going—in a fallen world, we are not ever going to have a nation that is Christian.

Joel: That's right.

David: And so this attempt to be sort of utopian, eschatological by our efforts, by passing the right laws and so forth, is where this ultimately collapses.

Joel: Correct.

David: It's a theological problem underlying this, and it also collapses in practice.

Joel: Yes.

So I would say it this strongly, that for a Christian who's seeking to follow Jesus faithfully, Christian nationalism is not an option.

It's not something you can tolerate.

It should be rejected.

It should just be flat out rejected.

It's at odds with faithful confession.

It's not in any way compatible.

David: And I would agree with that.

I think what I would want our listeners to remember is the necessity of the Church being the Church, this collection of redeemed people sent into the world to take the gospel to the ends of the earth and to make disciples of all nations.

Joel: I would say that what I want people to remember is you are called to follow Christ, and following Christ is always the way of self-denial.

You're dying to yourself.

So you're not trying to promote your agenda, your goals, your purposes, what's going to make your life better.

This is never the agenda.

The agenda is follow Jesus, and that means you die to self in your service to others.

So what I want people to remember is as a political citizen, your job is to figure out how you die to self in service to others.

We're not going to all agree on that, but that's what's driving you.

It can never be a selfish, this is what makes my life better, then you're on the wrong track.

Follow Jesus.

Jessica: That's all for today.

I'd like to thank our guests for being on the show.

Dr. Adams, thank you for being here.

David: It's a delight. Thank you, Jessi.

Jessica: Dr. Biermann, thanks for coming.

Joel: My pleasure. I enjoyed it.

And thank you for listening.

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