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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 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, when it's Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived.

We recently produced an episode on Christian nationalism, and it was one of our most downloaded

episodes so far, over a thousand downloads.

So in response to the interest of our listeners, we're going to continue the discussion.

This time we're talking with Dr. Joel Okamoto and Dr. Joel Bierman.

They are both professors of systematic theology here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis.

And last semester they taught a class together called Church in World, in which they discussed, among other things, Christian nationalism.

Dr. Joel Biermann is the author of the book Holy Citizens, God's Two Realms and Christian Engagement with the World.

Dr. Biermann, welcome to the show.

Biermann: It's great to be with you.

Jessica: Dr. Joel Okamoto was a contributing author to the book The Anonymous God, The Church Confronts Civil Religion and American Society.

Dr. Okamoto, welcome to the show.

Okamoto: It's good to be here.

Thank you.

Jessica: In part one of this series, we focused on the definition and dangers of Christian nationalism.

If you haven't listened to that episode, check it out.

But in a very abbreviated nutshell of that half hour discussion that Dr. Biermann and Dr. David Adams had, this was the boiled down version.

Trying to create a utopian Christian nation attempts to bring about the kingdom of God and the here and now by our own efforts.

It's not an option in the fallen world.

Dr. Adams said it's a theological problem and collapses in practice.

So listen to that episode to hear how they got there because now we're going to build on that.

So if creating and enforcing a Christian nation state is out, should Christians just sit down and be quiet?

What is our goal as Christians in the political realm?

Biermann: Well, I think I want to start too by just clarifying a little bit more about the Christian nationalism thing because people are getting a little bit worked up about the technicalities of the definition and whose term this is and where it's coming from and the source and people are kind of taking some shots at that.

It's not so much that I'm sold on this term or a particular definition of it.

To me, the bigger problem is just the very mentality or the mindset that somehow it is the job of the church to try to transform the society into being a more utopian society. Utopian is a pejorative term, but even it's the job of the church to try to make the world act a certain way.

I think that in itself becomes a problem in just our very thinking.

That creates the tension because the very issue then is, well, then we do nothing.

No, I'm not saying that, but I do want to be clear that Christian nationalism is not so much a technical term we're trying to go after.

It's more just this whole mentality of what is the task of the church anyway?

My concern is I believe that when Christians start thinking that our job is social reform, we're already losing the sight of the task of the church.

I guess to illustrate this, I'll invoke Stanley Hauerwas here who likes to say that the church does not have a social ethic.

The church is a social ethic.

That's kind of getting what I'm getting at, which is that when it's not like we're trying to do this or that thing out there in the world for the sake of this or that agenda, but we are simply living as the church, faithfully caring for those around us, following Christ, worshiping Christ.

In that process, we are impacting the world around us by being the positive witness to

the world without trying to have this deliberate agenda of, we're going to get this legislation, we're going to do this, we're going to do this.

We can get involved in those things to some extent, but that can't be what's driving us.

What's got to be driving us is let's be church faithfully.

What's that look like?

That's the clarity I'm trying to bring to this.

Okamoto: Can you say more about why?

Let's go back to Hauerwas and that distinction between having and being a social ethic.

Or like they say in Resident Aliens with a woman, the church does not have a social strategy.

The church is a social strategy.

That's not just a suggestion on their part.

I know it's not for you too.

What's the danger or how can the church become unfaithful if it thinks only in terms of having a position?

Biermann: The concern is that I believe that women is Hauerwas would have and I would have, and I think there are plenty of Lutheran supporters who would agree with this as well.

The point is the church is to be following Christ.

And when we follow Christ, that becomes the definition of who we are, how we live, how we practice being church.

Our goal is to simply be Christ's followers.

When we start thinking about what is our social strategy, what is our social ethic, what things are we going to go after this week or this year, we then reduce the church to being a lobbying group, a social interest group, a special interest group trying to get the world bent to our agenda.

Whatever that agenda might be, it might be the right one, but we're still thinking too poorly of the church.

We're minimizing the church.
We're treating the church as nothing more than one more force in the world for good.
No, the church is not one more force in the world for good.
It's not one more voice at the table.
And it's not even the most important voice at the table.
The church is God's body in the world.
The church is the in-breaking of God's kingdom in this world.
The church is the embodiment of all that God is doing in the death and resurrection of Christ.
That's who we are as the church.
And when we do anything less than that, we trivialize the church and we sell her short.
And so much of Christian nationalism is trivializing the church.
It's selling her out.
It's making her into just one more militant group in the world trying to make the world better according to an agenda.
And it might even be the right agenda, but the mentality is wrong.
It's missing the point of what it actually means to be the church.
That I think is the core of what I'm trying to get at.
And Christian nationalism threatens our understanding of what it means to be church because quite frankly I don't think a lot of us in the church think enough about what it means to be church.
That's kind of the big point.

Okamoto: Yeah, good.

Jessica introduced us by saying we had taught together the core course here at Concordia Seminary, Church and World.

And the question is, in different ways, what does it mean to be the church?

And Christian nationalism poses one important reason to take up that question, but there are others.

I mean, there are larger questions about civil religion, but there's also what about the therapeutic religious outlook that's so prevalent or what Nietzsche called nihilism.

These matter too.

My point in doing this is pointing out to our listeners and agreeing completely with what you're saying about, this is really, we should ask ourselves, what does it mean to be the church?

And Christian nationalism reminds us that in some ways we aren't doing as well as we should be.

We're not paying attention like we should be.

And if we were too concerned about Christian nationalism, that would be a problem.

It's a reminder to be faithful.

It's a reminder that we can't, well, to have faith in, to have confidence in Jesus Christ as Lord, to believe that through his death and resurrection we have forgiveness, life and salvation, that we can be free to live for our neighbors.

It's not to mean we're not going to be engaged, but we're going to be engaged in these terms.

And if people don't understand, well, we'll explain it to them.

But if they don't like it, well, we'll explain it to them again and we'll just carry on.

And we shouldn't be so fearful about what other people think or about how the world is going.

Eventually, Christ will return.
Eventually, it'll be resurrection.
In the meantime, we're free for our neighbors.
Wouldn't you agree with something like that?

Biermann: Oh, man, that is so well said.

And I like especially what you said that the issue is not really Christian nationalism for or against even.

And I don't want to be coming out like, oh, you're a campaigner on a campaign against Christian nationalism.

No, that's the very problem.

And you said that so well.

It's not a matter of we have to fight to make the world better.

We have to fight to make sure we don't do that.

No, we just need to be the church.

And that's the bigger point.

You see, the bottom line of all this, and that's I guess is the thing that's so clear to me and I want to make sure it comes through clearly to everybody listening is the bottom line is not this agenda, that agenda.

The bottom line is are we functioning as Christ's church in this world?

That's it.

And anytime the church gets distracted by anything so worldly bound, we're losing track of that.

I learned a lot about this from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and in his work in Cost of Discipleship, but even more in his ethics, which he wrote while he was imprisoned for his political activity, which is so ironic because in that book, he pulls way back from any kind of political agenda.

And what he focuses on like crazy in his ethics and in all of his work is the church being the church as witness to the world.

And one of the most compelling things he says in that book is in his essay, Christ, Reality and Good, he says, the church never fights for her own space.

She fights for the salvation of the world.

And when she starts fighting for herself, she ceases at once to be the church.

That's profound.

And that's kind of what I think we're getting at here is the church being the church, which is witness to the world.

And then all the other stuff is kind of ancillary.

But as you said so well, Christ is going to return.

There's going to be a resurrection.

And in light of those realities, everything else just looks a whole lot different.

And I want to be clear on this too, because I've said other times, I'm not looking for a Christian America.

Well, do I want every American to be Christian?

Yes.

I pray for that.

I would love to see that.

I want every single person to hear about Christ, receive that gift and walk with Christ.

Be awesome.

Who wouldn't want this?

And do I want my country following and living according to God's moral standard?

Yes.

I'm not interested in plurality for pluralities or pluralism's sake.

I want us to be faithful to what God gives us to do.

That's a given.

That's what we strive for.

But see, we're doing that and we're doing those things because that's what the church does.

That's who we are as Christians, not because we have an agenda to stop this evil slide into the abyss.

It's we just want to be the church in a winsome, faithful way of what it means to be church.

Jessica: What are the dangers for the church to be involved politically in an winsome way?

Biermann: The dangers, I think, the number one danger is we end up giving a bad witness of what the church is.

And people are turned off by the church.

We all know this.

There's been all the books about how Christianity has compromised itself.

Nobody cares.

Nobody likes what we're doing.

Well, fair enough.

The church has not presented a good picture of what it means to follow Christ.

Not that that's going to have people running to join the church because we do it well.

I mean, the early church is a good example.

People still resist, but then people are also intrigued and persuaded not so much by the argument.

That's never what does it.

It's the truthfulness of look how they love each other.

And then they talk about this Christ and there's something here.

There's something that's going on here.

This is what the church should be doing.

And when we are getting caught up in an agenda of any kind, whether it's Christian nationalism or whatever kind of agenda you think the church should be adopting, we start acting not like the church and acting like something other than the church.

And then our witness is very, very poor to the world.

So that's my big concern is that the witness is compromised or blunted or lost altogether.

This is Christ's agenda.

It's his goal.

What's my job?

Be faithful where he puts me now.

And so I'd be the best father, the best neighbor, the best citizen.

Should I vote?

Absolutely.

Should I get involved in contacting legislators and stuff if I want to?

Absolutely.

But you see, that's just part of my vocation as a faithful member of Christ's kingdom here and now.

But it doesn't define me and it's not my goal.

It's not my agenda.

I'm simply trying to be faithful where I am in what God has given me to do for the sake of the witness I give to the world, for the sake of the salvation of the world.

And so this is why I want to be clear on this too.

So my concern about Christian nationalism doesn't mean that, oh, then we should just get out of politics.

No, no, no, no.

Christians should be in politics.

We should be running for school boards and for county councils.

We could even run for state and national office.

But run for who you are.

And if people elect you, wonderful.

Get involved.

We need to be involved because we're citizens.

It's part of my vocation to have to be involved to the extent that I can.

And when the world quits listening, all right, the world quits listening just like they were not listening to Christ.

I mean, how receptive was the world to Christ's message?

Did that mean he stops doing it?

Does it mean he's not being political?

No, he keeps on doing the message.

Here's Christ's reality.

Here's God's reality.

It's come to you.

Let's just deal with that.

And that's what the church does.

We bring that message to the world around us.

We do that as a church and we do it as individuals.

And that puts us in engagement and we stay engaged in the world.

We don't disengage.

And so engagement looks like go to work, do your work really well.

And engagement looks like stay involved in politics.

Know what's going on.

Talk to your neighbors about it.

Talk to them about things that matter.

Raise questions.

Vote.

That's what it looks like.

Does it look like, you know, put my Christian nationalism flag outside my house?

I don't think so necessarily.

Does it mean I stick my science is real placard in my front yard?

No, I don't think so.

But there are ways to be engaged without agenda driven things.

Okamoto: So one of the challenges though is that, or I think that a lot of political engagement is seen only in those terms.

And that doesn't mean that there aren't many things that are seen but not understood as political.

And I think we have to be careful.

We don't want to think of political engagement in the world's terms, our social terms.

That's well said.

That if we are leading faithful lives in the world, and you brought that up about like work, we will be an appropriate witness.

Biermann: Kavin Rowe, have you read his book, World Upside Down?

That's such a great book.

It really blew my mind because Kavin Rowe argues that he's doing commentary in the book of Acts.

And his point is Paul always told people, oh, we're not being political.

No, we're not here to upset Caesar.

We're not challenging Rome.

But the very message he's bringing is, you can't not do it.

And so in other words, what you do is inherently political.

This is Hauerwas' point.

What you do as a church is inherently political because how we live in the world upsets the usual power structures.

When Paul comes along and says, God's real.

Diana's not.

There goes the whole idolatry factory.

You know, to Diana, does that have political ramifications?

Huge.

Paul's like, oh no, we don't have any problem.

What are you talking about?

You can't not.

And so you see, this is the reality.

The point then is, what I'm trying to get at is, the church doesn't set out to say, we're going to go after the idols and we're going to take down Diana.

No.

They just come along and teach about Jesus.

Jesus is Lord.

People make the calculation, oh, Jesus is Lord.

So much for Diana.

And it's like, is that the church's agenda?

No.

Church's agenda is follow Christ, teach Christ.

Does that have political ramifications all over the place?

That's not the point.

The point is not to take down Ephesus and remake Ephesus to be a Christian city.

That's not the point.

The point is to preach Christ and follow Christ.

In the process, do they change the world?

Absolutely.

But that's not the agenda.

Because when you start making your witness, you have to do this.

You are actually denigrating the witness of the church.

Because now you just look like somebody who's got an ax to grind and you're trying to force something on me.

You're not proclaiming Christ.

You're proclaiming an allegiance to a particular way of life.

That's different.

And then when we start, though, trying to say, you better follow these commandments.

When you're breaking the sixth commandment, now people just hear us being petulant and puritanical and hung up on a moral code.

They don't hear anything about Jesus at all.

And then Jesus becomes for them just some kind of meanie clamping down on their life, missing the whole point.

Is God's law there?

Absolutely.

Follow it for your benefit.

But the point is that Jesus is the one who transforms everything.

And He needs to be elevated, not the agenda.

Yeah.

Okamoto: So for instance, returning prayer to our public schools.

Biermann: A great example.

Okamoto: Ten commandments in public institutions.

Manger scenes in public spaces.

Those are beside the point.

And now, I mean, you mentioned Acts.

You mentioned C. Kavin Rowe.

Luke definitely understood, though, that this was all political.

When he introduces Zechariah, it's during the days of Herod, King of Judea.

Biermann: Oh, yeah.

Okamoto: When the birth of Jesus, it's when Caesar Augustus...

Biermann: Luke as the gospel writer has a definite agenda.

Okamoto: He does.

Biermann: Oh, an agenda of proclaiming Christ in a certain way.

Okamoto: The ultimate political reality, a wonderful new kingdom, is dawning.

Biermann: Right.

Exactly right.

It is.

Jessica: But not an earthly kingdom.

Okamoto: Well, it is not earthly in the sense of it belongs to this age.

So it's not simply a new dynasty.

It's not a new form of government.

It's not like the Gettysburg Address.

It is cosmic, and it's found in a manger.

It is found on a cross.

And it comes about even now before He returns by preaching the gospel.

Biermann: That's right.

And so it's an eternal kingdom, cosmic, but it has implications right now.

Okamoto: But the implications aren't the point.

Biermann: That's right.

Okamoto: Does that make sense?

Biermann: That's right.

Okamoto: It will have implications.

It definitely will.
And Paul knew that.
But it's not.
But the implications aren't the point.
And then Christians go wrong when they think certain implications have to be our...
Or come across as our major concern.

Biermann: That's right.

Jessica: So you don't mandate the implications?

Okamoto: Probably not.

Or at least we don't want...

We may be for certain things.

No, we should be engaged in our civil politics, but we should just do our best and live with results, as opposed to becoming...

Looking like we're overly concerned with, or gonna live or die by who wins the next election, or whether this Supreme Court decision goes one way or the other.

We shouldn't be unconcerned, but we shouldn't look like this defines us.

Biermann: Right.

Okamoto: Does that make sense?

Jessica: But some people would say that that's not doing your best.

Okamoto: Well, what do you mean by...

Jessica: You said, oh, you should just do your best in your sphere.

But to some people, doing your best in their vocation is...

This has to happen.

Okamoto: This is...

No, it's not up to us whether it happens.

Biermann: That's right.

It's not up to us.

We can't make it happen.

And if it doesn't happen, we have to trust that God is still Lord, and He is still His world, even if we don't like what we're seeing going around.

But see, I think you said as well, I wanna...

It's good, I wanna emphasize this again.

Do I want to see abortion laws enacted so the lives are not lost?

Yes.

Or what are we really accomplishing when we do these things or when we get involved?

Is our involvement really accomplishing what we think it's accomplishing?

That's what's to be asked.

Okamoto: Yes, and what we're asking about is what is the overall witness?

It is a witness matter.

And this is a great way how you bring it up.

What does this communicate?

Biermann: That's right.

Okamoto: And is it going to advance?

And then even Christians themselves are going to disagree.

Biermann: And there's room for that.

Okamoto: There is.

Biermann: Yep.

There's room for what's the best way to witness the reality of Christ to the world.

We can have different ways we come down on that.

And the motivations can be the same, but the action can be very different on how that comes out.

So long as...

And I'm okay with this.

I'm not saying you have to do it my way, but I'm saying be careful of what you're aiming at.

And you should be aiming at amplifying the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ breaking into the world and that new kingdom.

That's what you're aiming at.

So there is a goal.

And the goal is faithfulness to Christ and the proclamation of His reality.

That's the goal.

And if that's what you're aiming at, we can talk about different ways of going about that witness.

And be ready to be challenged if I think your witness is compromised.

And I'll be willing to be challenged too if you think I'm not being faithful enough in my witness.

Mm-hmm.

Okamoto: I remember when we were reading The Nature of Doctrine.

Biermann: Lindbeck.

Okamoto: Lindbeck.

And you made a point about...

You coined an expression.

I still remember this.

I hope you do too.

About obedience pluralism.

Okay.

In other words, there are different ways to be faithful.

There is an overall general story, a basic story you follow, and that doctrine as grammar tells you how to do it properly.

But one can construct a sentence in different ways and still be intelligible.

And one could...

Does that make sense?

Biermann: Yes.

Okamoto: One can live out things faithfully in different ways.

Biermann: Yeah.

Okamoto: And especially matters where you have different situations or you're handling things.

I mean, it goes to matters also like worship, but especially talking about here, talking about civil politics, they have ramifications.

They're complicated.

And you may stress one thing because of your experience or you know about, and someone may stress something else.

This goes up with immigration, for instance.

The laws are so mixed up.

And it's just, it's really, it's a big mess.

Or one could speak about taxation.

Yeah.

That's another big mess.

Another big mess.

You have to be careful about being reductionistic.

Biermann: Right.

Okamoto: Although our options are often reduced to binary or something then that it's its own problem.

But then you have to realize, well, people are gonna handle it in different ways.

And let's all just try to be...

Are we actually really being faithful?

Or are we, is it for ourselves or is it out of fear?

That's when it'd be problematic.

Biermann: You brought up fear.

Fear is a really lousy motivator.

Because when we're motivated by fear, we start acting in desperation and we start turning to false solutions.

And that's, I would say that fear is the mother of idolatry in a huge way.

And that's, I think, a big problem in the church.

And that's one of my concerns with the kind of Christian nationalistic idea or the, we're gonna fight for these right things, is we're doing it because we're fearful.

We see things falling apart.

We see bad things happening.

We see bad policy being enacted and becoming the law of the land.

It scares us.

So what's the solution?

We gotta find some way to beat this.

And then fear drives us into very bad solutions.

Christians should not live in fear.

Jesus is Lord, even when the world is going down the tubes.

Jesus is still Lord of this world.

And there's nothing for us to be fearful of.

Okamoto: So Jessica, seeing in your studio, your neighbor, Dale Meyer.

Jessica: Yes, he's the office next door.

Okamoto: Yeah, has spoken about the ascendant Lord.

He's not in the green room, to use a television expression.

He's in the control room.

Jessica: He talked about that in one of the episodes of the show, Check It Out, episode number one, I believe.

Okamoto: And he says that because Christians so often live as if you're just waiting for something. No, he is the Lord.

Biermann: That's right.

Jessica: He said that if we are waiting for Jesus, because he's in the green room, then we'll fill up the space of leader with something else.

Okamoto: That's exactly what's happening.

Biermann: That's exactly what's happening.

That's what's happening with Christian nationalism.

Okamoto: That's just one example, but that's the one we're talking about.

Biermann: That's right.

But it's just one example of the many ways that we fill in the space with something besides Jesus as Lord.

Okamoto: So Jesus as Lord is your point here.

Biermann: That's right.

It's not against or modifying Christian nationalism.

It's the occasion for speaking about faithful Christian life, faithful Christian witness.

Biermann: And that means we are speaking for what is true, what is right, what is lawful according to God's revealed will.

Ten Commandments?

Absolutely.

We support all of that.

We try to help the world become more moral for the sake of the people in the world.

Absolutely engaged in all that.

But we do it not because it's our last hope, because we're afraid, because oh my goodness if we don't, who's going to do something?

No, we do it because that's what Christ has given us to do and we want to be faithful to Him while we trust him and we are confident of Him.

So we live with this joyful confidence even as we work hard because the world is not a good happy place.

We get it.

It's both things.

Jessica: I've heard Christians say that to be a Christian, to pray that God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, that we are part of establishing the kingdom now.

And that by establishing a Christian nation and mandating tablets one and two of the Ten Commandments, people will be more likely to see their sin and look for a savior.

Biermann: People will be likely to see their sin when the law is proclaimed to them.

And as the law proclaims to them well, when we just mandate more rules and make them realize they're not following those rules, I'm not convinced of that.

I think people see the law best when they feel it in their own heart and in their own consciences are pricked by the law.

And that gets delivered well when they see their lives in relationship to a life that is lived well and they realize, I'm not there.

What's with that?

And I don't think we need to have laws mandated to make that happen.

In fact, I don't think that's even relevant.

The reason I would want to change laws for the sake of the world is simply so that people don't suffer so much.

And so that's why.

It's not because this is a moral violation and my conscience is troubled.

That's not the point.

The point is people are suffering needlessly because they're not following God's law.

Reality is when you follow God's will for creation, things work better.

And so is it better for people to do things God's way?

Yes.

That's just the way it works.

Okamoto: The whole thing has to be lived out.

Biermann: Exactly.

And this is the key thing here too.

So the person who says, we should be doing this for the politics because this is what's right, why don't you focus on what you can do something about?

Your own marriage, your own family, or your neighbors if you're single, or your church community.

There you have an impact and there you can do the law of God and how you live and show people what that looks like.

And now your witness is on track.

And does that have, as we've been saying the whole time, political ramifications?

Certainly, of course.

And you're going to be involved politically to the right extent, but that's not what's driving you.

What's driving you is I need to do the vocation God has given me.

And my first one is in the relationships of child, spouse, parent, neighbor, there's where I'm going to put 98% of my focus.

That's appropriate.

Okamoto: The point is not Christian nationalism.

Biermann: It's really not.

Jessica: So what would be the danger of quietism?

I don't want to push an agenda for the sake of pushing an agenda, but maybe I would just not say anything at all.

Biermann: Quietism I think has a couple motives.

One is a fearful, I don't want to get involved, it gets scary.

Okamoto: Why don't you explain what you mean by quietism?

Biermann: By quietism I would mean the sense that somehow government, state is one area of God's concern

and there's a nice wall that divides that from the church's thing.

We have material things and we have spiritual things.

The church does spiritual things and the government does material things.

And so I don't want to have anything to do with imposing my stuff on the world because that would be pushing God where he doesn't belong.

That's kind of the quietism.

Classic example is the Third Reich coming to power and the German Christians saying, hey, he's God's duly elected person, we've got to support him.

And we all say in retrospect, that was bad.

Right.

But see quietism is when we check out and we aren't engaged.

So there needs to be the engagement.

There needs to be the investment and we can't do that.

So the fearful is the one side of quietism.

The other side of quietism is this kind of wrongly driven theology that, well, this is a wall of separation and it's the Jeffersonian American move of, well, the two of them can't overlap.

And that's just not the way it works.

That's not scriptural.

That's not Lutheran.

That's not how things should function.

There is an engagement.

We do talk with the political realm.

We do try to shape it, but we're always doing it in an ancillary, secondary way.

It can't be the driver.

That's the biggest issue.

Getting back to what the church is.

Okamoto: Yeah, let me just pick up.

See, quietism actually, I mean, it's still a form of engagement.

Biermann: It is.

We're always going to be engaged this way.

The question is how to be-

Biermann: It's like we're always witnessing.

Okamoto: We're always witnessing.

That's right.

So teaching about the two realms, for instance, is actually realistic.

It is dealing with our situation in a faithful way.

And the talk we're having about witness, we're always witnessing.

We're always engaged.

The question is how.

And to what end.

And it is as followers of Jesus Christ.

That's the ultimate one, and that has to be the consideration we think about, how well am I engaged or how am I doing?

It can't just be for the short term.

It can't just be for the now.

And then going back to what you were saying about fear.

When fear drives things, then you're just going to, you are going to do that.

That's a definite problem.

We should appreciate that.

So James Davidson Hunter, he wrote a book called Culture Wars in 1991, I think it was.

Biermann: He coined the term culture wars, basically.

Okamoto: He made it what it is for us now.

Biermann: That's right.

Okamoto: He was interviewed 30 years later about this, and he was asked what was different.

And he said that at that time, this is early 90s, late 80s, early 90s, there was still biblical hermeneutics, there was still theology.

There were theological positions.

And he talked about that because he talked about the two sides, the progressive and the orthodox in theological terms.

That's all gone away, he said.

Now it's just survival.

Biermann: Yeah.

Okamoto: And when you get that, but that's not good.

Biermann: No.

And that helps to fuel more of that fear.

And that's why we have to, I think, extra vigilant that we don't succumb to that fear.

And the church needs to be all the more careful that we aren't jumping onto the fear bandwagon and trying to fix something by chasing an idol as a solution.

And this is what ancient Israel did.
They looked to Egypt for a solution when they were afraid.
And this is what the church is doing now.
We're looking to saviors, worldly saviors, to try to fix our problem.
That's not where we should be looking.

Okamoto: No, that's well put.

Part of the message in our preaching and teaching, it should not actually be principally, don't be afraid.

It should be actually giving them something to hope for.

In other words, we should be considering how are we proclaiming Jesus Christ?

How are we presenting God?

What are we leading people to do?

We want to proclaim him and teach him in ways which will lead people to say, our Father who art in heaven.

Will lead people to readily confess, no, Jesus is Lord.

And not doing this because that's what we're supposed to do.

Biermann: Or because they're forced to.

Okamoto: Or compelled to.

No, it has to be out of faith.

Jessica: So as preachers and teachers and Christians, when we share reasons that we don't need to be afraid because of what Christ has done for us, then we are living out our role as Christians and then they will learn to not be afraid and then these other things are not so much of an issue.

Okamoto: That's the idea.

Biermann: That's the idea, yep.

Jessica: So I can be a Christian and be patriotic, but I don't have to be nationalistic.

Okamoto: Correct.

Biermann: You can be patriotic in the sense that God has given me this country, He has blessed me richly through this democratic experiment and I love that and appreciate it and that's great.

But there's a difference between the nationalism of the kind of nation first or America first. Now you're getting into the wrong direction.

Okamoto: That's good.

Jessica: Final question from each of you.

What do you want our listeners to remember, Dr. Bierman?

Biermann: Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Lord.

Don't forget that.

Okamoto: He took my answer.

Biermann: I knew it, that's why I said it.

Jessica: Alright, that's it for today.

Dr. Okamoto, thank you for being here.

Okamoto: Thank you.

Jessica: Dr. Bierman, thanks for being on the show.

Biermann: My pleasure.

Jessica: And thank you for listening.

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