

Religion of Devotion by Ben Huot

Religion of Devotion

4th Generation Religion Writings

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Introduction

The Bible Above Doctrine

Humans develop doctrines
To try to understand God
But God is a Person not an idea
And we are asked to believe not understand

It is noble to be a teacher
And to spread the Gospel
But where our opinions start
Where the reading of Scripture ends

There is no one Christian worldview
Or one correct interpretation of Scripture
We struggle to put God into words
Because His thoughts are higher than ours

It is hard enough to describe oneself
Or any other person
How much greater a task would it be
To put God into words

The only correct doctrine is the Bible itself
If we want people to not get confused
And not come up with doctrine
That reflects a poor understanding of God

We need to work on the fundamentals
The fundamentals are not doctrine but practice
Read the Bible, go to church, pray, and interact with non-
believers
Christianity is a journey with Christ for all eternity

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We need not rush through salvation
Or misrepresent the commitment necessary
To have saving faith

To work on the fundamentals of faith
We need to encourage critical thinking
We need to promote literacy

And we need to broaden our understanding
Of all of God's creation and human thought

We cannot be so afraid of evil
So as to be unwilling to meet with the unsaved
America is not lost and we need never give up

We are no better than the unbelievers
We are no less stubborn
We are no less sinful
And it is only by God's grace
That we chose to be born again

It makes no difference
Whether we have been faithful
For our whole lives
Or we are saved just before death

The disciples went to the same Heaven
As the criminals hanging next to Christ on the cross

For a movement defined by spreading the Gospel
We have to first understand the culture
In which are witnessing

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The world has been reset
Much as it was during the agricultural revolution

America and the world are longer different things
And the one thing the world shares
As a common language is technology

Most of the Christian world lives in poverty
Where we live in relative wealth
But spiritually American Christians suffer more

We need no new theology
Or new scriptures
What we need is not better translations
Or better understanding of the ancient middle east

We need better understanding of our culture
And be willing to listen to
What God wants to reveal to us personally

We need to forgive America and repent to God
For our judgment on the morality of non-believers

We need to start our work in America
As a new mission field
We need to examine what parts of this new culture
Are consistent with the Bible and what are not

We need to be open to the idea that change
Is both good, God driven, and necessary

We need to stop letting the world make us afraid

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If you think you are being persecuted today
You do not understand what persecution means

Many unbelievers also feel afraid of the future as well
As we are making earth into a literal Hell

If we want to live a life of devotion to God
We have to rethink where we get our entertainment
And who we get our advice from

We spend too much time arguing
And focus too much effort on being American
Is our identity tied in with where we are born
Or Who it is we follow?

This synchronization between America and Christianity
Is unhealthy spiritually and emotionally
America is not talked about in end time prophecy
Unless it is Mystery Babylon

We have to see with faith
And not our media
We have to start thinking critically
And learn some history

We are falling for the same lies
Over and over again
The devil loves to distract us
And we are falling for it

We are being sidetracked on spreading the Gospel
Because we want to legislate our version of the Bible

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Who are we to tell non-believers what they should do?
The law shows us our sin
But it does not save us

We need to renew our focus on Christ
And understand not judge our culture

If the point of the Church is spreading the Gospel
Let's focus on that instead of things that divide
It is hard enough to get people to believe
Let us not introduce further barriers to belief

We only need to preach and hold ourselves
To the example of Christ

In the Roman world of Christ
There were many evil things going on in the government
But the response of the Apostles were to pray for the government

The Apostle Paul used his Roman citizenship
To spread the Gospel
Not to argue about politics

God is Outside Our Box

God is not a fact. He is truth. You cannot put Him into a box and the Bible certainly doesn't either. We reduce God to our level when we use terminology designed for science. Science claims the place of God in our hearts and minds and we cannot give it a foothold in theology.

I remember the little fishes on the backs of cars maybe a decade ago. The Christian one that means Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and Savior. Then you started to see Darwin fish symbolizing evolution and atheism. Then the Jesus fish eats the Darwin fish then you see Darwin fish eating the Jesus fish. Variations continued in that manner.

We all want to have the last word in a debate, but there is nothing to debate as the existence of God is obvious. The point is there is nothing to win. We need to be real with non-believers about our struggles and not fight them. They will fight us because they know no better. But we know better and should come out in peace.

Jesus had much harder words for the Pharisees than He did for the unbelievers. Jesus dropped out of society to a large degree and unbelievers were drawn to Him. He did not fight them but spent time with them in their homes.

Christ is the Prince of Peace not the god of war. I don't see where all the anger comes from. I see wrong on both sides of the politics aisle. Neither side will admit they support any evil but this is not believable to people who do not have a political party or who don't vote.

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We need to let the politics go. The Cold War was won and we don't need to fight China in a nuclear war. Bad things happened socially and politically, in the past few decades, and there were great things that happened as well. We had many wars, made the environment much worse, and we have legalized many vice crimes. On the other hand, we have better legal support for animal rights and people with disabilities.

We built out the Internet which allowed us to reach more people with the Gospel but crime has shifted to the Internet as well. We, Americans, still are the leader by far of the entire world in every measurable category and yet young people continue to think things will get a little worse each year. We are losing jobs and homelessness is increasing although we still have a huge amount of wealth in this country.

We live in a country that essentially cannot be invaded and we are doing well after fighting major wars every decade and losing the peace in every one of them for over 50 years. We are basically indestructible by ordinary or outside measures. But our entire world system is very brittle and can go up any time. We have found that we can now fight wars electronically so no one gets hurt until they start shutting down our electrical grids.

No one is addressing the key problems because they do not anger, scare, or excite us. We are a society of entertainment and the easy road. We could agree on doing some things we all need to do like fix roads, improve Internet security, clean up trash, get homeless people jobs and housing, crack down on fraud and identity theft, and pay for the healthcare of disabled veterans.

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Christ does not advocate fascism or communism, democracy or socialism. God wants to rule us directly. We need not fight the battles of this country figuratively or literally. Atheism is not new and it is not new in America. It started centuries ago.

The Church needs so have a vision for the future that we can agree upon. The country cannot agree upon many serious issues whereas the Church cannot agree on whether to wear masks inside. I really don't care which way we go but many people do not attend church because of this and this needs to stop.

The problems can all be solved within our churches themselves. We are our own worst enemies. We sink ourselves and give up way too easily. We fight and bicker amongst ourselves.

We congratulate ourselves that we have seen the light in the same breath we say all have sinned. We say we want to save the world and yet we have largely given up on our own country. We celebrate Christ's compassion and yet we have no appreciation for what our military goes through.

We should be the counter to our culture, not a subset of it. There are people with other views that can be Christians as well. Let us see if we can expand ourselves into categories of people we are less comfortable with.

We need to re-examine whether some things are cultural or Biblical issues. Our culture is fundamentally changing worldwide due to huge technological, ecological, and economic changes and we need to bring the Gospel to this new world culture. We need to see ourselves as entering an entirely different world culture. We need to approach it like we would a new mission field of a

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world that has never seen the Gospel in their language or adapted to their culture.

We need to bring English speaking Christianity into communion with Spanish speaking churches. We need to bring in churches dominated by other racial or ethnic groups. We need to expand into the Internet world but in a peaceful and low key way.

We should never give up doctrine and we should never accept defeat in evangelism. But we still must make major changes. The virtual world is about to be united with the physical world and we need to adapt and try to get ahead of the curve. Christians need to be more involved in watching technology, social trends, and intellectual discussions but in a way that is mostly about listening rather than debating.

2 Different Stories

Silence is a beautiful thing
God speaks a lot in silence
We need to read the Bible
Sometimes for things it is silent on
Sometimes it is more important
To understand not just what it is saying
But its tone, content, and purpose

Many see the Bible as a list of rules
Some seem to make Christ out to be a drinking buddy
The Bible truly is powerful
And God so much more than that

The power of the Bible is in what it is
The Bible contains the exact thoughts of God
Not every thought and only His thoughts concerning us
Not on His level or everything about Him
But nonetheless directly from Him
Everything we truly need to know

God's word is based on promises
He makes agreements with people over time
The agreements spans hundreds or thousands of years
Over time we get a better idea of who God is
Even animals have at least one contract with God

It is ironic that as Christians
We seem to agree upon the Bible and little else
And that basically only in name
Many both Christians and not

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May wonder why some of us spend so much time
Learning about the Bible

As a new Christian one of the first things you hear
Is that Christianity is very simple
After many years you agree in principle

But those details and doctrines
Become more and more complex
In some ways we have made it too complex
In others we have only scratched the surface of Scripture

Fundamentally God starts the Bible
With something very negative we have done
We couldn't follow even one rule

God's people collectively and individually
Go through many struggles with God and each other
And keep breaking their promises with God

In the middle part God tells us what He really wants
He also promises us some truly mind blowing stuff
Much of which we can only speculate on even now
Some of it describes Christ very well

Then God enters the very world that He created
He suffers a painful death as a common criminal
After preaching merely 3 years
Then He takes God's wrath upon Himself

He defeats the devil and returns to Earth
His gives us His own very Spirit to live within us
To encourage and guide us

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We are promised Heaven if we admit it is our fault
And stop a pattern of misbehavior towards God
We will live with God for eternity in paradise
Then, after we die, as a gift of God

At this point we are waiting for God's return
When He will destroy and remake the world
And then He will govern us directly Himself

WOW!

It is interesting to note that Tolkien based
Many ideas in his fantasy world on the Bible

How very different this is than
What you hear from politicians
Politicians do not care at all about agreement
They actually thrive on conflict

They only care about the record of your vote
With your signature on it
They will continue to promise the moon
And in the end there will be no noticeable difference

In fact, by the next election
The guy with opposite ideas gets elected
The he undoes everything the previous one did

Our government is based on lies and deceit
The government doesn't trust us at all
It wants us to always be in fear
And it wants to know everything about us

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It keeps huge amounts of records
Which it guards very poorly
And are constantly being changed
Without notice

But are being enforced
As if they were cast in stone
And guaranteed by God Himself

The government uses criminals and criminal methods
To steal information from its opponents
And then loses all these records
The criminals then use it in their scams

The government locks up the wrong person
The person is then denied basic human rights
Lives for years in prison
Suffers abuse and neglect

Often then becomes homeless
Then they monitor the person again
And this person's life spirals downwards
And it all started with getting a discount on food

So Christianity sounds more positive
And more epic and interesting as well
The future definitely gets better with it

You have to agree to the source of the problems in life
As being your own deliberate fault
But it goes up from there fast

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God cares about your future
The government cares about your past
God gives you peace
The government constantly barks at you

God brings hope
The government brings fear
God wants to forgive you
The government wants you to pay

God wants your heart
And the government wants your money
Really both want everything of you

The difference is no politician
Will do anything for you as an individual
Unless it will win them the next election

God gives freely of Himself
And often gets rejection in return
People are weird

The Rock

Why is Christ so contentious?
Why would someone
Turn down His offer?

We all would
If not for a miracle
And the work of the Holy Spirit

We think we are wise
And God doesn't get it
But He does

You can keep tripping over
And running into Christ
Or you can decide to follow Him
But you cannot just ignore Him

God doesn't like arrogance
And we are full of it
All too easily
We think we don't need God

Maybe God is letting life get harder
So we can more easily admit
That we need Him

There are things that are wrong
That have not changed since the beginning of civilization
That may just be part of being a civilization
Maybe that will be a wake up call

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For us to start fresh and wait upon God

Now there is so much anger and division
It is really ironic that with all we know today
That we are not any happier
And there is no less suffering

We have been very foolish
In designing a society so brittle
That is can be destroyed by our enemies
From the comfort of their homes

Without risk
And using our tools and knowledge
We give away all our secrets
Because we cannot be bothered to put in locks

Just like the pirates, terrorists, and barbarians
They cannot be hurt
Because they possess nothing
They cannot be located
Because they constantly move
They cannot be outclassed in technology
Because we gave it all away

Ultimately you cannot win an arms race
Unless you are willing to bankrupt yourselves
You cannot own the whole world
Without a unified nation

Some things are so costly and so beyond reach
Like the moon
That even if achievable are not worth the cost

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Computers are like this
Are the savings in money
Worth the cost of losing your society?

Someone put much effort
Into bringing about the industrial and information revolutions
They were not natural or likely
And they stretched us to the very limit
In the resources and social change needed to build them
All for what?

If those in power didn't want us to have the technology
Then why did they give it to us?
If they were smart enough to create it
Couldn't they foresee the consequences?

So if this is all unlikely
Maybe it is God steering society in this direction
Maybe this is how our strength
Is shown to be weakness

A grand illustration of the foolishness of people
And a breakdown of those structures
That put a wall between God and man

What is God's plan in all of this?
This might be a bigger surprise
Than the first coming of Christ

If the devil is the father of lies
And God is the source of truth
Does it not make sense that

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Everyone will know everything about everyone
And all good and bad will come to light?

That is in the beginning of the Gospel of John
People were living in darkness
And Jesus became the light of the world

The Church can then become the beacon
Leading people out of the darkness
By being the last social group standing

When every other institution fails
We then still have the Church

Just like the dark ages in Western Europe
We now have the Church to guide us
As we enter a digital dark age

No one will forget God
Because He does not need anything from us
He will always be around
And as science and technology change constantly
He is always the same God

Attitude

Crumbly Packaging

It is good to be unique
To be different from others
But it does not make you better
And it only makes life harder

Individuality is important
Because we are all individually responsible
For all our decisions
God sees us and works with us as individuals

He suffered and defeated death as an individual Person
And applies this to all of us individually

He stands beside us as we live
Through the same sorrows and joy
He did when He lived as one of us

So individuality is important
Because God decided it is important
Freedom is equally important to God
God cares so much about our free will
That He would rather we totally reject Him
Than follow Him out of obligation

Despite what you may have experienced from
Or heard about other Christians
God is the real thing

Often Christians are criticized as being as evil as non-Christians

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First of all nowhere in the Bible does it say we are any better than non-Christians

Most of us as individual Christians don't believe so either

The parable of the prodigal son

Applies to the lives of all Christians

The difference is that we have hope

This is why we want to share it with others

God is perfect but Christians are all a work in progress

We all should be improving and much better than we currently are

But frankly Christianity tends to draw from the broken and dysfunctional people

Because Christ rejects no one

Most people think they are too good to serve God

I think it is not so much that non-Christians think Christians are full of themselves

They think God Himself is

This is an individualism and equality out of control

When even emperors and empresses knelt before God

There is no shame or weakness in it

In fact God already controls everything

We are ultimately doing His will

Whether we like it or not

As does the devil as well

People want others to suffer for bad things they do

So that they can feel better than other people

We have used scapegoats to unite people for a long time

This is because we are unwilling to use God to unite people

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Everything that united divides
And everything that divides unites
Because you have to have a reason to unite or divide
Which is for or against something

I know forgiveness as a way of dealing with evil
Is hard for non-Christians and many Christians to understand
We think what we have done
Is not as bad as what others have done

Critical thinkers might wonder why having evil thoughts
Is as bad as hurting someone directly and outwardly
Our criminal justice system makes a huge distinction between
Violent and non-violent crimes
And between monetary and physical crimes

To God there is no fundamental difference
This is because the world works spiritually primarily and
physically as a secondary process
We cannot see this directly and so must accept it with faith
Like many of us do with other things we don't fully understand
like math
Or another area we have little knowledge in

But in our lives alone can we not see the negative impact of sins
like
Gluttony, gossip, revenge, and lust
Which grow up to be much worse sins
And create suffering for all of us?

Most major world religions agree that evil start in our minds

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Most rational people would agree there is a connection between
cause and effect

What causes a person to do evil?
The person chooses to do so of course

There are obviously other factors
Just don't try to argue that in any court
As a means of avoiding any penalty

Christ understands us because He created us
And He lived as one of us
Sin has destroyed the world He created
If anyone was going to suffer for it
He would be the judge not the accused

But for whatever reason He chose to pay the penalty for it
That part is hard to understand and takes faith
But one you get to understand more about God
You will understand His decision better

Christ is not a leader who just orders others around
He dives in and does the dishes for His royal court without being
prompted
He does not look down on us at all
Even though He has every right to

He lives within Christians who stink with evil
He works directly in this world rather than living it easy in
Heaven
If Christ didn't care would he have inspired so many people to
spread His message for so many generations?

So when a Christian presents the Gospel to you

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Regardless of their intentions
Realize the gift is from God to you
It has nothing to do with the messenger

Don't reject a better future for yourself
Just because you don't like the wrapper on the package

Cleaning Our Faces

What do we struggle for
If not to please God?
What do we hope to gain
If not to get closer to Him?

When we think of purpose
We seek wisdom
When we think of meaning
We fight for the truth

Why do we see problems in the world
Before we first see corruption in our own lives?
Why do we want to save the world
When our own souls are in jeopardy?

First we need to look within
And understand who we are
Before we conquer the world
And make our mark on history

As Christians we are ambitious
And rightly so
About our primary mission
But what if we ourselves
Are also far from the Lord?

Sometimes the greatest journey
Is from our bed to our knees
From our house to our church
And from our door to our neighbors

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If there is anything holding us back?
Maybe we first need to do a self check
If we cannot reform the actions of others
Maybe we should first reform our own thoughts

In this constant assumption of sinners' guilt
And being convinced of the duplicity of the unbeliever
We need to route out any hostility to God in our own hearts
We need to conquer our own pride first

If we think we can convince others to make major changes
Should we not be prepared to change our own lives as well?
If we are going to clean house
We must remember to wash our faces first

It is easy to be convinced of someone else's sin
Sometimes we think that what others have done
Is more angering to God than what we have done
We should be brave in our swinging of the two edged sword
Just remember it cuts us as bad as it does our external enemies

With each reading of a chapter of the Bible
In the singing of each worship song
In the taking of communion or eucharist
And in each prayer we make to God

We must always consider what God has to say for us and about
us
Often our greatest obstacles are in our own heart
If we think we are strong enough to stand against the world
We better have sorted through all the issues in our minds

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We think some issues are psychological and others are spiritual
This is like saying Christ and the Holy Spirit are different beings

We are sometimes the answer to our own prayers
And the subject of prayers of others
We cannot escape the reality of sin
In our own lives and minds

If we are to bring everyone to God
We have to be more serious
About breaking down the walls
That separate us from God

Too often we see other Christians
As super apostles who never fail
We need to revise this assumption
And be more realistic about our own weaknesses

It is surprising to see the seemingly minor things that we say
Often mixed in with what we consider serious sins
When the Bible lists
Those things that hold the Church back

If we want to have genuine conversations with unbelievers
It would be refreshing to start with
Speaking more openly to God and other people
And spending less time trying to defend things foolish Christians
say and do

It is easy to find fault in the many things that irritate us
About those not yet among us
But we must realize they have an equally long list of
transgressions

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That they hold against us

It is always about what is right and true
But perception matters as well
We need to be people that make unbelievers desire to believe
Before we can bring faith to those without hope

We need to remember how hard other Christians and God
Himself were knocking on our hearts
Persistence in witnessing is only part of not giving up the faith

Why do we feel the need to condemn the actions of the unsaved
Before they are yet saved
It is one thing to hold Christians accountable
To what they say they believe
But it is counter productive to hold others to our same standards
When they don't even believe in God yet

We need to look for positive ways
To share God with unbelievers
We need to find similar interests
And a basis for starting the dialogue

But if we are so offended by what they don't believe
Or by what they do or fail to do
How to we ever get to the point
Where they are accepted as one of us?

There is no rank or seniority in Christianity
Even if we have done much for God
And resolved many of our sinful ways
We are saved by God's grace mostly
And our faith only just a little bit

God is Good - We Are Not

I know that our Creator is a loving God
And I also know there is unbelievable suffering on earth
I also know we are responsible for what we do
And we are the ones responsible for suffering in the world

As much as it might be emotionally satisfying
To use God as a scapegoat
This is neither true, right, nor factual

As much as it is hard to get at the problem
We cannot just pass on the responsibility
We need to use our creativity
To find ways to show love in this world

It is our responsibility as Christians
To be more mature and more willing
To follow God wherever He leads

In a sense being Christian puts us in a position
Where we represent God
The only God very many people will ever see
Is the poor reflection of Him in us

Sometimes the fear gets to Christians too much
We need to have more respect for God
And be more willing to follow in His leading
Than to be afraid of where this might take us

Sometimes it takes courage just to stay alive
Knowing all too well the power of evil

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But we need to know the power of God more clearly

I have recently thought of what miracle God could do
That would convince people He is real
Maybe showing how Christ lived His life
Is more effective in that it shows how He is different

We have had too many people try to impress us
Too many leaders have set themselves up to be good examples
And then proceed to be just as bad as everyone else

People are crying out for a solution
And willing to risk more than ever before for it
But so many people are discouraged
They have tried everything to fix themselves
And all has failed them

Christians then appear as they have it all together
Would someone be more transparent and upfront?
Christianity is difficult to do right
And requires the biggest commitment of all

Many want wars but few will volunteer
Many Christians want to change the world
But few are willing to commit
The same is true for non-Christians

But Christianity is different, isn't it?
We should be held to a higher standard as Christians
Because we have the truth, the Holy Spirit, and the Church itself

We need to stop trying to run things our way
We need to focus on improving who we are

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Before recruiting others
The Church in America will not grow
Until we put our entire efforts on Christ

We still want to dress up God in our flag
And expect Him to speak our language

There will be greater changes in my lifetime than my parents
And even greater changes in the next generation's lifetime
Than in my generation

When the Enlightenment took place in Europe
There were 5 major ideological revolutions
In a couple generations
That we are still suffering from

Philosophy and religion change things more than
Technology, weather, and economics combined
This is because ideology can be
The biggest motivator
You can never destroy an idea
And you cannot predict what people will decide in their hearts

This is why ideology is so important to a nation
And no ideology truly dies
We are facing the same anger we didn't resolve
In the American civil war

The same pain that started America
And we based our world empire on
Is eating us up and tearing us apart within
American exceptionalism is a lie
And many Americans are now willing to admit it

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When the rest of the world thinks one way
And you do the other
You must consider the possibility that you are wrong
We are no better than Europe, Russia, the Middle East, or China

We are not unique in anything except our geography
Our ideas are straight out of Northern Europe
We are the child of the Enlightenment

America wants to be utopia
It wants to take the place of God in the world
America wants you to love it
America wants you to embrace its ideology as a religion

The one thing America does not tolerate is disloyalty
It is a world system based on its citizens
Not knowing what happens overseas
For the system to work

We need Islamic Fundamentalism
We need whatever you call the hybrid system of China
To have the freedoms we still do in America today

For America to be Christian we would have to
Prioritize other nations and non-citizens above our own
We cannot both promote self-reliance and God reliance
We cannot both base our society on self interest
And at the same time say we sacrifice for others

You cannot be both good and powerful
The things you need to do to control the world
Will undue the greatest empire ever known

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Once Americans have the dots connected for them
Of course most the evidence is likely classified

Bad Individuals or Bad Group?

So you obey the law
Don't you
As most people do?
But did you know
That none of us
Follow God's laws?

Those who follow the laws
Then think most people are law abiding
And they basically end up persecuting others
Because they sin differently or more obviously

But the Bible refutes that assumption
At least in the eyes of God
And so also should it be in the Church

For many it is easy enough
To follow the laws of people
Because they are easier
Than many laws of God

The insights we do not have
On preventing crimes
Is that they start with thoughts
Then we talk about them
And then we act on them

You have to decide not to
Think about the evil
If you do not want to do the evil

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Many religions have figured
This part out as well

Unfortunately any government
That tries to prevent thought crimes
Would be horribly abusive
Ultimately people must choose
To do what is right
Of their own free will and initiative

This is one of the reasons
We cannot prevent crime permanently

Another problem with policing
Bad behavior is that those policing
Are also engaging in bad behavior as well

There is no guarantee that
The police will always be just or consistent
Especially when others get in power
And the issues of the time change

Christianity is different
From the justice of the world
God's justice
Is defined by His mercy
And His forgiveness

This does not mean
That it is ok to steal or kill
But it does mean there are more
Evil things people can do
Than are written in laws

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And many of the earthly laws
Are downright garbage
Which again doesn't mean
That we shouldn't follow them

Lying, cursing, slander, and false testimony
Not listening to your parents
Are all considered crimes against God as well

Romans 1 goes on to talk about
Greed, envy, deceit, malice, gossip, arrogance, boasting
Inventing ways to do evil
As all in the same category
As stealing and killing

We learn in James 4
That the conflicts amongst us comes down to
We desire what we do not have
This is because we do not ask God for it
And when we do
We do it so that we can
Just please ourselves with more possessions

Christ even says in the Gospels that
Even anger is a sin and will end in living in Hell
We are told to love God with everything we are
And love others as ourselves

The peace between God and others are linked
You cannot have peace with others
If you are not at peace with God

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Even hating God is a sin
Or even not hating the world is a sin
God does not want us lukewarm
He wants us to choose Him
Unconditionally just as He saves us unconditionally

We have to choose whether we want
To please God or please the world
As they ask opposite things of us
In many ways all religions are similar
In that they want total devotion

The difference with Christianity is
Our God is the Creator and He is good to us
Plus He puts up with our bad thoughts and behavior
The other gods or people that are worshipped
Are not anywhere near as nice as Christ

This world has elected the devil as its leader
But God is the ruler of everything
And is the only legitimate ruler of us

When we decided to stop following God
And set up governments
And other institutions to rule over us
We ended up with corruption and abuse
By our earthly leaders

We need to start following God directly
And start by reading the Bible
Or learning to read
If we have not mastered that already

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Unfortunately we cannot reduce the Bible
To pictures or video

Devotion

Silent Night

What does it mean to worship?
What does it mean to follow God?
Ten thousand knees bow to God
And 100 million ignore Him

When we think over the course of our lives
How many times do we surrender to God?
How often do our actions prove this?

The devil blasts his ideas non-stop
While our God just whispers our names
We think we can avoid service
To one leader or another

But ultimately the absence of choice is a choice
If you do not choose God
You are rejecting God

There are 2 categories in philosophy
Concerning belief and religion
Theism and Atheism
Everything else is a subset

If you do not follow God
You follow the alternative
In this case this is a bad option
In this case you are rebelling against God and not people

Being Christian mean being a rebel too
It just means that we reject someone different

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There are often direct parallels
Between our worship of God
And our worship of people

We think as Christians
That since we have never practiced another religion
That we have never served another god
But there are many more idols
Than just the gods of other religions

At least with paganism
The gods are mean and scary
This gives us hints to avoid them
Pagans are also easier to a convert historically
As knowledge of the spiritual world
Makes many things much more obvious

So if you think of holidays like Christmas
There are some clear examples of
Behavior that is godly
And behavior that is worldly

Why do you buy gifts for others?
It should be to celebrate God's gift of Himself

Or is it our of obligation?
Or that you are trying to compete?
Or you want more for yourself?

Do you parade this before others?
Do you totally reject giving gifts?
Or do you just give cash?

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It is understandable when unbelievers act this way
It is harder to understand why Christians would do this

The whole idea of Christmas as we know it today
Is a tradition that reflects
More about modern America than the Bible

The Christmas tree itself is a pagan symbol
Just like easter egg hunts
Maybe if we saw Christmas as more like Halloween
We would notice how society has co-opted Christmas

To many Christmas is a time of high stress
As many have broken or no family at all to celebrate Christmas
with
This is the biggest season for psychologists too

It is also a busy time for those who work in retail
Many businesses find the end of the year the key
To making money for the entire year

This is what Black Friday means
It is the day that business gets out of the red
And starts making money
Black is always good in accounting

Christmas has become bigger than most holidays combined
Because you buy more stuff for it
How much can they sell you for Easter or Thanksgiving?

It also has as many psychological and economic factors
As it does social or family related

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Christmas is full of many symbols and rituals
It seems many have gotten lost in those
And forgot that Christmas has a message and a reason

It is not a time to compete
Or get drunk or do drugs
It is not just a big party like New Years
It is when show our gratefulness for our Savior

Rituals are not all bad
And traditions have their place
But be careful not to fall into
The subtle trap of forgetting God

In all our hustle to make a perfect Christmas
Even done for great reasons
We have to remember the Gospel passage
About Mary and Martha

We need to focus on the worship of God
Not just doing things
Even for genuine reasons

What God wants from us
Is our attention and focus
God simple wants to spend time with us
This usually requires patience and isolation

This is easy to lose in any celebration
Think at Christmas how you can spend time with God
Singing is good but there should be silence as well

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Maybe Christians should consider the early monastics
And the prayers of the hours
Where our modern clocks come from

Islam actually got the idea of praying 5 times a day
From the early Christians
Which were mostly in the Middle East
For the first half of Christian history

In fact Iraq was the center
Of one of the biggest churches
In this time period

Remember Islam is 500 years younger than Christianity
And the Protestant Reformation was only 500 years ago

Being Christian

So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.

--Philippians 2:12-13 WEB

Christianity is a religion based on who God is. Everything is centered around God as it should be. God also does not want you to stagnate.

He wants to draw you in closer and closer. Like the military He wants to start with a commitment you cannot back out of. Just like in other relationships you cannot go backwards or get less serious about God.

Being a Christian is like being mentally ill in that you are pulled in 2 directions at the same time. The world tries to pull you towards itself and God wants you to draw close to Him. You continue to expand your mind spiritually and begin to realize how many of your choices you once took for granted are actually really important.

Being Christian means being more spiritually aware and in a constant struggle. You cannot just put your faith on hold when you find it inconvenient. God is not embarrassed by anything we do but He also doesn't want you to be embarrassed about anything about who He is.

Like in the military you are supposed to change as you get closer to God. You realize that even your minor role in the world is of

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utmost importance. We are working against the clock as we have so little time to give before we go one of 2 places.

Being Christian is that you identify with Jesus Christ and take on His values and His purpose in the world. People will likely respond to you as they did to Jesus Christ as they do not want to be reminded about their mortality.

Everything that tries to compete with Christ will ask for the same level of commitment. Drugs, sexual immorality, and money will all lead you to the same place in terms of embarrassment and suffering. The difference is that you get nothing of lasting value from any of these things.

Just like a televangelist is not the same as a local Church, money will not be there for you when you need help. You cannot buy friendships or buy off disease. The reason why we learn soon in life to be self sufficient in many ways is because we cannot depend on other people. As we get more spiritually mature we realize we cannot fully trust ourselves as well.

God is not like a person in that He has no limits on His time or place. He also genuinely cares or else He would not have created us in the first place and certainly wouldn't go to all the trouble keeping people from destroying each other. In fact God actually invested in us with His death and resurrection at eternal cost to Himself. He also left us with His Spirit, the Church, the promise of Heaven and spiritual gifts.

God is not here to judge you. We already know we are bad and suffer because of it. Faith in God brings hope and peace in your life. God wants to be there for us directly and through other people and circumstances.

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God will make you feel grief when you do immoral things. But even with this grief living with Holy Spirit is better than being without Him. God does things for a purpose and God is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

God wants us to do more than just recite a prayer one time. He wants to affect real change in our lives to bring peace with Himself and then the world. Following God is not easy and recovery from sin is not a linear thing. It is a journey and you will fail at times. But God is with you all the way.

We as Christians and the Church itself are far from perfect. We tend to be resistant to change, to conform too much to our culture, and come with baggage in terms of all kinds of bad living. But stubbornness has a flip side and that is commitment.

Most of the Church as defined by people who have committed themselves to following God daily in their lives is trying to make the world a better place. We agree on few things but we all agree that the way to fix the world is God's way.

One of the things we learn as we live as Christians is to separate our culture, our education, our experiences, our preferences and learned biases from God's ways. It is not enough to do good. It must be done God's way to be effective.

Being a Follower

I don't know much about leadership directly
As I have never really had a position of leadership
But I am an alpha male
And have great ambitions
For what I am able to do

But being a Christian
Is about being a follower
Christ is ultimately our Leader
And our primary Leader

I think one of the best analogies
Is what a young kid or animal
Thinks of their parent or person

God is our Creator
And so it is natural
To want to be like Him
To want to please Him
And to feel loyalty towards Him

He is not just our Heavenly Father
We are His creation

Being a follower today is hard
Our society encourages everyone
To do their own thing

There is a lack of community in America today
Because no one wants to follow

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Not everyone should be or wants to be a leader
There is nothing wrong with this either

No one is entirely at the top level of leadership
With no one else to answer to but God

Serving God is a privilege
Not an obligation

It is amazing how small we are
And how unimportant we are
In the grand scheme of things

But that God still cares about us as individuals
Even though we are nothing in power or intellect
Compared to Him
But this does not impede our relationship with Him at all

He only feels a separation between us
When we do evil
Because He is perfect morally

And He has made the greatest sacrifice
To bridge the gap we created

When we think of the leaders of the early Church
They were disciples
Jesus did not choose people
Based on their intellect, ability, or experience
What transformed them was the Holy Spirit

What a wonderful thing that God
Wants to dwell within us

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But to get close to God
We must commit and be disciplined about it

We can get closer to God over time
But we only have a spiritual connection
That grows over time
If we really want it

And we need to prove this
By our dedication and consistency
God doesn't want nominal Christians
He wants something better for us

We think of our plans and desires for the future
As almost sacred
But frankly God has better plans for us

If we think back to our time on earth
When we are in our second (eternal) life
We would laugh at what we consider important here

What does God really want from us?
To follow Him and learn from Him
He calls us all like He did the disciples, prophets, and patriarchs

We have to take the time and have patience
But once we really show God
Means more to us than anything else
We will make our peace with God

We seem to have a non-stop stream
Of negative thoughts about God
I think it is hurtful to God

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Because God has feelings too

It is good to start with honesty
But respect is important too

We often see the problem of suffering
Rehashed over and over again

Isn't it obvious now that most problems
That we can trace to their source
Are caused by our own bad decisions and foolishness
Or that of other people

The reason why we still struggle with such issues
Is not because we do not have a rational answer
The question isn't "Why do people suffer in general?"
But "Why do I or someone I love suffer?"
Or more specifically "When will the pain end?"

There is no answer that is emotionally satisfying
Instead of expecting God to conform to our way of thinking
Maybe we should try to understand the way God thinks

He does have the answers to everything
But we will not know everything He does
Even if we follow Christ

There are just some things that we cannot understand
Except through faith
But God obviously does care
As He has suffered greatly for us

Today we think we can explain everything

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But that is just because the things we investigate
Are either trivial or an implementation of an idea

We are unwilling to consider
Taking another approach to solving problems
Because there is so little trust left in society

It is hard to trust God
Because so many we have trusted
Have failed us publicly

We have to understand God is different
Your pastor is not in the same place as God
Neither is your church
God is good but even His people are not

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Faith Journey

Standing Prayer

Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

--Ephesians 6:13 WEB

The Encourager

When I am really tired and feel defeated, I think of the military and my choice to never give up. I have always known that God goes before me and even in my hell, at the time a gas chamber, God was with me although I certainly didn't realize it then or feel or see it.

Like the wind, sometimes God can best be seen by His effect rather than visually and over time. The famous medieval philosopher Maimonides talks about how God can be understood by us only as what He is not limited by, or by describing how He is different than us. We know God is not limited by time or place, He is without sin, and there are no limits to His power.

It is only in the life and words of Jesus Christ that we start to see God in a way we can start to describe Him in terms of qualities He has that we can relate to in some degree. Many see God in His majesty but fail to see Jesus in the boring and mundane repetition of everyday life and common experiences we all can relate with.

We are unlikely to see God visually and even the mystics preferred not to as they feared they would become proud if they received some special visions or insight into God and spiritual things. This does not mean He is not with us daily in every step we take and in every minor decision we make.

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Christianity is a religion not a philosophy and relies on faith as our primary means of understanding God not reason.

The System

We think the devil lives in hell and God in His heaven and we are alone on earth to suffer from each other without restraint. This is not true at all. Both forces and individual spirits are at work in the world constantly. In fact the spiritual world is not really a different world but a bigger one which the physical one is a small part of.

The only thing that limits God is His nature and the limits He places on Himself with regard to human choice. The most effective way to subvert God's people is to be subtle and convince people there is no spiritual world. The devil cares more about the Church and the Christian's mind than unbelievers.

Typically the most supernaturally aware societies are the most receptive to the Gospel. There is a reason why the devil does not try to physically oppose or attack Christians very often. God also gives the spiritual world a shorter leash than the physical world.

Spiritual warfare is more like a cold war in our world and has some connections to the way intelligence agencies work. The main weapon is not force but deception. Changing the mind of the opponent and having perfect insight into what he knows and thinks is often more effective and less costly than trying to occupy a foreign nation.

The US world system is very much patterned after the British one including similar ideology, but the US has found it is more

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effective to control the hearts and minds than the territory of other countries. That is why computers were developed in the first place and why our media is so powerful and so resistant to reform.

And this is why people are watched more closely by governments or now businesses than every before. To truly control us they had to let us have a little bit of their power and get us to choose to play by their rules. They watch us like an intruder they know is there because any power can be reversed and used against the aggressor. Every system is penetrable and every attack has a counter.

The devil although many times more powerful than all of us people combined will never destroy God's Church because it is based on God's power not people's. God works through people but the Church is directed by God. Just as an individual soldier realizes their frailty, they have access to greater power, in that case the power of an entire army.

Forward with God

Before we can truly embrace and work with God in an effective way we first must realize that we must never try to work alone. Life is too great for any of us to try to survive on our own, let alone temptations and the lies and deception we encounter in our daily routines that seek to undermine our connection to God. It is only when the soldiers are alone or in small groups and detached from the main army that they are weak and easily defeated.

For Jesus to be our Savior He must be our Lord as well. Furthermore, we cannot please God without faith. So we must submit ourselves to God's will daily but also stand with Him

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when we need His help. God does not abandon us when we are defeated or we cannot hold onto our faith. The simple answer is for us to choose then to believe God despite our doubts and then to ask God to increase our faith.

Life is truly a battle and this is obviously not just spiritual. We fight against disease, aging, accidents, debt, personalities, politics, greed, divisions, and the like. Life is a fight for survival even amongst animals.

We do not need to be defeated and we will not as long as God is both leading us and we are working through His power and for His purposes. We will suffer no matter who we follow but we can actually win depending on what side we choose. The next step is to make this decision very clear and continue to make it clear daily.

As a reflection of the model of salvation, faith in and of itself is a gift of God as well. God provides most of the faith necessary. The key part we need to provide is the choice to believe repeated over time. The choice to follow God is not a one time choice, but one we continually make throughout our lives. You cannot remain neutral spiritually and eventually everyone will be forced to choose one side or the other.

Self Confidence God's Way

Today within the global North, most people believe that the world can primarily understood by science. Most people in the global South believe that the world operates mostly spiritually.

The same was true of of Europe as it is now in the global South up through the fist half of the premodern period just about the time of the Crusades in the Middle East. Aristotle's ideas were considered heresy throughout the first half of the European Middle Ages because God was to be understood primarily by faith not reason.

Some Christians today in America and Europe are finally challenging the idea that the spiritual and physical worlds operate separably. Christians are finally seeing that the mind is where the real spiritual battle takes place not the Middle East or the public educational system. There is now thinking within Christian circles that America is actually becoming more spiritual, just not always in a good way.

Interactions with the spiritual world occur in our minds and then cascade down into our decision making process and then through our physical actions so that sin goes from inception to action and ultimately death. To break the chain of causality to do evil we have to have a degree of self confidence and responsibility. This confidence comes deeply rooted in who we are spiritually by God's free gift to us that cost Him everything, when we are once saved.

As the spiritual battles are subtle and deceptive our biggest weapon is the truths God has revealed to us in the Bible. What

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Christ has done for us and who we are because of what He did is what enables us to be grown up and mature Christians. While we are to grow up and take responsibility and use the tools God gives us with confidence, we are to root everything in Christ. Spiritually we are weak without Christ but unbeatable as long as we submit ourselves to Christ and His will.

One of the most important things to do to win spiritually is to pray first. Everything is affected by the spiritual world and this is in fact the bigger world that the physical is only one small part of. That means that although we clearly must take care of things in this world that we physically live in, there is a more significant struggle at work.

Christianity is a process and struggle throughout your entire life before death. The only safety we have in the world is Christ alone. Not even the Church offers any true safety. God determines what happens in every reality and has thoroughly and completely destroyed the devil's power over us and the penalty for sin on the cross when He died for our sins.

But to apply this victory to our lives and resist the temptations of the evil one we need to use the tools God gave us. These tools include believing the things God promised us, following the commands He gave us, and accepting the truths He has revealed to us concerning us, Himself, and our relationship. They require us to act on who God says we are, submitting ourselves to Christ's authority, repenting of any and all sin, and committing ourselves to truth in every form.

Simply put, we are not going to stop a lifestyle of sin because we pray for it. We must get up, get out, and do the work. We must

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make clear and audible declarations of whose side we are on and start speaking with authority in Christ's name.

Christians don't need to be afraid of the devil. We struggle mostly against our own sin nature. He makes things worse and amplifies our rebellion against God.

The focus should always be on our Lord and Savior Christ. We must accept that we sin because we choose to. We must then choose not to when we are tempted by challenging each and every thought as it comes into our heads.

But although we have the greatest safety in Christ we must take a clear side and choose to fight. We cannot remain neutral in this world. But we also need to not base this self confidence on our own abilities or try to work independently of Christ.

We are children of God full stop. This happens immediately after we genuinely turn our life over to Christ. God has given us victory but we must first stand up to the devil. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

We will be attacked no matter who we are or what we do. This should show us that even the devil thinks we are of significance. We should then call upon the name of the Lord our God and He will save us.

We have complete freedom in Christ as He never forces us to do anything against our will. This means we must stand up and resist as God will not make our choices for us.

Be very careful and specific about what you say when confronted with a spiritual battle. Always speak in the name of Christ. Do

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not get into a contest of wills or delude yourself into thinking the power comes from you.

This is serious business and you are an authority figure whether you want to be or not. The most important proactive things you can do are make it clear whose side you are on and own up to your sins immediately.

Do not try to deceive anyone or have anything to hide. God already know and likely so does the devil. You also need to say things out loud as the devil cannot hear your thoughts. Only God can.

You cannot choose God plus some other combination of beliefs. You believe in God period. If you try to hold onto anything else you will suffer for it and ultimately your suffering will have no meaning.

We need to make sure we continue to submit our mind, body, and soul to God daily. We are in a world where we are forced into 2 camps more and more. The answer isn't I prefer Christ or I prefer being self-sufficient. The answer is I am all in for Christ or I am not at all.

You will not lose your place in heaven because of your sins. But you will suffer greatly for it until you admit what you did and choose out loud and follow through with your commitment by your future actions.

You can live in victory. Just make sure you are in God's will. Do not take on anything in life alone. This is even more true with spiritual things.

Thinking Forward

I no longer need elaborate rituals
To pay for the times I have chosen to disobey
I do not need social pressure to be disciplined
I no longer need to conform to the expectations of others

I no longer need to worry about what punishment awaits
I no longer need to seek the comfort of material things
I only now hunger for learning more about God

I yearn for God to condition my mind to understand His words
To submit to God's will and not my own or others
God is now the center of my life and reality
And my one purpose is to please Him

I need no one else to teach me how to live
I present offerings to God of my body, mind, and soul
I commit to seeking pleasure in doing the will of God

I agree with God's covenant
And to the conditions He makes
For entrance into His Heaven
I now focus solely on
His expectations, promises, and teachings

I am devoted to finding ways to delight in His presence
I accept His gifts with exaltation and praise
My body, mind, and soul are no longer my own
But bought at the highest price

There is nothing for me in this world

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There is no other name I call on when I need help

I identify with Christ
And try to recognize His voice
As it is the only one I need to
Pay close attention to

I can relax in the confidence
That I am being watched and loved by God
Not for my obedience but for who I am
Therefore I strive to follow His commandments

I have emotionally accepted my place
In the Kingdom of God on earth and in Heaven
And my greatest wish is that I may be more like Him
My ultimate loyalty is now to Him alone

I need no other source of self worth
I will survive and carry on
Because I know that in Him alone is my peace

There have been times when I have been afraid
To follow God in all His ways
As I feared what He might call me to do

But I now know that anyone I follow
Will demand similar things of me
But without concern for my welfare
Or any promise of building my confidence in return

The things that make the Christian God different
Fundamentally from all other leaders
Is that He is a servant too

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He longs only to do the will of God the Father

He does not claim anything that is not true
And He always follows through with His promises

He has the legitimate authority to do
Whatever He wants with His creation
And yet He gives us both complete freedom in Christ
But even with the option of declining this generous offer

His morality is beyond challenge
And His sacrifice is both so significant and grand
That He chooses to suffer alongside us

I do not want to run from God
In any aspect of my life
I want to embrace His plan for me
As He embraces me as I am

Why would I want to pursue my own agenda
When His is so much better?

We are often told to forgo the perfect for the good
But what if it were the opposite
We could have a perfect Leader
If only we would renounce our limited vision

There is but one way for us to be happy
And it entails being at war with the world
Christ is the Prince of Peace
But His is at war with the god of this world

His mission is to undue the work of the evil one

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And to save us from our spiritual death
And separation from God

We can live in victory and so also in peace
With everyone we see and all who surround us
Because Christ has created a way

There is no need to find God
As He stands right before us
There is no need to travel the world
As God is everywhere that exists or we imagine

There is no need to suffer alone
As Christ and God's Holy Spirit
Stand beside us and encourage us
There is no need to feel lonely
Because Christ has provided His Church

When we think of utopia
Why don't we think of God's Heaven?

When we seek justice
Why do we not wait upon the Lord?
When we are afraid
Why do we not call on the name of the Lord?

When we cannot walk further in faith
Why don't we let Him believe for us
He is always watching our backs
Despite knowing all that is in our hearts

In the world there is little safety
But we can suffer the least

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If we follow the will of God

We can be happiest
If we seek God with all our hearts

Stepping Forward in Faith

I do commit to follow God's will
At all costs
But I do not know if my heart is in it

I know from experience
It is much easier to commit than to follow through

I also have experienced situations
Where you are pulled through
Without your consent

And there are no limits to your pain
Time wise or intensity wise

I try not to commit to things
That I do not know I can carry through with

I am very hesitant to do something
For whatever good reasons
That puts me in a painful situation
Like being in the military

I am trying to learn from my mistakes
And avoid repeating painful experiences

I must say before I consider
Following through with a possibly similar situation
Than being in the military
I need a real obvious sign only God could give

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And I truly have no idea what that would be
To convince me it was really from God

This is the question that comes up
When you make any commitment
Especially when it concerns God

It is better to be honest than devout
Because it does not feel good to let God down

It also makes me think of
How Christians says you only need
5 minutes to save someone from hell

Maybe to say the prayer
But most people cannot change their life's purpose
In mere minutes

Following God will be costly
As will not following Him

When we take on the commitment
To make God the Lord of our lives
It is a long process that make it possible
To overcome our selfishness and sometimes fear
That we need to honestly accept God's gift of freedom

Christ describes us as having so much trouble
Admitting we need God in our lives
That it is actually impossible physically, emotionally, and
spiritually
And it only happens as a miracle from God

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God has to supernaturally intervene
To allow us to conquer our pride
This is true of all people
This is why there is no rank or seniority amongst Christians

Many people today are unwilling to commit to anything
They also see no problem in not following through
I feel differently because I have had different experiences
Maybe also because I am extremely stubborn

I think this was one of the reasons
I was so poorly suited to the military
I am too self reflective in many ways
And see too much of the potential for suffering

Much of this is from the direct experience
Of not doing enough of this
Before I made the commitment

To say I take God very seriously is an understatement

But my fear is great
And I do not know how far I can go
If it gets too hard to continue

I know my only chance of safety is in God
And I know that I could easily lead myself
Into an equally bad or worse situation
By my own poor choices

I remember in the confidence course in basic training
I tried but couldn't make myself
Repel down a wooden wall face first

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Sometimes I wonder why God places no limits
On fear or suffering
Sometimes I wonder what is harder for me
Pain or fear
I do know fear makes pain more intense

I don't like anything intense anymore
I sometimes find eating something too rich and sweet painful
I no longer desire to take any risks

It is ironic that although I as an American
Live in so much comfort
I still see so many painful possibilities
Completely or partially out of my control

I struggle just to take care of myself
I have stuffed toys because I cannot take care of pets

I have identified best with Lazarus from the Gospels
Who was dead when Jesus arrived
But Jesus did then raise him from the dead

I get peace now from reading the Bible
But it also brings fear as well

I am comforted by what God says
But He often talks of suffering like Christ
And considering the grotesque ends
Of His closest followers

I do not consider myself anywhere in the ballpark of them
In any way save some of their failings

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This is why I say my heart is not fully resolved

But I take the step forward and commit with faith
That God will do the impossible
And I will be able to follow through
With what He asks of me

The World

Enduring Lessons

Many people often wonder why would someone spend so much time studying philosophy and religion. What is the practical benefit of it? These things help you become wiser and avoid pain.

I do not pretend to be wise. On the contrary I have made many stupid mistakes and continue to do so. But I like to avoid pain where possible and so like to read about the failures of others so that I can avoid the consequences.

Why does God tell us not to sin? Because it hurts us by making it harder to find peace with God and the world. Sin sounds fun at first but later on it hurts us and others. Sin is the source of suffering in this world. There was no suffering before sin.

Most major religions have as many or more rules than the Bible. They are also very similar. The same hold true for government laws. They are necessary for people to get along and have a society that is stable and functioning.

One of the many problems we have today is that we are making things legal that should remain illegal. I know the reasoning is that no one follows the laws anyway or that they do not hurt other people. But all addictions hurt other people.

These laws fall into a category called decency or vice laws that have been illegal until recently in our country. Issues involved include sexual immorality, gambling, and drugs. Lying is probably the worst for destabilizing society but, though not directly illegal, there are serious legal penalties for it in certain

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cases. Stealing is being enforced less also, especially involving anything digital.

Many of these on the surface seem like things that the government should not legislate and they should be left to people's conscience. The problem becomes that once you allow a little of sin in your life, it escalates until you end up serving the sin. You then lose your freedom and joy in life.

As Christians we have a very different idea about freedom than America does. Christians do not believe that we have rights just by being people. They believe they have been given freedom by the price of the suffering of Christ on Earth.

Christ had to be totally rejected by His Father and go down into hell after having a shameful death as a criminal. So Christians believe we are all guilty of sin and deserve to suffer eternally in hell. Christ paid that price instead.

Many think this too severe a punishment but we do not understand how painful sin can be. Wise people figured this out over the millennia of human existence. What seems fun at first can have really bad consequences that are not usually apparent at the time.

So why should the government be brought into this religious issue? It comes down to things affecting other people. When someone does drugs and then drives it hurts other people. When they steal online media and software it drives media companies to make everything we buy temporary like streaming or software restrictions.

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Our country needs to find a way to agree on basic things and find some sort of philosophy to base the country on. The constitution is not enough. There have to be cultural ways of understanding how to interpret it. Separated from its context the constitution is unclear.

Furthermore this constitution was written for an early industrial revolution era not an information revolution era. The main problem at the time was the power of government not the power of hackers. Our world is now global as well as much as we do not like it nothing has been produced anywhere near the scale we do today without China as it is governed today.

We can thank Saudi Arabia and China for their governments and their cultures, for our freedoms today. Without them we would not have the internet today which is now the basis for a stable and functional society as much as oil or food. The US is not self sufficient and could not be in the way the US decided to design the world.

Unfortunately we can not just travel in time to fix the problem and if we did we would open a worse situation than we have now with the Internet. There is a direct tie between how easy it is to do something and what society ends up doing on a large scale. We have made crime too easy and that is why we have so much crime today. Most crime is done online today as everything else is as well.

The human mind is the source of bad things. Our enemy is really ourselves. No one makes us do bad things usually. We can be compromised but that usually involves us previously doing something bad which gives the criminal leverage.

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The more we link the human mind directly to actions as we do with current technology like doing good or bad with a button, the more we bypass our brains so that we move from what we feel to what we do. When we do not think critically about how we feel and use our mind to suppress antisocial and evil tendencies we end up doing bad things.

So the combination of both making sin legal and easy to do increase the sin in the world. When you remove more and more absolutes other basic concepts in civilization are challenged as well. It may not be more laws but it could be the way we educate or don't like in not teaching how to multiply without computers, art or trades in school, or how to write in cursive or how to tell time by old clocks.

We have made great strides in society when it comes to things like toleration for differences and lack of tolerance for violence and we need to push this even farther. At the same time we need to double down on getting vice crimes under control. But to do so we need to reverse much of our thinking about these "minor" crimes.

Sin hurts us and others whether you are a Christian or not. That is why we must make it harder to sin. When we were a rural based farming society you had to go to the city and go out of your way to get involved in sin and crime. Now everything comes into your bedroom and, if you hit the wrong button or have poor security, you can do bad things.

I think the way to deal with this for individuals is by studying about ethics, changing the way we think, and being more careful in how we act. What the rest of society does is out of our control. But going down the road of sin leads to more suffering. Avoid

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even things only loosely related to anything you would not be comfortable with telling your mom.

American World of Faith

We live in a world of faith. We just don't call it that. We rely on countless technologies to work together seamlessly for life to work. Few have any idea of how they work, but we do know we are completely dependent on them because when they go down, we get little done.

We expect experts to run our society. We couldn't rebuild almost any part of our society even with 95% of the population if we had no experts. We trust experts on many subjects including our health, in our jobs, and in our future. Most people do have great faith. It is just that their faith is in science and not God.

It is ironic that so many people outright reject the concept of God without question and are so critical of religion in general but even Christians accept science with blind faith and a lack of critical thought. The reason why is obvious - our society is based on science and atheism. It would be like arguing living without food or water.

Science is designed to work so that people are critical of scientists. The problem is you have no control over where others take your ideas and what parts they accept and reject. Christianity is based on sacrifice and yet much of the vocal church in America is very rich. Christ was a mystic and yet many in the Church still use His ideas to try to win empires.

Medieval Europe was created by the merging together of the German and Roman cultures but many might think they embraced the most violent parts of both cultures. In America our culture is being heavily influenced by Mexican culture, but we

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have no idea exactly what parts of American and what parts of Mexican culture will be chosen in mass.

So we do understand faith and so that is not the obstacle to spreading the Gospel in America. I think the biggest obstacle to faith is that life is too easy and people are too busy to prioritize God. It is just too easy to ignore God as the world shouts and God whispers. There are emerging obstacles as well as emerging opportunities in America today.

Feminism has become mainstream but so has science fiction. Feminism has historically been very anti-Christian probably because the Christian God is male. Science fiction deals primarily with what Christians would call the supernatural. Pagan or animistic cultures have been some of the most receptive to the Gospel.

One of the biggest problems in America is Hollywood. The way Hollywood portrays the life of Americans causes much suffering in the world. This is both because of how the world sees Americans as morally corrupt but also because it is aggressively marketed / propagandized throughout the entire world.

Our culture is now almost entirely based on entertainment and gathering information on individual people. There are still other things sold but they do not make as much money or employ as many people. Much of the world will never be a part of it because computers can only be made so cheap and advertisers / businesses have little interest in those users who can barely afford a phone.

So the logical step would be to form some sort of entertainment with Christian morality but that likely has us falling into the trap

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of just making a Christian version of something inherently pagan. The other angle is to try to get people to work harder and then really take a rest.

Christians should play to their historic strength - community. Christianity is one of the few institutions that will likely survive the information revolution (as a social thing, as religion existed long before the agricultural revolution). Christians need to return to education and critical thinking even as the world exits this area. It must be kept alive and it makes sense to get ahead of the game and be there when things go sideways.

But the best way to do this is not to try to do anything on a large scale or make any plans for it at an institutional level. If this is God's will it will happen. We should work hard to make it happen as individuals but it will be better for us to let God lead. If we learn nothing else from our situation the world is in is that God needs to be our direct and primary leader.

Look at how Jesus or Paul ran their ministries. They didn't get out a map and learn about the best strategies for spreading the Gospel. They just took advantage of opportunities that God opened up for them. No one would have thought of those particular areas would be effective areas to build the Church from.

Africa has been a very successful field for the Gospel although it started there as well in Egypt and Ethiopia, but they were boxed in by Islam to a large degree. The interesting thing about how the Gospel was brought to the rest of Africa was at both the same time as it was leaving Europe and America and it was spread by Africans to other Africans. The American and European missionaries converted very few people directly but a few

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converts who were former slaves ended up evangelizing millions of people a piece in Africa during the last hundred years or so.

Now Africa is at the center of world Christianity and future prophecy and no longer needs missionaries from America to be self sustaining. This is more recently been the case with American and European denominations as African Indigenous Churches have never had trouble spreading the Gospel. Ironically the bigger thing holding back Christianity throughout most of the world is its association with rich Americans with aggressive international political ideas.

Christianity in America suffers from the common problem that cultures where the Gospel has spread tend to associate Christianity with a certain part of their culture, tribe, or social group. In America, there is a strong connection between English speaking conservatives and Evangelical Christianity, which has been the most aggressive Christian group in American politics. One of the challenges to Christianity in America is to bring English and Spanish speaking churches together and bring Christianity to those with liberal political views.

In order to meet these challenges, we need to keep to our traditional theological roots and focus on the fundamentals. We can no longer afford to let politics, languages, or social norms hold us back. Whichever side you are on, the political landscape changes every few years so that whatever is decided on politically will switch back as fast and as hard as it went in to begin with. The future may be an apocalypse but Christianity will be strong.

Shadow of the Mountain

A great mountain has risen overnight
And we now live in its shadow
Some battles are only won through attrition
Some fights end with only one standing

Sometimes the gear becomes so heavy
And the time goes by so slowly
You start to re-evaluate the necessity of the journey

Why does everyone hate God today?
Do people realize that God is not the same as His followers?
Do they not realize that they have just as much shame?
Or that life is just as hard for Christians?

They have just chosen not to believe
Because they feel they are too good for God
Or that they have no need for Him

They cannot accept that He has different moral standards
We will never be equal to God
We will never be able to solve our problems without Him

It is not weakness to trust God
Not that we are strong enough to begin with

Are we now at a point where only one group will survive?
Will one cultural side of America exterminate the other?
When 2 groups cannot co-exist
When they cannot even agree on what words to describe themselves

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When they can only agree there is no compromise possible

For a nation without the stamina for prolonged conflicts
How does this get resolved?
Should we just break into 2 regions?
How has that ever worked before?

It is not like everyone from one culture lives in the same place
I for one cannot identify with either group
I can appreciate some aspects of both cultures
But I am not comfortable within either

I am still waiting for my second wind
I am waiting for the wisdom to navigate this brave new world
The pit of despair and immovable obstacles combine
To make forward travel unthinkable

Maybe it is only possible to hold our ground
Most religions agree this is the most evil time in history
The fights today are beyond ridiculous

Some are so afraid to die they cannot leave their homes
While others are unwilling to get a shot
These are not people with emotional problems or small
percentage of the population
We realize these are just metaphors for deeper divisions in society
And some of us are just caught in the middle

Diseases aside little makes sense anymore
I could take or leave most of the legislation both sides advocate
Or at least the thought behind it
But can't we agree to at least be kind to one another regardless?

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It seems that many on both sides
Just sit and stew all day long
They are trying to pick a fight
For over a decade it has just gotten worse

All of us suffer and all of us are in the same boat
We have done some very bad things in the past
And we continue to do so
So many people have been hurt
But the solutions proposed just hurt others

Christianity offers another solution
This is to forgive and forget
Both parties feel wronged
Both believe the others demands are unreasonable

At this point we can't even get reliable information
This much we can agree on
We need fact checkers and use terms like censorship
Could it be that all of us are wrong?

Could what we are arguing about be the least important thing?
Maybe the debate over the forum is a side issue
Maybe we need to just agree to disagree
And that some justice may be unachievable

We may need to accept that the only solution will be rolled out by
our Creator
There is a lot of bad in the world now and will be until He returns
But this kind of stubborn anger
Is going to cause us a lot of health problems
And the criminals are all cleaning up
They are the only ones doing well

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And those who hate us all equally
Like certain hostile countries
That we empowered and rely upon
For the basic functioning of our society

That we both agreed upon
And our only choice
Will be to give up modern technology
Or descend into chaos

And at the end the idea of America
And computers and the Internet
Will sound like a fairy tale

Both sides think they have an easy solution
But neither are based in reality or on facts
Ironically mine is plausible
Even though I admit my ideas
Are conspiracy theories

Peace and Technology

When we think of ancient peoples
Many think of fantastical adventures
But what made them so much more moral?
They were simply bombarded with less temptation

How does a Christian fight against this?
Create and release as much content as possible
We can saturate the world in our own beliefs

Being both careful and subtle in how we do it
With our own personal stories of struggle
And in love and humility we can strike back

Spiritual warfare is about lies and deception
What a better way to counter evil in our hearts
Than with a barrage of good and lovely thoughts
We can do this just as individuals
But we need to drop the politics to give it reach

What the world has been lost in for the last 80 years is fear
War after war in the world and crisis after crisis
Continual social revolution in our own country
We look on the past as safe and have nostalgia
Because we see that as something we won

But that series of decisions led us
To what we deal with now
The technology and worldview we adopted
To win the Cold War with the Soviet Union
Actually contributed to our losses in the war on terror

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And has now divided us within the COVID era

We need to stop ending wars
In a way that sets up the next war

The major powers in Europe at the peace conference
After Napoleon was defeated
Decided to stop fighting each other
The peace lasted for about a century
And allowed Europe to dominate the world

The peace broke as World War I started
This set up the modern world in many ways
It set up cultural connections
And gave birth to modern combat techniques

It pushed modern medicine into existence
It set up the political and ideological boundaries
It stopped the liberal age of Islam
And started the US domination of world government

It set up the situation that started World War 2
But most of the things it started
Turned into what we struggle with today

It is not the ascendancy or descent of Europe from world status
That I see as the problem
When the world was politically dominated by Islam
There was more morality in the world

But the idea of holding back the biggest armies and navies
Is something we should continue to strive for

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The last 8 decades we fought basically 8 major land wars
On the other side of the world
And the situation was worse for all sides afterwards
In most of them

When it comes down to you having to
Destroy your regional allies
In order to destroy the enemy
What is the point?

The toll of these wars goes well beyond just the immediate effects
Not just what happens overseas or within militaries
It is also what makes us into bad people

Technology is often driven by war
But it is often violent in nature
It is a big part of why we are so violent
Even against our own people

Some people see the police as the problem
Some people see it as the media
I see it as both

And the increased power over us
That these and other groups now have
Is that they have mastered the technology
Which was thought to liberate us

This happens again and again
Because we try human solutions
There is no way to get peace by ourselves

Because all technologies have good and bad sides

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All methods of defense have an effective counter
Whatever unites also divides

The only way to get beyond violence
Is to make the Prince of Peace
Lord in our own lives
And convince others to do the same

In order to accomplish this
We need to first improve our morality
And our connection with God
Then others will flock to Christ

Our world is pagan because our focus
Is not on God alone
Within the Church itself
Our loyalties are divided
As a mirror of our society

We try to do everything
We do not prioritize
Many do not follow God
Because they do not believe they have time to

We need to make time for God
To be in silence and alone before our Creator

Until we start to put boundaries on
Our commitments and our technologies
Our hearts will be far from God

Sometimes it helps to start
By making our physical surroundings less cluttered

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Once we have cleared an entry point
Or beachhead in military terms
In our self improvement process
It starts to become believable to us
That we can truly change

Try starting by cleaning your house
And going through things you don't need

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Values, Politics, and Technology

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Values

Many people see Christianity as being about fear. I think non believers might come to this conclusion because Christians are quick to point out that God is not just about love but about justice as well. Fear is the opposite of what God is about because He wants to form a close connection with all His creation. This is especially true with us because we are made similar to Him in some ways.

God wants to motivate us out of love and He forgives us unconditionally but then He wants us to do good plus forgive others unconditionally as well. Having both love and justice be compatible is hard for us to understand in our society. Reconciling these two values only really works when you add mercy and forgiveness as an alternative to justice enforced by punishment.

Much of our society does not like the concept of enforcing justice at all and some like it too much. Mostly we like to pick on the individual who breaks laws that we seldom break. This way we can be for justice but not worry about being the object of the law's wrath.

Christianity brings in radical equality in that all evil and all violation of law including our evil thoughts are considered bad enough to bring the greatest punishment. The flip side is that it is very easy to get out of if you can conquer your pride and accept God's point of view on this. Ultimately God can be both merciful and enforce justice because He has taken the penalty for our evil on Himself.

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Many are used to treating God like they would someone in a business exchange where you do some thing for God and then He does a favor for you. This is the pagan or pre-Christian model for dealing with the spiritual world. It is the same way politics and many people's relationships work. It is a big part of Confucianism.

God doesn't want to have this kind of interaction with us. He wants to be part of our family where we can be called children of God and Christ even says we are His friends because we are in on what His plan is for us. He is in a leadership position over us but it is not the typical one where it can become a power struggle or even abusive.

We know we do bad things and God knows even better on all the details, reasons, and results. God does not hate us for this but while God is merciful He is also perfectly good to the point that He cannot associate with any evil or person who sins. God made a bridge of Himself and suffered the curse of sin on His Son. Christ went to Hell Himself so that we wouldn't have to go to the underworld or Hell after we die.

So the Christian solution to suffering is God using His Son's death and resurrection, His Church, His Spirit living in Christians, and history itself to ease our sufferings. After we die we need not suffer anymore at all. The only thing stopping God from doing anything is His determination to only save people who want to be part of His plan.

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Politics

This is why it is futile to have a nation that is governed by people to think it can successfully fool people into believing it is of the Christian God. The Christian system only works where Christians are all volunteers. God gives His forgiveness freely, because He has chosen to, and has already paid the price.

Trying to combine America together with Christianity is a hard combination to join together. The Church and Christ offer everything free and capitalism is based on the idea that nothing is free. Furthermore capitalism promotes the idea that we are never satisfied with what we have while Christianity is based on the idea that the only thing you need is God. America promotes the idea that Americans are more important than other people in the world whereas Christianity is for all regardless of birth, politics, geography, or even criminal status.

This twin ideology was useful to get the support of many conservative Americans. These citizens would provide the backbone of the Army, Intelligence, and opinion leaders in America during the Cold War. This was because they needed people with education and discipline which were areas the Church was historically a leader in. Also most our Cold War allies of any economic, military, or political value at the time were also predominantly the same culturally.

The Church was a natural opponent of Russia because the Church was persecuted in a more obvious way there at that time. Although the Church was strong both before and after the Soviet Union in Russia. And both those times had nothing to do with America or any of its ideology.

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Over the years, the Church and academia have parted ways and so has the government felt less and less need to force the idea of America and Christianity together. But the idea that America thinks it is better than the rest of the world remains. This is because America has never been different fundamentally in its thinking than it is now.

America shows it continues to think it is better than the rest of the world. America continues to attack computer infrastructure around the world and on its own citizens and allies. The US continues military operations around the world when there is no war declared and it monitors of its own citizens when no warrants have been issued. We continue to use what we now call soft power to get the US what it wants that are difficult to document without access to classified information.

The US continues to favor legal immigration to the United States that is not fully based on legal record, persecution, or relative world population levels. The US continues to support many nations that support terrorism, torture, and war crimes when it denounces non allies for the same behavior. We still control all the world's sea lanes by armed force. Furthermore, the US is still trying to start another cold war or world war with China.

America has always been a country that chose economics over all else and believed that it was better than those who had the land or resources they wanted. This pride in America is why so many other countries hate us. If you claim to be different than the rest of the world and are not, people are going to bring that up over and over again.

Invariably some of the most evil and destructive forces in the world have been put at the center of our empire on purpose over

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the last hundred years or so. We are the product of the European Enlightenment which was the big force that drove most the major European attempts at utopia. They were all based on human solutions all of which resulted in various kinds of totalitarianism and greater suffering.

To argue that American liberals and conservatives are working for different aims or using different methods are just talking point used to divide American citizens. You cannot be better than the other powers and still be the dominant power. Power and morality are not compatible. Other powerful people want what you control and the one that wins is the one that is willing to do evil in order to do good. This is why politics itself is often incompatible with Christianity.

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Technology

Today information of common ordinary people is now worth more than oil. America and the rest of its Empire and its businesses want people to be as careless, lazy, and uneducated as possible. This contributes to them not critically thinking about what they are doing or what the country is doing.

America's world cares less and less if you love it because it knows you live in fear of nuclear annihilation, terrorism, or disease. Christianity is more of an obstacle today because it makes people less afraid of death and adds a competing loyalty for its citizens. Christians are starting to realize America is not predominantly Christian anymore and wasn't most of its history either.

Instead of having to fight wars to divide people now it can do so by hacking businesses and infrastructure and manipulating media coverage and opinion leaders. You don't actually have to fight real wars anymore because you can cause as much suffering and destruction with computers. If you control others minds you often control their souls as well.

The reality of the Internet has changed things so much that the appearance is as important as reality. This may change so that appearance is the same as reality in the near future. Those who realize what it going on are starting to live like cloak and dagger spies did 20 years ago.

There will be nothing hidden soon unless you have enough money to pay the blackmail and are vigilant enough to avoid all scams. The current value of information relative to the difficulty in acquiring it means that we are all of sufficient importance to be at risk. The information age has not just made information a

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commodity but the ability to automate hacking has made it realistic to hack everyone at once. This means that it is also profitable to go after everyone and everything in a meaningful way.

So in our desire to fight off totalitarianism we have in effect not only grown up the same capabilities and institutions to carry this out in America with the precision and effectiveness of the NAZIs, we have also exported these same technologies and business / government hybrids globally and locally. We have created a future that values information so much that we no longer value spiritual things.

Spiritual things are in direct conflict with a certain level of technology because too much available information leads to more sin as it fuels addictive behaviors. It gives the common person too much power and temptation. It also allows some people who understand how to use information against people almost unlimited power. Organized crime thrives because basically you are expanding their market into everyones living room. It also starves people of time and social skills so that people have less time for God or other people.

What makes things easier for government, businesses, and schools also makes things easier for hostile governments, criminals, and bored teenagers to cause problems for everyone. We have been democratizing the technologies and skills that typically were used by spies for the general public and we wonder why it is destabilizing.

The government, media, and educational institutions keep evangelizing these tools and how much we as a society need to master them. At the same time these same groups have failed to

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master them and society mastering them creates more problems for them and everyone else.