

*The Rise and Fall of the American Christian Empire?*  
Study Guide Week Four: The Decline of American Christianity  
Pastor Dixon – May 2024

### Overview

We have considered the origins of the church in colonial America, the transformation of the faith in reaction to social, scientific, and global developments around the turn of the 20th century, and the dramatic reimagining of faith's role in politics in our lifetime. We conclude our fall series with a survey of the church in our day. Churches are closing, the Christian majority is shrinking, and young people increasingly respond "none" when asked to identify their religious affiliation. One hypothesis of this course is that the forces that contributed so greatly to the growth and the development of Christianity in America over the past three centuries also explain (and indeed cause) its present decline. The quotes below are excerpted from conversations with young people in our congregation, who graciously responded to the question, "Why are young people moving away from the church, or trusting it less? What do young people not like about Christianity?" Their responses will form the foundation of our final session.

### Key Quotes

"I've noticed from peers that they only associate Christianity with beliefs like racism, homophobia, and things like that. I think a lot of people my age tend to only see the most extreme and negative ways that people utilize the religion to justify actions that they are morally opposed to."

"What makes me the most upset about Christianity and how it is viewed overall is when politics and the Bible mix. We are not fostering a welcoming environment when some (not all) Christians cherry pick parts of the Bible to justify political beliefs. I believe that if there is ever any confusion as to what God wants for us, it is to love each other."

[What do you think people would assume about you if they knew you were Christian?] "I think they would think that I think I'm perfect and that I judge them for not being Christian. They would probably think that I believe what every stereotypical Christian believes in and would shame them for their sins."

"Honestly I struggle a lot with all of [the fundamentalist expressions of Christianity] and if our church wasn't as accepting and kind as it is, I couldn't see myself being a part of the church as a queer person. It is terrifying hearing the stories my other queer friends have told me about their religious trauma and the hatred and fear their churches laid on them. Soooo thank you for being apart of a church that makes me and the other queer people feel safe and loved!!!! Genuinely changed my life."

### For Further Reflection:

- Why did you go to church and trust church when you were in your 20s? Would it ever have occurred to you not to trust the church?