

Should Christians be involved in politics?

TRANSCRIPT

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NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** This is the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum. We're here to encourage and equip you again to discern things differently. We want to encourage you to think biblically, to live holy, and to serve redemptively in every place that God gives you opportunity. And that includes our politics.

This is an episode that is a part of our series called Politics Discerned Differently. I feel like that's a really urgent topic for us as there is. Opportunity for us to display our faith in winsome ways in the environment of our politics. Everywhere we go is a platform for our discipleship, and that includes this area.

And so we're looking forward today for a conversation with Kaitlyn Schiess. She's been a part of our podcast in the past. Let me introduce her to you again in a formal way. Kaitlyn is an author speaker and I love this perpetual theology student as every Christian should be. She is also the author of a couple of books, the ballot and the Bible.

How scripture has been used and abused in American politics and where we go from here. We got to talk to her about that a few months ago. She also wrote the liturgy of politics, spiritual formation for the sake of our neighbor. And her writing has appeared in a number of different places, including Christianity Today or an article over the weekend that we're going to dive into a little bit.

The New York times, Christ and pop culture and other publications such as relevant. She has a master's degree in systematic theology from Dallas Theological Seminary and is currently a doctoral student in political theology at Duke Divinity School. And Kaitlyn, I think that may just be a place for us to start, but first of all welcome back to the podcast.

We're glad to have a conversation with you.

[00:01:49] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, we're looking forward to it. Remind our audience again, a little bit of your background something maybe that you could share with us that we couldn't get from your bio, or if we were to do a Google search about you, what would you want us to know beyond that?

[00:02:06] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** so I grew up all over the country as a military kid grew up in the church. Two really faithful parents who showed me Jesus taught me about Jesus and showed me how much they believed in the gospel in their lives. Maybe something that would not show up in my bio, but maybe I should add is a lot of my life now is, is split between My doctoral work my exams, writing my dissertation and doing public writing and podcasting, things like that.

But honestly, my favorite part of my life right now is the time I spend in my local church. I teach Sunday school. I'm in the nursery a lot. I like dip into the middle school and high school. Cause one of my best friends is our, is our youth director. So I just, that's one of the most. meaningful parts of my life is being a part of a church that I just love and has been a really faithful place for me to do this thinking from.

[00:02:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Oh, that's great. Just as a pastor for 35 years, I love hearing that. And maybe let me back up and just start there and say based on all of the work that you've been doing you know, it would seem to be that every Christian and certainly every Christian leader needs a political theology. But in this moment, as we are a hundred or so days away from the next presidential election, what would you say to pastors and church leaders in this moment?

What would you, how would you encourage them and equip them to walk through these next couple of months?

[00:03:29] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. Oh, that's such a good question. I, I think one thing I would say is, and this, this happens a lot is in the next few months, I will go to a lot of churches and a lot of Christian schools. And a lot of pastors will ask me like, what's the sermon I can preach or what's the Sunday school class we can do that will kind of make everything as best as it can be, I guess, in the, in the next few months before the election.

And what I often find myself saying is, This happens every four years where right before the election, we all kind of freak out and we go, what do we need to do in church to make this okay? And what I wish we would do instead is say, let's focus on being as faithful as we can in the next few months.

Let's just keep preaching the gospel. Let's be in conversation with people. Let's create conditions where people who are different from each other, spend time together, hopefully over food in our churches. And then let's let the anxiety that we're feeling right now, fuel a much longer term

plan. for political discipleship in our churches because a great sermon or a great Sunday school class can only do so much.

A lot of the real idolatry and dysfunction that we see in a lot of our churches when it comes to politics is a much deeper spiritual formation issue. So often when I go to churches, I'll say, I'd love to do a workshop. I would love to kind of teach a lesson, but I would really love to spend some time with your Sunday school teachers and your small group leaders and talk through what does it look like for us really administering to people to find ways to creatively address those idols and those theological failures.

In a way that is relational and long term, rather than thinking, if we just present really great political theology right now, that will really fix things. It probably won't, but we have great resources. We have great examples in Christian history of people withstanding temptation towards political idolatry.

And most of the time it came through communities that were really committed to one another, who prayed together and read scripture together over a long period of time and built up the spiritual resources to do this work.

[00:05:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** What a, what a good word. And I, I love what you said a moment ago about doing that over food that made all the Baptists jump up and sing at that moment, right, and but you know, the, the gathering around the table is a powerful thing. We see it in scripture and there's a reason why Jesus had a special meal right before the cross.

Several reasons for that, in fact, but. You know, certain things happen, special, powerful things relationally happen when you're sharing a meal together. And you're getting to know each other at that level, but that's a good segue into I wanted you to define what we, what you mean and what is meant by political theology and what drew you to this area of ministry.

[00:06:07] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** So there's, for any of the nerds listening, you might know that there is like a particular period of theology in Germany that starts using this phrase political theology. When I use it, I don't mean just this era and just this kind of the emphases that they had in kind of early 20th century German.

I mean political theology more broadly, which is to say theological reflection on how we live well together, which, to back up then, the way I use the word politics might be unfamiliar to some people. Some of us, when we hear the word politics, we just assume that it's political. You know, voting, the legislative decisions that are made, the decisions the president makes, maybe we think of the Supreme Court or even lower courts and decisions they make.

That's all part of politics, but when I say politics, I mean, how do we live well together? How do we create communities that function well? And so that starts to, at the really lowest level of the relationships I have with my next door neighbors. It's politics because it's like, how do we live well together?

We're going to have disagreements about things like if really loud music should get played at three o'clock in the morning when we share a wall between ourselves, you know? So we have to do politics in that way. And then it goes all the way up from like city councils to state legislatures, to our national politics, to even international politics that happens between nations.

So if all of that is included in this broad definition of how we live well together, then you can see why actually theology has a lot to say about how we live well together. Christian theology has a lot to say about what kind of creatures humans are. And so how we best flourish in communities is, is rooted in that idea of what, what were we made to be?

How do we best flourish as individuals and then in families and then larger communities. And then if you're looking across scripture, Whether it's the nation of Israel, whether it's how the people of God in the New Testament relate to the nations that they live under, there's a lot of teaching on just what does it mean to live well in the conditions that we live under, and even teachings about what conditions we should try and create.

What kind of conditions do communities best function under? So when I say political theology, I mean that kind of theological reflection. If it's defined in that way, I really think all of scripture has something to say then about it because all of scripture has something to say about how communities function and the kind of characteristics individuals need to advocate well, to seek that kind of flourishing in their community.

Sometimes we kind of bifurcate scripture into what's the communal stuff and what's the individual stuff, or what's the communal stuff and what's the inner spiritual stuff. And I think our politics really requires both. It needs instructions in scripture, like in the Old Testament law that says, here's how communities best function.

Here's how God desires communities to function. We need to learn from that, but we also need to learn from The fruit of the spirit from the way that individual leaders are described and how they are judged for failures and we need all of that counsel to help us think well in a complicated political context for how we should navigate it.

Yeah.

[00:08:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So, so great to hear you explain that and, and just made my mind go back to kind of Jesus's fundamental teaching when he says the most important thing is love

God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, politics is about learning from God, how to love your neighbor In close proximity to them.

And as technology has made us aware of each other on a global scale. Now we're able to do that and in some ways be aware of that. Our founder let me back up and just say this Were you 13 when you decided that you wanted to spend your life engaged in political theology, or was there a story about how that catalyzed a little bit

[00:09:41] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah, thank you. I didn't answer that part of your question. So I, in some ways, this feels like something I've been interested in my whole life and that I've always been interested in politics in some way. I was a pretty young kid. I took a philosophy class early in high school and was really interested in the debates that we would get into and questions of how we should live together.

But honestly, I, I spent most of growing up thinking I would go to law school. I thought I would be interested in policy just from that perspective. I didn't really consider so much the theological parts of it. And then it was when I was in college I went to Liberty university. People might remember 2016 election was a school that was really involved in that election.

And so we had. You know, there were politicians on campus. Ted Cruz announced his candidacy there. Trump was there a few times. Bernie Sanders actually also was there. And then that meant there was also lots of national media on campus and commentators and pundits. And so the question, not just of politics, which I was already interested in.

but of Christians relationship to it was really in your face. Any student there in that time would say, like, this is something we couldn't avoid thinking about. And at the same time that was happening, I was sort of forced into being a camp counselor for middle school girls at the church that my mom was working at, because when your mom is on staff, you get Forced into things like that.

And I had a real plan for my life that was like, go to law school, do something in policy afterwards, and was stuck in a cabin with a bunch of middle school girls at camp and discovered Both had a real encounter with God myself and realized I had had some really bad reasons for being interested in law and policy.

There are really good reasons for Christians to make that their career. My reasons weren't good. They were mostly about seeming successful to people and gaining some kind of prestige publicly. So I had to reckon with that spiritual issue. And then I also, Very surprisingly to me discovered. I loved teaching the Bible to these girls.

I loved spending time in prayer and conversation with them. So I went back for my senior year of college and thought, okay, I don't know what this means. I guess I should go to seminary. And I honestly really thought, okay, real faithful Christian ministry has nothing to do with politics. So this is great.

I'll get out of that world entirely. I'll just, I'll just focus on the ministry part. And I got to seminary and most of my peers, my first year in the 2016 election. We're asking all these big questions about what they should do in their churches, how they should lead, what does Christian theology say to our political life?

And I pretty quickly both felt God really directing me to focus on that and realized I had a good kind of temperament for it. Like it, it, Stresses me out like everyone, but I realized pretty quickly I actually enjoyed getting into it in a way that some of my peers were pretty freaked out and a little hesitant.

And so didn't anticipate spending my life talking about the two things you're not supposed to talk about in polite company, theology and politics, but here we are.

[00:12:24] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and you're doing a great job of it. And for those that don't know, they can catch you on a regular basis with Phil Vischer and trying to keep Phil Vischer between the ditches on any conversation, but particularly on politics and culture. Is a challenge, but they can find you talking with Phil and with Scott just Bonnie on the Holy post and would encourage people to do that.

Great great conversations are had there, but lo and behold, you never know what kind of surprises God may have for you when you're on the journey of ministry and, and Hey, if you can survive working with middle schoolers at any level, you know, you're pretty good. Pretty stout now, which, but that, that also brings me around to another thought that I had for our conversation.

We have a mutual friend Curtis Chang, who will be a part of this series on politics discerned differently a little bit later. I caught a recent conversation that he was having in which he described politics like we come to politics as a crystal ball in a mirror. I don't know if you. Caught that conversation or not.

But our founder, Jim Denison recently said politics is the organization of power and kind of building on what you said a moment ago, the, the organization of power so that people can live together well. Or hopefully that it will be that they desire for everyone to flourish together, not just for some to flourish together.

That would be the better way of understanding politics. I, I would think, I wonder if, if Curtis kind of unpacked this idea that we come to politics and we kind of look at it as a crystal ball, anticipating, What our future might be, and that we also look at it as a mirror. Do you think he's onto something there in terms of why politics is, has become particularly now in our moment, so important to almost everybody?

[00:14:08] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. Oh, I, I totally agree. And I, Curtis and I have been in conversations before about our political dysfunction, and I think we agree on a lot. And what I love about that, the mirror and the crystal ball, I, what I often tell people is we go to politics looking for a sense of identity and community, which is, I'm guessing similar to what he's talking about with the mirror.

It's like, I want to see myself reflected in this. And we often then treat our votes like things that they actually aren't. We're looking for our votes to be a reflection of everything we believe and care about, and our sense of identity, and our sense of who my kind of people are, and our interests in the world, instead of, as you said, saying what is my role in, in this system to try and do the best that I can to create good conditions for people to flourish, which should be a pretty Christian way of going about this, saying it's not just my interest or my sense of who my people are.

It's, About my neighbors and my love for my neighbors, and I as a Christian have this beautiful gift of God revealing to us things about how humans best function that I might not discern myself. I might not look around and see examples of it, but in scripture I see this is how humans were meant to function.

I also think one of our kind of dysfunctional relationships to politics is we go into it assuming that this is, It's a space where if we have the right theology and the right ideas, we can just go into it and fix things and do the right work and everything will work out fine. Instead of recognizing that when we go into politics, which we don't kind of enter into as a foreign space, it's a part of the air we breathe.

It's a part of the communities we live in, but it has a formative effect on us as well. We're not just going in asserting what we want. It will shape us as well. And for Christians in particular, this is an opportunity to be appropriately cautious. Not fearful but cautious of the ways in which we might go in and think I have really good ideas but our Sense of who we are and what communities should look like will be shaped by the messages the stories the emotions that play such a large role in our politics And instead of going in and saying well, it's us against them This is the the right story the right idea I have and you have the wrong stories the wrong ideas instead It would be helpful to say I want to be really deeply rooted in the story of the gospel.

I want to be shaped by the practices of the church. I want to know who we are and what we believe. And from that place of rootedness, go out into politics with curiosity, with, with, you know, questions to ask of my neighbors, with the expectation that I might find God working there in surprising places. Not with the naivete of, oh, everything, you know, I'll just be able to get whatever I want done, everyone will sort of bend to my will, I can just share the truth of the gospel and it will all work out fine, but with curiosity, that there might be opportunities for faithful work in places that I had previously thought would be close to faithful work, but that movement of, like, rootedness into curiosity, Is a more helpful way I think than either thinking I'm asserting everything and I have the right ideas and I'm going to come in and just make it all work and it won't be, it won't affect me at all, or this idea that this is a battle for me to fight and I'm on the right side and anyone else who's not on my side is, is the loser.

[00:17:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I think that's a, such a much healthier perspective then. What seems like, Kaitlyn, that some of us have drifted into some form of idolatry when it comes to our politics. And, and we, I want to get into the article that you wrote just a few days ago that was published in Christianity Today around this, but what, what are we, what are too many of us, I should say if, if we're on this precipice of turning politics into some kind of an idol, when we walk up to politics as What are we asking in some ways from our politics that our politics were never intended to provide?

[00:18:00] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** that's such a good question. We, like I said earlier, we're looking for a sense of identity and community that is both politics is a bad source of identity and community. And for Christians, it's not the one that we already have. We have a sense of identity and community that we've often forgotten.

So we're looking for that. We're also looking for. Often real transcendent meaning and purpose. One of the things that I wrote about in my most recent book was part of the reason that politicians still to this day, even though Christianity you know, attendance in church affiliation with the church is declining in the U S.

Politicians still go to biblical passages frequently, or at least to kind of sprinklings of biblical language, even if they're not citing a full passage or exegeting it, they still like some biblical language. I think part of the reason for that, that we should be really compassionate about is people are looking for their politics to mean something more than just.

Petty fighting. They want it to mean something more than just politicians fighting it out on TV. It starts to feel like entertainment. I, someone recently at a church told me that it has started to feel like WW fighting. What is that called? Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's like it all just feels like a game. It feels like entertainment.

People are hungry for it to mean something deeper than that. And I think one thing that Christians can provide is like, we actually do believe a much deeper, meaningful, cosmic story that politics isn't going to provide for you. It can try. It will give you really twisted, distorted versions of the gospel.

It won't give you the real thing, but we are going to it hoping that it will give us. That sense of identity and community and the sense of transcendent meaning and purpose. And some of this, again, is not bad. You know, there are so many problems in the world, policy questions that are really complicated.

Many of us just think I'll give that discernment over to someone else. Just tell me what team to be on. Just tell me who the good guys are and who the bad guys are. And I'll align myself with the good guys. And the Christian message that I think is so important is to say, If it's true that ultimate justice and redemption is coming with certainty, suddenly you can have the freedom to say, I can't fix all the really complicated policy things.

The structural issues, people in churches all the time are telling me like, I just feel like my vote doesn't matter. It feels like our system is broken. E, even in the face of all of those challenges, if we really believe that the end of the story is justice and reconciliation and redemption, suddenly.

It's not a failure for me to just spend my political energy changing one small rule in my community that disadvantages vulnerable people like really working to get trash service provided for a poor neighborhood or really trying to make sure that our public schools are serving the poorest students that are coming to them or trying to make sure that the local crisis pregnancy center is really providing what what moms and their children need.

Suddenly, that doesn't seem like a failure in comparison to these big, global, scary national problems. Suddenly, it seems like that's faithful, and actually God, in God's economy, that can end up meaning more, and we can celebrate that.

[00:21:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah, I hear echoes of what your article, was about in what you're saying there and so let me I just want to quote a little bit of the article and we'll put this in the show notes, encourage people to read it. I think it's a really good word. It's really helps us to think about what's at stake.

And that's what really has people, as your article points out, they're either on edge and, and really creates a sense of, of anxiety for a lot of people. Or it creates a sense of exhaustion and causes people to move, just move away from all of this. And I just don't want to hear any more about it. So the article appearing in Christianity today that Kaitlyn wrote is called the most important election of our lifetime.

How extreme rhetoric Stokes fear, and encourages apathy. Interesting that it can go in both directions. Christians can offer, can offer a productive counterpart. So a lot of things start swirling around when I read the article and went back and kind of thought through it, but let me pull out a couple of quotes.

I'm wondering, I'm wondering how. Extreme rhetoric does push us in both directions simultaneously. But it also points to the opportunity that Christians have in this moment, the many opportunities, but let me give you a couple of quotes and we'll get into this a little bit. For Christians, nothing is truly a threat to our survival or existence.

That's interesting. If this election poses an existential threat, then we can more easily justify doing anything, including harming our neighbors, lying, stealing, or cheating, to avoid it. But if ultimate justice is promised by God, we have the freedom to seek provisional justice here on earth, as faithfully as we can, without fearing that if we fail, all is lost.

Then a little bit later in the, in the article, you say this, the resurrection of Christ is the horizon of our agency, the event that defines the possibilities for creative and faithful work. I just love all of those statements. But Kayla, how does this, how can the extreme rhetoric that has become now commonplace in almost all political rhetoric and conversation, how does it On the one hand, stoke fear and also stoke apathy at the same time.

How does that happen?

[00:23:29] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** I, I, we didn't get to include everything in the article that I wanted to, and there was a whole paragraph where I was citing some studies that have been done on this actually, and some anecdotal evidence from my own life. But, so on one hand, when the stakes of an election feel really high, and, I have, you know, every election I have voted in as an adult, someone has said, this is the most important election of our lifetime.

So you hear it a bunch of times and you stop believing it, you know? But, so we've had that level in the past. This election, I'm hearing a lot more of this phrase that you just used of existential threat. Like, this is a threat to our survival, to our way of life, this is a threat to our country. And what's striking is that you hear it on both.

You really hear both parties saying, if the other guy's elected, this is the end of our way of life. This is the end of our country. This is the end of democracy. And on one hand, that can leave people in this just parried, anxious state. And I see this a lot online. People who are spending a lot of their time scrolling through social media, reading large documents about things that are happening at the national level, watching C SPAN a lot, and putting themselves in this state where It's really actually hard for us to engage in politics well.

We know this even on a brain chemistry level. Like, your nervous system is in overdrive. The chemicals in your brain telling you that there is a threat in front of you are firing. You're not in your most capable state to engage well. Even in ways that would be really helpful. You know, calling an elected representative, campaigning on behalf of a candidate.

Like, your brain and body are not in a place to do that well because you've been so overwhelmed by this threat. Threat. This has even been shown in studies that when we see campaign ads that are scary, the chemicals in our brain that are going are the same chemicals that go when we have an actual threat of physical danger in front of us.

So our bodies and brains are just not in the right state to engage well. At some point, that becomes so overwhelming that people are so exhausted, they're so fried by it all, that they just check out. And a lot of people are saying everyone keeps saying that democracy's on the line, that the threat to our country is existential.

But they keep saying that, and they also keep not acting like it's true. Like, many of our politicians that give stirring speeches about the threat that will come in this election, then go and do things that don't seem to take seriously how, how extreme the threat is that they just portrayed. They make silly jabs on social media.

They say things off the cuff that we think are, are, are unhelpful or really derisive unnecessarily. So we stop believing people that the threat is so extreme and we just think, I can't handle any more of this. I'm so exhausted. I'm so stressed out. I'm just going to opt out entirely. One of the studies that I had originally read and read in the article said, even when it comes to, it was one side of the political spectrum, it was a study of young Democrats because they were saying Biden had really increased how often he was talking about the existential threat in this election.

So they were looking, Are you more likely to vote because of these claims? And the study basically found, no, people are not more likely to vote. So all of this rhetoric puts us in these two camps that whether you're really scared or you're really apathetic, either way, you're not actually in the kind of condition that you need to be in to vote.

To faithfully serve your neighbors to actually seek flourishing in your community. And that's kind of going back to what I said earlier about pastors, just like I think pastors need to think, what's the long term strategy here. I think individuals need to be thinking, what is necessary for me to live through this election as faithfully as I can with the emotional bandwidth, with the energy, with the relational capital, with the resources I need so that when it's done, regardless of who wins.

I can serve my community faithfully because regardless of who wins, there will be needs in our communities that we need to meet. There will be local politics that's still happening, and I worry

that many of us are going to get to the end of this election and many others too tried to just bring a casserole to a next door neighbor or show up to a city council meeting where we have a lot of agency to do faithful work.

[00:27:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. When, when I got to the end of your article, I was really struck by how it pointed back to a friend of mine. He and his wife are trying to help an immigrant family. Who basically tried to escape their country or did escape, escape their country because of really desperate situation. And they are simply trying to help that family survive until their situation can be properly you know, processed through immigration and all of those things, but they're just trying to help this family survive after having walked thousands of miles to escape their situation, and there's a lot of complexity in that kind of situation.

It just reminded me and I, matter of fact, I sent them the article just because it's, it's so powerfully focused on, Hey, what really matters most is the neighborhood in which you live, the community in which you live, the church that you're a part of. And those are the immediate platforms where you actually can make a difference today.

Yes, we are in some ways, good and bad made aware of everything that is national global, and there are lots of things to be concerned about that, but the biggest place where we have a platform to make a difference is right out our front door. And, and that I love. But I also hear in this Kaitlyn something that you'll hear.

Come along. And I wonder first of all, I just, it feels like when I read your article that what part of what you're saying is, is look, perpetual anxiety, perpetual anger, and perpetual apathy. None of those three, three things are God's will for the Christian's life. That's just, that's just not what we're called to live.

Those are the three pathways we have to reject right out of hand. Is that Mike on, am I reading you right in

[00:29:03] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. I mean, part of what I hoped I could communicate was you know, there are a lot of folks, I've gotten a lot of feedback, even from the Holy post episodes where people have said like, you should be more concerned. You should be more scared. You should be more angry. And one of the things I wanted to communicate was.

Look, if it wasn't for the gospel, if it wasn't for the, for the firm hope that I have in the return of Christ to make all things new, you're right. I should be really scared. I should be really angry. And if I was telling you to be less scared and less angry just for the sake of being less scared and less angry, you're right.

That would be unhelpful. Like it would, it might risk diminishing the significance of this election, which is what some people were saying. Like, no, this really affects people's lives. And I want to say it does. But I'm not saying. Let's all just care less. Let's be less worried just for the sake of being less worried.

No, actually it's been true in our history. I cite in the article, Mariah W. Stewart, personal like hero in the faith of mine, Martin Luther King Jr. As people in two crucial moments in our country's history, during the fight for abolition, and during the civil rights movement, who weren't saying politics doesn't matter because Jesus is coming back to make all things new.

No, they were saying, actually my firm hope in the resurrection means that these options that you just described aren't options for me anymore. I shouldn't be living a life full of anxiety or fear. I shouldn't be apathetic about what's happening in politics. I actually have the freedom. To seek the good of the community that I'm in from this better place, from this better emotional place, this better spiritual place.

And both of them in different ways. I actually really focused on spiritual formation in relationship to politics, like who I am when I engage in politics really matters. And Christian history has great resources for that. Like I said earlier, has has examples in our history of people who met together, prayed regularly, practiced spiritual disciplines regularly, ate together regularly, for the sake of being able to advocate in the public square for really good, just things.

But they recognize that if they weren't rooted in those practices, in the truth of scripture, in the gospel, they would actually, even if they had really good intentions, when they got out there, they might end up doing things that they shouldn't do. They might make compromises they shouldn't make. They might mistreat their neighbors because of how fraught it all is.

But if they're rooted in the truth of the gospel and the return of Christ and the resurrection, It actually makes it so that you can be more faithful in the work that you're doing.

[00:31:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It's such a good call. It makes me go in a number of different directions. One is, is that, you know, I, I learned in a situation early on in ministry that, that anxiety and anger cannot propel the best of human action. In the immediate sense, it almost always, if we're driven by either anxiety or anger, or we choose apathy, we always end up.

not choosing the most redemptive actions. And that was, you know, I had a situation early on in my ministry where a church split that I was aware of. And you know, the people that were angry went down and started another church and that church never did thrive. And as one of my mentors pointed out, it's very hard to build a church on anger.

It's very hard to build a church on anxiety. And that what I hear you pointing out and pointing us back to Kaitlyn is kind of what the apostle Paul talked about when he. Kept coming back to this deal of faith, hope, and love that, that we will do our best work. We will make our best choices in the immediate sense.

And we will be sustained if our motivations come out of the resurrection of Jesus and the faith, hope, and love available to us in him. Because the other anger, anxiety, apathy just is not, they're not going to motivate us well, and they're not going to, they put us into a mental spiritual state where we can't even make good choices, right?

[00:32:48] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yes. And I don't think enough of us are thinking in those terms of like, how am I doing for the sake of the work that I'm doing? It's just, if I can get the thing done, that's what matters. And I, I just want to, I don't want us to keep putting band aids on. On the problems that we have in politics, I want us to, to think more long term.

And that requires thinking more about spiritual formation.

[00:33:09] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And, and a reminder, great reminder for Christians that Yes, God is very interested in what you do or don't do, but he's even more interested in why you're doing it. That the motives as well as the methodologies matter and, and we might even be able to theologically tease this out to say that the motives matter more than actually what the, the outcomes would particularly be.

Okay let me ask you, cause this had not anticipated asking this question, but it just comes to mind is part of our anxiety stirred up when we hear. People say, you know, this is the way nations, this is the way churches, this is the way organization organizations fail. They fail very slowly and then very suddenly.

And I think that's true in many ways historically. But is that serving us in a poor way in terms of. We're just, you know, we're sliding down this slippery slope and we don't know how far we're down the slippery slope, but this sudden plummet is going to happen and we have, is that thinking hurting us, I guess is my

[00:34:17] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah, I think so. And I think it goes back to Curtis's thing about the crystal ball. So much of our politics is us saying, I know what the future will hold and how all of the different pieces will work together. And so I make a decision based on supposed future knowledge, which is why I felt like it was really important and the piece to say.

This is like a perennial way people think about politics, and this is part of the most important election in our lifetime kind of rhetoric, is this is the turning point of history. This is the moment

when you want to be on the right side of history, which is really I mean, it's a lot of pride often in our estimation of what will happen and, and what we even know of the past.

We assume that we have the correct read on what was right and what was wrong. And Christian, one of the gifts that Christian theology should give us is real humility about we're making our best judgments in the revelation that God has given us. We have some, some aid in making judgments about good and evil and what was a good political move and what wasn't.

But we are still judged. Finite and fallen human creatures that don't know what history will, will do and what will happen in the future or what history will then make judgments about. So we need to have the humility to say, I will make the best judgments available to me in this election. I will be as faithful as I can.

I will educate myself. I won't ruminate on things, but I will educate myself and I will make really faithful judgments to the best of my ability. But I won't believe that the outcome of this election. It could, but I can't know that, and so making a judgment based on that would be wrong, and we have this really beautiful belief in Christianity that actually the turning point of all of history was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the defeat of the powers and principalities on the cross, and so if that's the turning point of history, Then that both means we have certain possibilities open to us.

There are things we can, we actually believe we can do faithful work. That seems like an obvious thing to say, but it's actually incredible that Christ has made it possible for us to do things in our communities that bring glory to God, that, that serve other humans, that we're not so weighed down by sin, that it's impossible for us to do good things.

But it also means that our orientation, instead of looking constantly for what's the cliff that our nation is going off of, or that the world is going off of, our orientation is towards. The return of Christ to make all things new. And that being the horizon of our, of our action, the possibilities that seem open to us is not just pie in the sky thinking.

It's not just, Oh, Jesus is coming back. So everything will be fine. It's actually. I have a, I have an appropriate idea of what I can do. It's limited in many ways, because I'm not Christ that's returning to make all things do. If that's the horizon, that means I'm not doing that, but I have opportunities for faithful work.

And what I would rather us do instead of making judgments that often fail about, you know, what's coming in the future or what's the defining moment or what year or what election will be the kind of hinge on which everything turns would be to say, Again, keeping our range pretty small. Most of us, the, the greatest things that we can do are in our local context, and we can make actually more accurate judgments there about what's coming in the future and what's needed now instead of spending a lot of our time on, on.

guesses about things that we've often been wrong about. I mean, people have often made decisions about who to vote for, for president based on assumptions about what will be the big fight in Congress next year, and then it, it doesn't. I think about George W. Bush a lot with this. Like he had a whole plan for that term of I'm going to deal with, with childhood education.

9 11 happens and, and his entire term has changed. So for us to assume that we know under what conditions decisions will get made or what cascading effects will happen is often hubris.

[00:37:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I think that's a great reminder for us to think about. Just navigating how complex this is. I mean, the world's a big place, the country's a big place, 330 million people, and we can learn certainly some things from our past, but you know, the country was very different at different seasons and the world was different at different places.

And so this is our time. And we have to remember that. And that, like I said, our biggest opportunities lie in the places that we live our lives on a day to day basis. And that's where our greatest opportunities are. Kaitlyn, as we kind of move with a few minutes left, I wonder if we could give folks a few more practical details or, or suggestions I might say.

Because it's really, you know, we toss around phrases in this kinds of conversations about separation of church and state. I think. Your ministry and your writing is really pointing us more to the biblical integration of faith and politics rather than you know, but we, we do want to be aware of the risk and the benefits of how we bring our faith into the public arena.

But we hear a lot of past passages tossed out. Micah 6, 8 seems to be one that gets called out a lot for Christians, which I think is a great, great passage. You referenced in some ways, Jeremiah's call in Jeremiah 29, seven to seek the welfare of the city where you are and that kind of involvement.

And then no, no less a person than our friend Russell Moore and Yuval Levine wrote about this in his recent book about understanding what it means to win. In American politics and what, where that, that conversation through me was back into the familiar passage that we ought to always start with, which is first Timothy to pray for all of those that are in authority, pray for the King and all of that, that passage also goes on to tell us some of what the goal ought to be.

Particularly in the phrase that we may live peaceful and quiet lives and godliness and holiness. Can you help us kind of think through this? What, how, how could we be content that we quote unquote one in a biblical way in American politics help us create a, a healthy definition there because part of what Levine points out in his book is, is look, no matter who's the, who wins the election, the other side will still be present.

Because we don't believe in eliminating our political enemies in that way, or at least we hope we never get to that place.

[00:40:25] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah.

[00:40:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Help us unpack that a

[00:40:27] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. No, I love that. And I do, I wish more of our conversation started with one of the most frequent explicit teachings about politics and scripture. I think all of it has something to say about politics, but explicitly about politics is pray for your leaders. It pops up a bunch of times. What I think we miss sometimes is that it is always connected both to, like you said, how we live our lives.

Our ability to live faithful lives is partially conditioned on the fact that we believe God is in charge. If we didn't believe God was in charge, if we weren't praying to God to guide our leaders, to, to give them wisdom, we might just feel like we can't live peaceful lives. We need to fight for everything that we need, but it's also often connected to it.

the fact that at the time all of scripture was written, and I think this is actually still true today, there isn't a strict divide between the political and the spiritual. So when scripture tells us, pray for your leaders, or even when in Romans, Paul tells the Christians to submit to governing authorities, part of what's going on there is not just that.

Pray to, we assume that that makes sense. Of course, we pray to God for our leaders. Often early Christians would have thought our leaders make divine claims and you're telling us to pray to God for them as if God is over them. If God is in control of all the things that happen in our politics, but also God is a higher authority than the government authorities that are claiming supremacy.

There's something really crucial there for us to remember. You mentioned earlier, we're, we're tempted towards political idolatry often, even if not in the ways that Christians would have been in the first century of literally worshiping a government leader, if you've been to a campaign rally recently, it often looks like a worship service.

We are also tempted to worship our leaders or to worship political ideas as if this one policy or this one ideology. We'll just fix the world and we won't actually need the gospel anymore. We're often tempted towards that. Even if we wouldn't say it, it often is, is happening in our hearts. And so part of what I think we need to remember when we're looking at these passages about praying for our leaders is they're saying something really subversive.

This happens in the Psalms a lot as well. When, when there's a depiction of God, not just. kind of serenely overall creation, but actually defeating these other powers that seem to be at work in the

world and saying God is supreme over all of them. That has political effects for us. So I think part of what we should do is read those passages and say, have I rightly understood this?

Do I really understand that God is supreme over these other powers? But then I think we should also look to the way that prayer is described in the book of Revelation. I wish we spent more time in Revelation in election season, not because I think we can pinpoint, you know, a certain political leader as a character in the book of Revelation, but just because it's such a powerful picture of Christians dealing with Great injustice and evil on earth and struggling with it.

Early in the book of revelation, I think it's chapter seven or eight. There's a depiction of the prayers of the saints on earth going up to the throne room, being mixed with incense as an offering to God. And then God returning those prayers to earth as thunder. There's a real picture there. Our prayers actually do matter.

They really have an effect on the world, but praise God. They're purified before they come back as thunder. We don't have to worry that we need to know exactly what to pray for, who should win, or what policy should go forth. We can trust that God, in his wisdom and mercy and love for us, will create the right conditions, ultimately, but also is protecting and providing for us now.

And we can pray for that. We don't need the right words. We don't need to know exactly what plan to propose to God to make happen on earth. We can take great comfort that those prayers aren't just wafting up into nowhere. They're making it to the throne room of God and, and God in his mercy and justice will respond.

[00:44:10] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. It's such an encouraging, encouraging word for us because like I said, we, we sometimes take our faith and want to turn it into a crystal ball. That we can somehow use the crystal ball of our faith to anticipate and know what nobody else knows about what's coming or what politics is all about.

Misreading scripture. We're misreading the book of revelation when we do that. And it does, you know, It definitely does challenge our faith. I would say it challenges mine when we're like if God is supreme and sovereign over all of this, how does, how come he let this happen? You know, how, and that, that's all, that's what Christians and theologians have been struggling with for thousands of years is understanding how God can allow some of these things to happen.

And that's true on a personal level, as well as on a political level. But then the other side of it that I was thinking about just a moment ago was. How apathy is also not an option for us because we can't look into the crystal ball in our, of our faith and say it's all going to be all right in the end, so I'll just sit on my hands.

And that's kind of what Paul called out in second Thessalonians. He's like. No, that's just sitting on your hands, waiting for Jesus to come make it all right, is not an option either. It's this better way of helping in limited ways, yes, but in the ultimate faith promise that the kingdom of God will come.

And it can come in some measure when we make good redemptive decisions and we become involved in our churches and our communities, our families. Amen. In the places where we have influence right now, the kingdom of God can come with a significant measure. And the promise behind that is what you've said before is that it is coming in full.

And we want to be busy in that work when it does come, because that's going to come suddenly. If we're, if we're on a slope, it's actually sloping up

[00:46:03] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yes.

[00:46:03] **Dr. Mark Turman:** as Christians. It's actually sloping up. It's not sloping down. And we need to hang on to that hope. Kaitlyn, as we kind of wrap up here going forward kind of one of the questions I'm asking in this series of myself and others is, is, is there kind of a primary concern?

I might say fear, but we're not supposed to fear as believers and your, your work helps us not to do that. What's your primary concern and what's your biggest hope that when we get to, you know, November the 15th. And when we get to January the 20th do you have a primary concern? Do you have a primary hope that you'd want us to focus on?

[00:46:44] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah, I mean, I think my, my primary concern, which has been the same in the last few elections is that Christians would substitute the gospel for a political agenda. And what has really changed in the last few elections is that I see it now in all different corners, different corners of the church, different ends of the political spectrum.

There is just this constant temptation to equate the gospel, to equate our interpretation of scripture with particular. Policies that we should care deeply about, but we should hold loosely enough. We should be able to, to be willing to change our minds about in a way that we hold much more tightly to the truth of the gospel in terms of hope.

I think I always, even in the last few election seasons that have been really challenging for Christians. The, the hope that I keep coming back to is even though. Things on a national level are really fraught, even though many of the things I see on social media really disheartened me. I keep showing up to churches where there is great political disagreement and people have really committed to maintaining unity amongst themselves.

I keep showing up to churches where pastors are saying, I just, I want help, but I'm trying to lead as faithfully as I can. I keep showing up to Christian schools where there are Christian college students going, I'm I'm spending a lot of my time right now wondering what it means to be a Christian in this political world, and I'm curious, and I have questions, help me.

And those postures I keep coming into, even in places where I think, oh, someone told me that this church is really, really pretty conservative, or really pretty progressive, or someone told me that this student group has really strong opinions, and I keep being surprised by how curious and faithful many people are.

And I wish I could bottle up that experience that I keep having. And give it to people who aren't going to all the places I'm going to, because if you look at some of the reporting, if you look at what's on the internet, it looks entirely bleak. It looks like people are totally divided, at each other's throats, nothing good can come of this, and, and there are real reasons to be concerned about that.

But I have found that the Holy Spirit is working still in places that you might not expect in ways that I wouldn't have expected, and I'm trying to exercise that as a muscle. I want to be someone who regularly expects that the Holy Spirit is working in a place that I didn't plan, that I didn't schedule, that is not the people that I would expect the Holy Spirit to be working in, and learning to have that muscle I think will get us through a lot.

[00:49:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, that's a good word. Kaitlyn, thank you for sharing with us today. I wonder, as we close, would you mind offering a prayer for us and those that will hear this podcast and that. God just might be able to do everything he wants to do with any and all of us. And that he would be the one most glorified.

Would you be willing to lead us in that prayer?

[00:49:32] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Dear Lord, I thank you for the people listening to this. I thank you for people who are curious about how to live as a Christian in our political world, who wants, who have a desire to be faithful. God, I pray that you would equip us. That you would regularly remind us of the truth of your gospel, of the return of your son to make all things new.

And I pray that you would give us relationships and communities and practices, regular rhythms that remind us of that, that train in us this, this muscle of expecting your spirit to be working outside of our regular expectations or schedule. God, I pray for wisdom. In this election season, I pray for strong relationships to be built in spite of the division.

I pray for faithfulness in communities that aren't going to get covered on national media, that aren't going to maybe make a huge splash in our politics, the national level, but are faithful with

the resources they have, are faithful to listen and learn to their communities. God, I pray for opportunities.

And I pray that you would sustain us in this season and that we would keep our eyes directed on you. It's in your son's name. We pray. Amen.

[00:50:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Amen. Thank you, Kaitlyn . And thank you for the conversation as well as the other ways that you're working in God's kingdom. And I want to thank our audience for spending this time with us. If we've been helpful to you, please rate, review our podcast on your platform. And I just want to say thank you for all the other ways that you as our audience encourage and equip us to do the work that we get to do.

And. Thank you for that. We look forward to seeing you next time on this series, politics discerned differently and on other features in the Denison forum, you can find us at denisonforum.org and we'll include Kaitlyn 's article and her, or the writings in our show notes as well. And we'll see you next time.