

Is America a Christian nation?

TRANSCRIPT

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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome to the Denison Forum podcast. We're glad that you're here. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and host for today's conversation. This is another installment on our special politics series called Discerning Politics Differently. And we're glad to have you along for the conversation.

As we often talk about what we're trying to do at Denison Forum and with this podcast is equip you to follow Christ in every area of life that he Guide you into. We want to help you think biblically. We want to help you live holy, and we want you to serve redemptively for the glory of God and for the good of others.

We believe that that is the mission that God has given to all of us, and we want to help you in that direction. This politics series is intended to help you to do that, to live out your faith and to be A winsome disciple in the midst of all of the conversations that we're having around politics as we work our way to the next presidential election and to the next season of life together as a nation.

So joining us today for a conversation that. Could be titled a lot of different ways. Maybe I'll title it just simply nations, politics, and the kingdom of God, and maybe a few other thoughts beyond that. But we want to talk about things like how does God see America? What does it mean to be a Christian nation?

If there's even such a thing. And how can we come back to really focusing on Jesus as the light of the world and as the source of our ultimate hope. So joining us for today's conversation is Dr. Jim Denison, the founder of Denison Forum and our cultural apologist and the other Dr. Denison, Dr. Ryan Denison, who is on our team and serves Denison Forum as senior editor for theology.

And so it's just a little bit odd to be the only person in this conversation not named Denison. And to welcome them to the Denison forum podcast. So guys, welcome back to the podcast that bears your name.

[00:02:00] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Mark, thank you very much. We could get that name change figured out, probably. There are legal ways to do that, and that would only be even more

confusing around Wouldn't It. So, but I do have to say Ryan was not the first doctor at his home, that he married a dentist who was a doctor a long time before he was, and so if you're going in order of priority here, you should probably have Candace on this on this podcast instead.

[00:02:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And from what I understand, we continue to have discussion and debate about which doctor is the most helpful.

[00:02:28] **Dr. Jim Denison:** If your teeth hurt, you definitely would know the answer to that very quickly.

[00:02:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Ryan's sitting here going, should I weigh in or not weigh in?

[00:02:38] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** It's a dangerous water. So I'm, I'm kind of holding my tongue a little bit.

[00:02:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** we are glad to have you both back on this conversation and, and back on the podcast. Obviously we've got a lot of ground that we want to try to cover to try to encourage and equip people in these interesting and chaotic political times. We are living definitely in a season where there won't be a paragraph or two or even a page or two.

There's likely to be. Several chapters and a multitude of books about the political experience that we're having as a nation right now, and even specifically about the strange things and. Scary things that have gone on so far leading up to the next presidential election. But we want to try to frame that in a biblical way in every way that we can through this conversation.

So Jim, I'd like to just ask you a couple of questions that maybe lay a foundation, create a framework for the things that we're going to talk about today. So from a biblical perspective we asked the question, how does God see America? We even have a book that you and Ryan worked on that under that title we're trying to understand can, can we even grasp what God's perspective on our national issues, global issues might be?

Can we really, can we even really answer this question in any kind of a way when we talk, start talking about how does God see a group? How does he see a nation? How does he see a generation? And it just kind of came to me as I was preparing for our conversation Is it is it even somewhat arrogant for us to raise the question and attempt to answer it?

How would you respond to that?

[00:04:15] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. I'm glad you're asking it first, because that really does need to be the place where I think we start, Mark. You have to come into this with the kind of humility that you're suggesting, without any doubt about that, I think. The prophets were

obviously inspired by the Lord to say, thus says the Lord to the nation, whatever the nation might be at that point in time.

You've got examples all through scripture of prophetic truth where you could answer your question if you're Jeremiah or if you're Isaiah. Yeah. Yeah. by saying this is what God told me to say to you. We're not that none of us on this podcast. No one today, I think is inspired to the same degree that the biblical prophets were so that we can come along and say, God is saying to America X on that same level of biblical authority as you find in the Bible.

biblical prophets. So now what we need to do is come along and apply what they said to our setting. You pick up biblical principles. You pick up prophetic statements. You ask to what degree does this seem to apply to our culture? Where are we like that? Where are we not like that? God's nature doesn't change.

Human nature doesn't change. The Bible is just as relevant as it ever was. And so you're applying biblical principles to the issues that we face. And you're doing that hopefully as Holy Spirit leads us and guides us. But with the kind of humility That you really are suggesting. Anyone that wants to come along and say, I have God's word for America as though I was Jeremiah is somebody you want to run away from pretty quickly.

[00:05:35] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and that's one of the things I I wanted to allude to next which is Just this long story of God's covenant relationship in the formation of Israel, and then his relationship that covers about 75 percent of the biblical story as we engage with it. And like you said, prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah.

Those kinds of things. We're looking again for those eternal truths, those principles that we can latch onto that apply to us. But Jim, let me kind of take that a little bit further and say we had these prophets in the old Testament who had these directives and these messages from God in what sense is the prophetic role of the new test?

How do we understand the prophetic role in the new Testament? We read about in one of our favorite chapters, Ephesians 4, that God gave evangelists, prophets, teachers, that type of thing. How, how, is there no such thing as a prophetic voice? From the church to the church in today's New Testament time.

[00:06:38] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Oh, I think there is. In fact, prophecy I think is a biblical gift, a spiritual gift, but we have to understand it a little differently than a lot in the culture do. Even in scripture, most prophecy was forth telling far more than fore telling. It was far more of what we would think of as preaching or proclamation today.

And even when there was foretelling, a great deal of that was conditional. If you do this, God will do this. If you don't do this, God will do this. That's sort of a thing, even kind of a conditional sort of a statement. You do find declarative statements in the scriptures that I'd be hesitant to assume God would gift anyone to be able to state today that are as predictive as Isaiah might have been or Jeremiah or somebody.

But for the most part, I think a prophecy is preaching. I think of it as, as a biblically inspired and spiritually inspired declaration of biblical truth. But it has to be measured by biblical authority. It stands under the truth of scripture rather than rivaling the truth of scripture. I can't speak as a biblical prophet with anything like the authority of the biblical prophets.

So I'm to speak within biblical authority as a means of communicating biblical authority. So it's in that sense that I think the gift of prophecy operates today as a fourth teller, as a preacher, as a declarer, and an applier of biblical truth to the cultural issues of our day. I

[00:07:54] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And we, yes, we talk about that again. Ephesians four comes to mind as you were talking, just this really fundamental idea that we're committed to at Denison Forum of speaking the truth in love. But Jim, I've, I've often, or sometimes I've heard people talk about the prophetic voice. of the church and of scripture as being the conscience of the church and in some way the conscience of the culture.

Is that a good way to talk about it in terms

[00:08:20] **Dr. Jim Denison:** it is.

[00:08:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** the role of what prophecy is or what the prophetic voice and ministry of the church is compared to, say, the priestly functions of the church?

[00:08:30] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I think that is a valid distinction. And I think it's an appropriate and urgent calling today. If we're going to speak biblical truth to the issues of the day, we'll be doing that in a prophetic sense. And by that, I mean, in a sense of that, we're declaring biblical truth to the crises we face, to the issues we face, the kind of task theology that was so much what the prophets themselves did on occasion, biblical prophets would make statements without a specific immediate context, but that was very rare.

For the most part, they're speaking to kings, as the Babylonians are coming, or as we're dealing with the Assyrian challenges that are here, as we're dealing with Nathan calling out David's sin with Bathsheba. Almost always, it's God speaking through them to a specific point in time to address a specific issue.

When we'll bring biblical truth into that conversation, we're doing that today. We're being the conscience of the culture. We're speaking prophetically in the sense of speaking to cultural issues

directly to Cultural challenges and to the to the to the fallacies and the and the issues that we face today It's in that sense that we're doing what the biblical prophets did I think and that is the conscience of the culture and is a critical Role for the church to play today It's never been more urgent than preachers and even believers across the body of christ To speak biblical truth to the issues that we face a lot of what our ministry exists to do Is to equip people to do that very thing and to model that as we try to speak biblical truth to our issues today as well In that sense we have a prophetic ministry and we're encouraging others into that ministry also.

[00:09:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and that, and that's so important and also just reminds me of how important it is to remember the context whenever you're reading the Bible or you're hearing it preached and taught, especially when someone is preaching and teaching from the old Testament that they should be putting these things into their proper immediate context and then looking for those eternal lasting truths and principles that can be taken and properly applied to our current context.

Especially when you're dealing with things like what we're talking about on this podcast and in this series about how does our faith intersect with our current moment, politics and issues and struggles, there's a need to be very careful in the way that you handle the scripture and the way that you apply the truths found there, both old and new Testament into.

The current context. And one of those areas that pastors, theologians deal with is sometimes under this banner that can be a bit confusing called replacement theology. And let me give you my understanding of what that is. The idea is, is that God had a special relationship that he created with Israel, a covenant relationship that plays out across the long pages of the Old Testament.

But that when Jesus came, there was a change, there was a shift. And some would say, some would, would teach that the new Israel is not the nation of Israel, but now the church, the followers of Christ, and some have even gone a further step to say that can now be applied to a nation. And. There's a lot of conversation happening in some parts of our, our culture that that nation is America.

Can you kind of frame that out, Jim, about this, this idea of replacement theology? Is it legitimate? Is it not legitimate? Can it be applied to the church and to followers of Christ? Can it be applied to a nation? Can it be applied to America?

[00:11:55] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Wow. What a wonderful question. So there's really a spectrum here on the one side of this, as you know, Mark, there's a dispensational theology that would say every promise made to a literal state of Israel must be fulfilled by a literal state of Israel. And so they'd be the opposite of a replacement theology.

They would say the 1948 creation of Israel is a fulfillment of prophecy. They would pick up anything said to Israel in the Old Testament and apply it to the Israel that exists in the Middle East today. The opposite extreme of that, perhaps, would be the replacement theology that would say no, the church replaces Israel.

Israel fulfilled its purpose in bringing the Messiah. And now we, as the church, because the scripture speaks so of us as the new Israel on occasion and as the Israel of God. And Galatians 3 says neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, were all Abraham's seed and heirs according to the covenant.

So some will come along and say the church is the new Israel today and pick up every promise made to Israel in the Old Testament and apply it to the church. Then some will go even further, as you said, and claim that America is a uniquely Christian nation. And so if the church replaced Israel, then the church in America, or even America, is now the new Israel.

And you see some, even in the Puritan era, some movement, a city on a hill, kind of an idea of America as even this kind of New Israel as it were my own personal take on this very complex subject as you know, but I myself I'm not a dispensationalist as you know But I also don't believe that the church replaced Israel to the degree that God is not still uniquely using the Jewish people I still do believe that he is doing that I don't myself see 1948 as a fulfillment of prophecy.

I don't myself see the modern state of Israel as itself a prophetic entity, but I do believe God is using the Jewish people in a very unique way. So I would not in that sense be a replacement theologian. One step further, I do not believe, and I know we'll talk about this in a bit, that America is a uniquely Christian nation, and so I don't believe that what is said to Israel in the Old Testament uniquely applies to America in a way that is not relevant to any other nation on earth.

So I myself would not be really a replacement theologian. Certainly would not endorse the idea of America as the Israel of today. Although many do for the reasons that I tried to describe just a moment ago.

[00:14:10] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So it's, it's a really big, big conversation and it can be very challenging, very confusing at times. And like I said, you're starting to get into this idea of intersecting big biblical truths and big biblical promises with nations and the movements of nations and sometimes even down to the rise or the removal of a certain leader, that type of thing, it can get really complex.

And I would say in some ways really dangerous, which is kind of where I want to pivot the conversation and Ryan want to bring you into this some I read an article that you wrote a little bit ago about Americans and their pride. This kind of shapes a frame for us in some ways as well. Can you talk a little bit about your understanding of the connection between Our sense of pride

and patriotism, the recent numbers that you cite in your article that people can find on our website talk about how many Americans say that they're no longer really proud to be an American.

They don't have that sense of national pride. But how is that? Sometimes good and sometimes not good as an expression of patriotism. Why is that important for us to think about?

[00:15:26] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Thank you. Yeah. I think one of the reasons is that pride it's Marcus Aurelius once called pride a master of deception, and I think that applied to the political, that applies to politics very well, where in terms of our sense of pride in our nation, the reason we have pride is very important. And especially as Christians, where we're called to see the world primarily through a biblical lens, rather than a political lens, or a partisan lens, or a cultural lens.

The reasons we have pride in America, if those reasons are because America is doing something that aligns with the Word of God, then great. If we would have pride in America, if we see not having pride in America is a problem, that keeps us from pointing out the ways in which America is not living in accordance with the Word of God, though, then that is not patriotism.

Because patriotism at its core is the desire to see a nation flourish, the desire to be proud of a nation. And I do think that's one of the important distinctions between being proud of your country and being proud of your country versus wanting to be proud of your country. I think the day we lose that second one, we're in some trouble.

When people no longer have a desire to see America be successful when people no longer have a desire to see the nation flourish, then That's probably a bigger sign that we're going down the wrong road. When the majority of people in the country, which a majority of people, regardless of political party, no longer say they're proud of to be an American.

If the reason for that is simply, we look at the world around us, we look at our culture and see the problems, then that's a good thing. It means that we're equipped to go forward and try and solve them. And that desire to do so is what we can't afford to lose. And I think as a, as a church as the church, one of the ways that we can help our culture is by being that voice to inspire people to be better because at the end of the day, the best way to bless people is to help them live a life that God can

[00:17:19] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, it's so well spoken both here and in the article. It just made me think that the idea of pride taken to an extreme, like you said, blinds us to the weaknesses and the, and the, the flaws of our nation and kind of ask us to be blindly loyal in some ways. At least to a particular understanding of the nation and of the community life that we share.

But a true patriot will be both grateful for the good things about America, for the things that align with God's word and that promote the good and the flourishing of all, but a true patriot will also be honest and clear. About where we're missing the mark, especially in terms of aligning to the, to the Bible's ideas and where we need to challenge each other and to try to get better.

And if we're not willing to do both sides of that, then we're not living our lives as the best patriots and best citizens that we can be. Ryan, one of the things that we want to get to in this conversation is This big idea of, of America as a Christian nation, it's been written about we'll get to Christian nationalism in that, in that sense in a moment, though, there's a little bit of a distinction there.

When you hear this term Christian nation talked about, what do you think the basic kind of common definition of any nation, but particularly America being a Christian nation? I was. Recently in a conversation with a man who was born in Iran, and he basically made the bold statement that he believes that Iran will become a Christian nation in the next decade or two.

And I thought that was astounding on several different levels. But what, what is the historical kind of theological arguments either in support or against that? Our nation or any nation could literally be defined as Christian. What do we mean by that?

[00:19:16] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I think defining those terms is important because at the most foundational level, people are the only ones that can be Christians. A nation can't be Christian because a Christian is someone who has a personal relationship with God. And so I think when most people speak of America as a Christian nation, what they mean by that is that the nation at its core was founded upon Christian principles and was founded upon a belief in the importance of a relationship with God.

Basically, the desire to see people be good Christians, I think is what a lot of people think about when they use that term. And historically, there's arguments for and against it. A lot of it depends on how you weigh. people's practical actions versus their stated beliefs. Many of the founding fathers, for example, were deists that had a very high opinion of Christian morality and wanted to see the nation as a whole, adopt a Christian ethic and a Christian morality.

They just themselves didn't necessarily want to go as far as saying Jesus is Lord, or that Jesus was raised from the dead or that miracles are real. So there is a disconnect to an extent between, that you have to make what people wanted to see for the nation versus what they wanted for themselves.

And I think when we think about America as a Christian nation, the closest we can get there is to focus more on that basic respect for a Judeo Christian morality that seems to have undergirded a

lot of the founding fathers a lot of their desires for what they wanted America to become, and a lot of what they really believed was important for society to flourish.

[00:20:45] **Dr. Mark Turman:** helpful. Do you think it's also helpful, Ryan, for us to think in terms of the majority of it, we say that America is a Christian nation. We say that this country over here is an a Muslim nation, or this country over here is a Hindu nation. Are we also thinking, or should we be thinking the majority of the people are oriented toward that system of faith.

They, they might not actually believe the core tenants of Christianity or Islam, but that's their general orientation. That's their general heritage as a culture from a primary standpoint. Is it, is it more about an, a general orientation? That is dominant within a particular group of people or a country.

[00:21:31] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I think that plays a lot, has a large role in it as well especially because it's helpful to remember that, like you mentioned, when we think about other nations, we often describe that more, what most of your people believe as the defining characteristic for the nation. Particularly when we talk about Middle Eastern countries and we talk about them as being Muslim nations without necessarily parsing up which branch of Islam that means or theologically what all that, that entails.

And I think we can do the same for America where. for the bulk of our history, we could be considered a Christian nation because more people were Christian than anything else. But even within that, I think one of the things we've seen in the last few decades is just how important it is to really know what you mean when you call yourself a Christian, because that basic understanding of I'm not Muslim, I'm not Jewish, I'm not Hindu, so I must be a Christian has been a popular approach for people throughout much of America's history, but it's It's different on a pretty fundamental level from what the Bible says constitutes being a Christian.

And if you look at the demographics around when America was first founded, how the second great awakening was required because It was the majority of people were not going to church on a regular basis. The majority of people were not doing many of the things that we would think of as being characteristic of a Christian faith.

And those no longer define their lives. And this is a decade after the American Revolution ended, that that's the majority of America. And so it really is difficult to go back and historically say, for the whole of the nation's history, we can be characterized as something as what the Bible would probably call majority Christian.

Outside of that basic respect for Judeo Christian morality, the desire to not be anything else. But I do think it's, that it can be a helpful perspective and just remembering that despite the changing

demographics of what individuals may have believed, there was, does seem to be a fairly consistent respect for Judeo Christian morality that has undergirded most of our history.

[00:23:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Go ahead, Jim.

[00:23:30] **Dr. Jim Denison:** And one thing I would add to that, thank you, Ryan, for that. I think that's a brilliant, his backgrounds in history, as you might. Not be surprised, Mark, and that's where his doctorate is, and I always learn so much when he helps us in that way. The thing I would add to that very briefly is that in much of Islam, you have the ability to actually function nationally in the context of Islam.

Sharia law gives you the means by which to do that. The Levitical Code gave the Old Testament Israel a theocratic means of functioning as a nation. The New Testament doesn't do that. Christian theology doesn't give us what you would need in order to create a functioning nation. You could call a Christian nation.

It doesn't prescribe a specific political system. It doesn't prescribe a specific economic system. It doesn't tell you the things you have to have in order to function. function as a nation per se, in the way that Islam does, and even in the way that Levitical codes in Judaism could be seen to do. And so yet again, it's impossible to have a Christian nation, if by that you mean a nation that functions in the way that Christianity says a nation should.

Because Christianity doesn't do that. It's much more universal. That's one of the reasons Christianity works so well around the world. That's why we're saying this fifth great awakening right now is because you can be a Christian in so many different systems. One of the strongest churches I know anywhere on earth is the Cuban Christian movement, which is happening in the context of a communistic system, a very oppressive, communistic, anti capitalistic.

system, for example. And so because Christianity isn't tied to a specific sort of geopolitical kind of system, it can therefore be universal and be available to the whole world. But that does make it different from most of the other religions of the world that could be a means by which a nation functions.

And that's what you're seeing in Iran. That's what you're seeing in Saudi Arabia. One Shiite, the other Sunni. Back to the point you made earlier, you have to define your terms by Muslim, but they are attempting to be a Muslim nation. That's the intention that's behind what they're doing so much of what anchors them with moderate nations like Jordan is that Jordan attempts to be a democracy and yet a Muslim nation?

And the radicalized Muslims would say that that's heresy. Democracy is heresy. Why do you want the laws of men when you have the laws of God? One of the reasons Osama bin Laden was

so angry at the Saudis is because of their concessions to the West and his belief that they were in many ways corrupting pure Islam as he saw how a nation should function.

So, again, Christianity doesn't give you the means by which to create a nation in a geopolitical sense. And I think that's important to keep in mind.

[00:26:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Ryan, you had a thought.

[00:26:08] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Yeah. One other thing I did want to add, kind of along those same lines, is that another, I think, maybe helpful way to look at it historically is what parts of your history are you most proud of? And in America's history, I think a lot of the things we would point to is saying, okay, those are the things that I want to define our history as a nation, a lot of those were undergirded by Christian principles.

And I do think that can be a helpful perspective when we're parsing how we understand this national morality, or this national history as well, and as America, a Christian nation. It's like some of our proudest moments happened because of Christians living out their faith in ways that probably wouldn't have been possible without that.

And I do think that's a helpful perspective to

[00:26:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I think, I think you're absolutely right. But it also reminds me that Jim, I appreciate the example of Jordan trying to figure out how to weave these things together from their perspectives. It reminds me of a conversation I had with an attorney and a leader in Israel. That Israel's trying to do this from the standpoint of being a Jewish democracy in trying to do that.

Jim, do you feel like we're in some ways trying to reach back or to reach in some direction to try to make Christianity work on that level in, is it manifested in things like we need to have the 10 commandments in every public building. We, that needs to become the, the, the paradigm by which we.

all of our legislative and legal system. We should pick up the, perhaps the sermon on the Mount and bring the sermon on the Mount and the, the 10 commandments together, which they're already woven together in a deep way. But we should let those kind of be the two pillars of our of our economic, legal and cultural life together.

Are we, are we trying to make Christianity work in the same way that one of these Muslim countries, either Shiite or Sunni, is trying to make Islam work in that sense.

[00:28:04] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I, perhaps so, certainly rhetorically, you would say that that's part of bringing God, the nation back to God is kind of some of what you're seeing behind some of

the symbolism behind that, I think some of the rhetoric behind that. But if you parse that for very long, you realize how difficult that project becomes.

For instance, in the Ten Commandments, we learned that thou shalt not commit adultery. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, as you said, gives us interpretation of that and says that lust is adultery. Are we now going to outlaw lust in America? How are we going to police that once we do that? How are we going to find that?

What is that going to say about popular media? What's that going to say about internal personal lives? What is that saying about how we live our lives on some daily basis? How legalistic do we wish to become here? If we in fact want to make that happen, the 10 commandments outlaw murder. Jesus says, hating your brother is murder, is the attitude that leads to murder.

So are we going to legislate against hate? And how are we going to do that? So once again, we start trying to do what Sharia law does with the 10 commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, just to pick those two examples, just those, those four chapters out of all that you could be doing if you're thinking in terms of biblical imposition, that sort of thing.

Once you start doing that, it becomes an impossible project. Almost immediately. Part of the reason, as you know, that you have the mission and the Jamorah and the Talmud and all of that is because you had the Jews trying to apply the 10 commandments to every dimension of life. So you had interpretation, then hedges and then hedges around the hedges.

And you had 39 categories of Sabbath regulation, not 39 Sabbath laws, 39 categories. Of sabbath laws. How far can you walk on the sabbath? What kind of burden can you carry on the sabbath? Can you get water out of a well with one hand, but not two? Can you wear false teeth on the sabbath? Can you have a pin in your clothes on the sabbath?

Once you start trying to legislate morality, it becomes impossible and that's the jewish attempt to do that in a very different context So yeah, I think there's a rhetorical move mark to what you're saying But once you get past it you realize how impossible it is To make that actually be how you legislate morality in a country like ours.

[00:30:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, but we, as you're talking to him, it makes me think we've had, we have some of our own history with this. You and I are old enough to remember what were called blue laws, where you couldn't go shop at certain stores on a Sunday. And I can remember going into a. A store when I was a kid with my dad and you could, you could buy a piece, you could buy a nail, but you couldn't buy a hammer and things like that.

We're, we know that there's been laws on the books where adultery was considered illegal or was legislated as being illegal. That divorce in some regards was illegal. So we, we do have some of our own. History and struggle with this, right?

[00:30:52] **Dr. Jim Denison:** We do and that history makes the point doesn't it how impossible it is really to legislate morality impossible because if the heart doesn't change at the end of the day, there's always a way around the law itself Always a way to qualify it always a way to quantify it. So you had blue laws except for essential products.

What's essential? And what's essential here isn't the same thing as essential there. We see a strong move these days as another example to bring prayer back to the public schools, as it said, someone said, as long as there's tests there'll be prayer in public schools, but they mean an official prayer, something said over the loudspeakers at the start of class, as I'm old enough to remember.

And a lot of people remember as something that they wish was the case. Okay. What prayer? If we're in Utah, will that be a Muslim prayer or a Mormon prayer? Rather? If we're in Hawaii, will that be a Buddhist prayer? If we're in New York, will that be a Catholic prayer? If we have a Christian let's say Protestant private school, will that be a different prayer than if it's in a public school?

Who gets to make that prayer? Who gets to say that prayer? Who gets to decide that prayer? If we're going to legislate that all prayers must be Protestant which Protestant? Are they going to be Baptist? Are they going to be Methodist? Are they going to be yeah. How are we going to do this? Okay. So it's Baptist.

Is it going to be Southern Baptist? Is it going to be Texas Baptist? Is it going to be Cooperative Baptist? Okay. So it's Southern Baptist. Which Southern Baptist? Because as you know, there's several streams right now on the SPC that are at war with each other. So at the end of the day, you start trying to change hearts through laws.

You understand that again, the brilliance of Jesus ethic. And Jesus believed that it's only when you change the heart that you change the hands. And that's why he so much wanted to see a new creation. That's the beauty of the gospel, because in Christ, we can be a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come, and then everything changes when the heart changes.

[00:32:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I, I think that's the best way we could probably think about spiritual awakening, right, Jim, is that when, when we see a large number of people personally expressing that their hearts are, are changed and are being changed by Christ that might be the simplest and clearest definition of awakening.

When that happens to a significant number of people. Within a particular time and place. Is that a fair way of thinking about

[00:33:04] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I think so, and then when you see cultural results from that, you could see a revival change as a person and awakening change as a culture, and so you do see divorce rates go down. You do see murder rates go down. You remember in the Welsh awakening that the coal mines went out of business for a time because the coal miners all got converted and stopped using obscene language and their mules could no longer understand their commands.

And saloons went bankrupt and police made barbershop quartets to sing in churches because there was no one to arrest So there is a period of time during a great awakening as we call it when you really do society see society change But not because it's legislated not because during that awakening someone came out and made saloons illegal It's because hearts were changed and they had no more customers No one wanted to go there.

They were legally allowed to go there, they didn't want to go there. And that's when the change is most systemic and most transformative.

[00:33:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And I let me jump off here and, and take us to a place. We, we, we don't want to go too far down this road for this topic, but an example of that would be what we've talked about in other contexts around being pro life and in advocating for the sanctity of all life and particularly for the unborn, that the idea would be that we wouldn't have to legislate against abortion because.

There would be so many people's hearts turned toward God and turned toward life. There'd be less people, if any people looking for an abortion, is that, is that a way of thinking about that?

[00:34:30] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Now, years ago I was speaking at an event, actually at the place where Roe v. Wade began at the Dallas, what used to be the Dallas courthouse. Henry Wade was the Dallas district attorney that was sued in Roe v. Wade. Back in the day that a culminated in 1973. So there was a pro life event that was there.

And one of the speakers that was also on the platform with me was an apologist for the pro life movement. That's really what he spends his life doing is going around it and doing debates and making making the best kind of logical arguments for life and against abortion that he can. And I heard him say something that really resonated with me on that platform.

He said, our real goal here is to make abortion abhorrent. That was his word. Abhorrent. And I really think that's right. That's really, at the end of the day, not a matter for law, that's a matter for heart. And that's our job, is to make abortion abhorrent in the culture. To a day, because you'll

always, especially with medication abortion, it's going to be virtually impossible to make abortion no longer available.

It always was available, even prior to 1973, depending on the context, but I can't see, can't imagine a world in which it can't, where it can be made absolutely not available. So what you have to do ultimately to save all lives at risk of abortion is make it abhorrent. And that's ultimately our job as followers of Christ.

[00:35:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And I would even take that even more broadly to say, our goal is to model and also to aspire to, to pursue that all sin is abhorrent. And, and all righteousness, holiness is the most attractive thing. That's really what we're talking about is, is that the, the way of Christ and the way of His righteousness that starts in the heart is the most attractive thing.

And by, by converse that all sin would be abhorrent. And how can we how can we move toward that? How can we preach and teach toward that? How can we encourage and model that in every way, including within our politics? And we do that in a lot of ways. We do it symbolically. Ryan, I wanted to come back to you and, and we kind of zoom out a little bit more again around how we think in, in phrases, we think in terms of symbols of previous podcasts, we had Caitlin Chess with us who wrote a book about how the Bible has been used and sometimes abused in politics.

One of those phrases is this idea of America as a city on a hill. And I want to get you to unpack that a little bit and some of the history around that. And. This whole idea that America is you know, some people would want us to think that Jesus had America in mind when he used this phrase in the sermon on the mount, take us back through that a little bit and.

What may, what elements of that might be good and what elements about that are dangerous for us as a nation?

[00:37:21] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Like yeah, I think it's another example, one of those examples where on a personal level, absolutely, Americans should want to be a city on a hill. But when it comes to applying it to the nation, that's not really where the that term actually didn't become part of the popular conversation with 1950s.

Its origin, the, there was a historian who went back and was trying to understand America's Foundings around the time of the Cold War, a little before that. and was looking for a way to, to frame America historically that would highlight biblical roots and would highlight biblical foundations.

And he found a sermon by a Puritan named John Winthrop who he delivered Winthrop delivered the sermon aboard a ship called the Arbella before it disembarked in 1630. So it was about 10

years after, you know, a lot of the new colonists started coming to the new world, but he was among the first Puritans to really come and establish a colony here.

And The, he basically used that term, oftentimes it's been used in politics today, especially to give this sense of God established America with a special vision and for this special purpose to bless the world. And I think that concept has pros and cons, but the idea of using Winthrop as the basis for that is historically flawed.

We started to see that in the. After Miller kind of started proposing it, you see presidents starting with JFK, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, all these presidents start to refer to it, but Ronald Reagan in the 1970s was really the first to take it and popularize it as this sort of call to remember your origins and call to personal pursuing your personal best and things that aren't inherently wrong, but the context of Winthrop's sermon is he delivered it when he delivered aboard the boat was to essentially try and scare people into being faithful.

The bulk of that sermon was describing the community, the kind of community they wanted to have. The Puritans left England in large part because they wanted, they were dissatisfied with the Church of England's morality and wanted to basically give the world a proof of concept that you could actually live your biblical faith.

And so, if you don't mind, like I think it's helpful to read the entire quote rather than just the city on a hill part. And at the end of his sermon he wrote, he stated, For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work, We have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us.

We shall be made a story and a byword through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land wither we are going.

And so it's this basic idea that the, when Miller pulled that idea of the city on a hill, the context of that is Winthrop saying, what we're about to do is really hard. And if we screw it up, the rest of the world is going to blame Christianity for us. It is going to blame Christianity for our failures.

So be better. And I think that last thing. That impulse to be better is helpful, but the idea of America being the city on a hill that was specially purposed by God to fulfill, to be a light to the rest of the world it may have some, there may be some arguments for it. They do not come from where they're usually from the usual place where they usually are stated to originate like that idea

of city on a hill meant something fundamentally different to the Puritans than it does to many American Christians

[00:40:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, you had a comment?

[00:41:01] **Dr. Jim Denison:** As Ryan's explaining all of that, I'm thinking about a conversation I had over dinner a number of years ago with a Cuban pastor who was in the States and he was preaching at our church in Dallas, a longtime friend of mine. And we were talking together and he said he had been studying America's history and he had come to understand why God had blessed America.

And I thought this will be interesting to hear what a Cuban pastor thinks about our conversation right now. If you were on this, on this podcast with it, he said, God has blessed America. So America's Christians can bless the world. And I, from then till now, I believe there to be truth in that. Now, I don't want to take that too far.

I don't want to put in some some kind of causalities that don't exist there. But it goes with what Ryan would just say, if we're to be a city on a hill, it is to the degree that we're to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world for the sake of the world that we're here to serve, it's a means to an end.

And to the degree that God has blessed us, and he has, God has given America remarkable resources on a variety of levels. And to the degree that God has done that, he's done that as a means to the end, so that we can, in terms, bless others as we have ourselves been blessed. So I think my Cuban pastor.

understood our national purpose, perhaps better than a lot of Americans do.

[00:42:14] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, probably so. Ryan?

[00:42:18] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** And one thing I would add to that is just in summation, I do think that highlights that this idea of being a city on a hill, both I think biblically and historically, should be seen as a call to responsibility rather than a source of pride. And I think that's where we often get it wrong today is we view this American exceptionalism as like, look how great America is.

Look how much God has blessed us when the reality is if we don't immediately pivot from there to go. Okay. So how are we going to be good stewards of that blessing to bless others, then we're sinning, then we're failing, then we're not upholding whatever purpose God had for calling us here and for establishing this nation.

And I think that is something our founders had some, had a better understanding of that we do today. And I think we do them a disservice and we're being historically inaccurate when we forget that.

[00:43:09] **Dr. Mark Turman:** What that sounds like, Ryan, is, is even if you subscribe to some level of American exceptionalism, Like I said, if you don't move very quickly to the idea of stewarding that in an appropriate way for the blessing of others, then it's become, then it becomes self serving pride. Jim, you were going to.

[00:43:28] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, just one, one last thought there. The original context, as we all know, of the city on the hill is in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is preaching the sermon and he's on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. And the city he spoke pointing to almost all scholars believe it's the city of Shavuot or Safed that's still there today.

One of the holy cities of Israel today. We've been there a number of times when we take people to Israel, often we go up and see it. And it's this city that's literally up on the top of the hill that Jesus could be pointing at as he's preaching the Sermon on the Mount. But then he immediately makes his point.

He said a city on a hill cannot be hid, neither do men light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. The whole purpose of being the city on a hill is to manifest good deeds that glorify God.

If they're not, we're not accomplishing our purpose and no light's under the basket, or in Jesus case, the whole city's under a basket. And so to make the point that both of you are making, let's see this as a means to an end. Let's be good stewards of the gifts God's given us for his glory and for our good.

[00:44:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, but that's just so important for us to have this kind of an understanding of something so symbolic like Ryan, I love the fact that you point out that it wasn't just Ronald Reagan, it was a number of people before him. I was thinking when you were describing that about HW Bush and his thousand points of light, maybe even as an extension of that idea.

You know, it's, it's always been interesting to me, continues to be interesting to me how. In different moments of our culture, we coin new phrases and we, we, we latch on to certain verbiage and and that idea of a city on a hill has really been A driving statement that has given rise to this phrase that we now use called Christian nationalism.

Over the last two, three years, I don't know how many times I've heard that phrase. I don't know how many books I've read and articles I've read dealing with this. Terminology of Christian nationalism. I can tell you I don't think I'd ever heard this term in any significant way Ten five or ten years ago, but it's all around us now So Jim, I would come back to you your simple definition of Christian nationalism and is it or is it not biblical

[00:45:45] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I would love to give you the simple definition. The problem is there are a number of definitions, as you know, Mark. The one that typically people, I think, have in mind when they speak of Christian nationalism is the idea that America is intended to be a Christian nation, and by that they mean a nation that privileges Christians.

A nation that lives biblical truth and morality in every dimension of itself, that it was founded as such, and was always intended to be that, and should be that again today. That it should live in terms of biblical legislation as it were, and it should privilege the Christian religion. And the Christian church wouldn't be a separation of church and state.

In fact, often Christian nationalists will point out that that phrase was used by Thomas Jefferson and his letter to Danforth Baptist whom they will call a deist, of course some would even say a pagan. And so they'll say it's, and they're right. It's not in the declaration of independence. It's not in the constitution.

And so some Christian nationalists will say there should be no separation of church and state. That really what we want to have here is a nation in the privileges Christianity where everybody's a Christian, we hope. And everything is done according to Christian biblical guidelines. As I've said earlier, that's impossible actually to do, but I think that's the concept a lot of people have in mind.

Now there are others that will back away from that. There could be called Christian nationalists in the sense that they want America to be as Christian as possible. There's some that would call me a Christian nationalist because I want to see as many Americans come to Christ as possible because I want our nation to honor and glorify the Lord to the degree that I can lead it to do so.

If I'm being salt and light, if I'm making disciples of all nations, they would call that Christian nationalism, even though I don't think it is. So I think it's nationalism to the degree that someone sees the nation as an entity, as Christian. As Ryan said earlier, it can't really be done because you can be a Muslim nation.

You could be perhaps a Jewish nation can't be a Christian nation because a Christian is an individual that has a relationship with Christ and a nation doesn't have a soul, but that nonetheless, I think is what people mean by that. A nation that is explicitly and a privilege is Christianity and it lives according to Christian guidelines, whatever that's understood to mean.

Even though that's very difficult, if not impossible to do.

[00:47:55] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim? Do you think that that the converse of that is at least for some true which would be? That they would hinder those those that are not Christian or those that don't want to be Christian. If, if, if those, are there people going so far as to say, I want America to be a Christian nation.

I want it to privilege Christianity, but that, that also means I want us to contain other systems of faith. Are some going that far,

[00:48:23] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I don't know if they would use the word contain, and I don't know that they would admit what you just said per se, but that's the outcome of a lot of the rhetoric and a lot of the strategy that's here. We want evangelical Christians to dominate every school board, to dominate every local city council, to dominate local governance, that sort of thing, and therefore to privilege Christianity wherever they have influence by which to do so.

The outcome of that is going to be The inevitable outcome of that is going to be that those that are not Christians are not willing to be publicly identified as Christians are going to feel themselves to be second class citizens on a variety of levels. They're going to be Christian prayers at high school football games.

And if you're not a Christian, you're just going to have to tolerate that, going to have to listen to that. The same way when we're in Muslim nations, you're listening to the prayer call as it's issued across the day. And you're not a Muslim, but you just have to listen to it because you're in a Muslim nation.

That's how non Christians are going to feel about prayers at city council meetings, or at football games, or at baseball games, or pretty much any civic event or any civic function as it were. You're going to be seeing, I think, a great deal of privileging of Christian morality as it's understood, relative to rather ambiguous moral concepts, moral ambiguous concerns and issues.

So it's going to be a variety, I think, of challenges, even down to the local level as some seek to make this move forward. And no doubt about it, Mark, there are some that are spending billions of dollars. To accomplish what I'm describing right now. To get their version of Christian evangelicals elected to office from the most local level, all the way to the national level.

Friends of mine, people I have known over the years with whom I very much disagree on some of these issues, but that nonetheless are spending a great deal of time and money to accomplish that vision. I think they're well intentioned. I think they genuinely do think that we're wrong in this conversation right now.

I think they do believe on the historical merits that America was intended to be a uniquely Christian nation and should be that again. And that God won't bless us until we do, but he will if we do. I really do think they have that sense of this, even though I just disagree with them on the merits.

[00:50:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Ryan, you had a thought.

[00:50:28] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Yeah, just two things I want to, I'd like to add to that is historically, if you look at the separation of church and state I think it's good to remember that that was instituted primarily to protect the church from the state rather than the other way around. And while Thomas Jefferson was a huge advocate for it, you see the beginnings of that within the Baptist who didn't like the fact that Because they were not the official religion of any of the colonies, they couldn't practice their faith.

I mean, some of the earliest Baptist leaders were whipped in the public square simply because they were Baptist and not congregationalist or not because religious freedom in the early, in the, at the start of America was that each state got to choose their brand of Christianity and you had to subscribe to that.

And I think going back to the Christian nationalism conversation, I, One of the ways that I found helpful to kind of think about it is, what is our goal? And it seems, while I don't think any of them would, this is necessarily the case on a conscious level for Christian nationalists, I think a lot of it is motivated by the desire to make America a comfortable place for Christians, rather than by the desire to create an environment in which people can come to know Christ.

And there are points at which those two goals are fundamentally in opposition to each other. And I think the call of scripture is to always choose what, to always do what we can to help people know Jesus rather than to make our lives comfortable. And so to the extent we have to choose between those two things, I think we're called to be inclusive rather than exclusionary.

And one of the downfalls, I think of a lot of the way Christian nationalism expresses itself is it makes it harder for people to come to know Jesus.

[00:52:03] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Good point. Yeah. Lots, lots to think about just in that comment. So yeah, thank you for that, Ryan. I want to, there's so much more I want to try to get to. And so I'm watching the clock here for all of us and for all who will listen to us. But I want to come around to at least one or two more ideas. And Jim, I want to come back to kind of a theological biblical underpinning of some of the ways that we make policy and make policy out of the way that we understand ourselves.

or understand human nature and particularly around this big idea of human depravity or sometimes it's called in certain Christian circles, original sin, that we are all sinners. And that that will show up in some ways in the way that we operate our country, the way that we operate and participate in our democracy, our and in our understanding of nationhood.

But can you kind of help us think for a moment about this theological biblical tension that we live in between the book of Genesis chapters one and two describing us as being uniquely made in the image of God. But then we are all sinners because of the original sin of Adam and Eve to the point that like the new Testament will say that we are dead in our sin, that we are dead toward God.

And that, that sinfulness of our lives is so pervasive that it touches everything about us personally, but it also touches everything about us collectively. How would you want us to think about this? Because there's a basic argument between all of us are good and we just need to get the hindrances out of the way that are keeping us from thriving as well as we'd like, or are we all fundamentally flawed?

And that means we're going to continue to struggle at some level. Help us parse that out a little bit.

[00:53:57] **Dr. Jim Denison:** First of all, I need to correct your question because what you just said, Mark, applies to everybody but my grandkids. Okay. Okay. Okay. And I want that to be stated here. I

[00:54:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And my grandkids

[00:54:06] **Dr. Jim Denison:** that inherited original sin skipped them somehow. And don't know how that happened. I don't, I really don't, but no, but that's, that's my assertion nonetheless.

[00:54:16] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** As the father of two of those grandkids, I can say that that is incorrect.

[00:54:19] **Dr. Jim Denison:** And see, I just think that's an expression of sin on the part of their son. And making that statement is how I see it. So, you know, but having said that with that, with that caveat in mind, you're really describing two different reasons for there to be democracy. Rousseau and those that would be in his school of thinking would say, because of, because people are so good, they deserve democracy because we're so good.

We can be trusted to govern ourselves and we don't need Kings. We don't need autocrats. We don't need theocrats. We really can do this ourselves. And because we're so good, we all deserve a vote. We all deserve an opportunity to serve. We all deserve to be able to run for office, be

elected to office. And because we're good people, we can govern ourselves and self governance should be the result of that.

That's one version of democracy that ignores the fact of inherited original sin, the fact that sin pervades every dimension of our lives. What's called the doctrine of total depravity doesn't mean that we can never do anything good. It just means that sin affects every dimension of our lives. It affects our thinking, it affects our wills, it affects our, every dimension of our beings are infected by sin.

And Rousseau is ignoring that, in that version of democracy. The other version is the one that C. S. Lewis describes and explains, I think, as well as anybody. When he says he believes in democracy, not because people are good, but because they're bad. But because they can't be trusted with unsupervised authority over others. That they can't be trusted with unaccountable authority over others. That it's because we voting vote people in and can vote them out. It's because we can't trust each other with unsupervised authority that we need, that we can't have Kings who don't have accountability and we can't have autocrats and dictators and theocratic systems because then they have unaccountable authority.

We need to have accountable authority that democracy provides because we're fallen. And because none of us can be trusted to run the world by ourselves. Lewis says of himself, I'm so fallen. I can't be trusted to run a hen house. By myself, much less a nation. And so, and I believe that to be absolutely the case.

It's because of total depravity that I believe in democracy, that I'm grateful for democracy so that we can elect leaders and unelect leaders so that we can pass laws and then repeal laws so that we can adopt a constitution and then amend the constitution so that we can keep holding ourselves accountable to the common good, to the greater good in light of the sinfulness of individuals.

[00:56:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So, yeah, that's a great foundation to one of the things I wanted to at least touch on Ryan and Ryan, you and I had a conversation a day or two ago about how these issues can be addressed. Manifest themselves in nations over a long period of time. The world has just recently been hyper focused on France because of the Olympics and a lot of different things that we could talk about, some of which we have talked about in articles that the two of you have written and in other places.

But you brought up the idea of kind of comparing, contrasting the French Revolution and the American Revolution and I'm wondering is Is what your dad just described in this fundamental perspective of we're going to approach democracy as if we're all good versus we're going to approach democracy as if we're all flawed.

Do you think that really is in some ways a summation of the difference between these two revolutions, the American and the French?

[00:57:35] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I really do. I think if you look at the American Revolution, so much of it was founded on this belief that again, as I mentioned earlier, that even if like some of the founders didn't necessarily believe in Jesus as the son of God, they did have a profound level of respect for the Judeo Christian morality and a profound awareness of people's need for that morality.

And if you look at the French Revolution, They used many of the same philosophers such as John Locke and Rousseau for the foundation of what they believed the government should be. But beyond that, the French Revolution, and they, and they embraced a much more humanist perspective for it where they did think that people were good enough to rule.

That we didn't need the church anymore. And part of that, and, and, and. It's probably because the expression of Christianity in France had been like, was Catholicism for such a long period of time that there were legitimate questions about whether their clergy supported France or supported the Pope. And if put to a, put, made to choose between the two, which direction would they go?

But, and so when the revolution started. And also, leading up to the revolution the only semblance of democracy within France was the Estates General, where the 98 percent of France had a third of the vote, and then the clergy had a third, and the nobility had a third. So it's understandable that once that 98 percent decided they wanted all of the control, they wouldn't necessarily trust the other two branches of that.

form of government for that. But as a result of it, by four years into the French revolution you had the start of, you had the reign of terror starting in 1793, and they tried to set up a new calendar that didn't have any reference to Christian or royal influence. So they changed the starting date to be when France was declared a republic.

They changed the names of all the days and the months, and, to go away from anything religious. They outlawed Catholicism, which again in France was the same thing as outlawing Christianity, to the point that they forced priests to sign an oath saying they were more loyal to France than, than they were to the Pope.

And if they weren't, they were imprisoned, executed. Overall, at least 17, 000 people were guillotined across about a 10 month period of time with countless more dying in prisons. And beyond that, I think one of the biggest representations of their different approaches that whereas in America, you see this, you see George Washington talking about the importance of the church, the importance of Judeo Christian morality.

In France, they actually replaced the church with something called the cult of reason. And they turned the cathedral of Notre Dame into the temple of reason. Outside of Notre Dame, there were 28 statues of biblical kings that they took in the public square and beheaded the same way they did the Kings.

They did King Louis and they did Marie Antoinette and so many others and there was this even when that failed they were able to Basically make something akin to deism is a more lasting religion. They called it the cult of the Supreme being, and it allowed for the existence of God, but the theology was more based on a civic religion.

And so it was very deistic in that sense. And even that it was to the point that even after Napoleon came and kind of put an end to the revolution and eventually was declared emperor, France never really walked the religious side of that back. Part of that's because they either killed or exiled most of the clergy.

And so when they started to try and hack the thousand again, that wasn't. Really all that many Catholics left. And, but for even when the people for the most part decided they didn't like the, the French revolution form of government, they decided they did want to keep the French approach to Christianity and the French approach to religion.

And I think even to today that's main, that's stayed as part of their cultural ethos in a way that isn't necessarily the case for a lot of other

[01:01:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah. So, Yeah, that's, that's a, that's a big history lesson as a short history lesson on a big, big topic. But Jim like I said, with this hyper focus that we've all experienced for two or three weeks around France, would you say that we saw manifestations of these differing ideas playing themselves out over 250 some odd years?

Almost the difference Is there, can we really say there is a difference the way that the two nations have followed these two different ideas of democracy, how would you respond to that?

[01:01:43] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, really, I think you can, and it's really interesting that it was the French that enabled our independence, wasn't it? That it was their support, that it wasn't so much that they loved us as much as they hated Great Britain, for all the historical reasons that go inside that. But from then till now, Los Guinness and others have made a great deal of emphasis that we're choosing today between 1776 and 1789.

We, as a nation, Are making that decision. There's a strong movement, as you know, in America to believe that we were founded on faulty premises. That America in 1776 was founded by a white supremacist that we're seeking to use the mechanisms of democracy to advance their own personal agendas and that really we need to tear the whole thing down.

It's a critical theory move that would say that it's the oppressor and the oppressed and it's because of slavery at the heart of America's experiment that America needs to refashion itself in 1789 lines, in secularist lines, in cult of reason. Lines that we need to get back to an enlightenment as it were another American enlightenment great deal of emphasis today in this country moving. Attempting to move in exactly that direction with woeful ignorance of how it turned out the first time. As Ryan described so well of what actually happened when this move took place. It was attempted in France and will happen again here.

Nietzsche was right that the will to power is the basic drive in human nature. That's why we need the mechanisms of democracy in order to keep from on some level exerting our will to power against each other. It's Adam and Eve, it's Cain and Abel, all the way. That's why we need these things, but it's also why John Adams said that our democracy was made only for a moral and religious people and is wholly unsuited to the governance of any other.

It's why George Washington in his farewell address said all of the, of all the dispositions essential to democracy religion and morality are indispensable supports. As he put it we can't have, we can't govern ourselves as a people if we can't govern ourselves individually. And so just like we need accountability to each other through democracy, we need accountable to God through Christianity.

That's what, and, and Christianity uniquely provides the opportunity to change the human heart in a way that no other religion even professes to be able to do. Jesus can make us a new creation so that we then are accountable to him, even as we're accountable to one another.

[01:04:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Ryan, you had a thought.

[01:04:03] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Yeah. I'm. I think all of that is correct. And we started this conversation by talking about the need for humility. And I think so often what you see is that people attempt the same things thinking we can do it because we're better. And that just is not the case. I mean, people are still falling. People were still making the same mistakes, just in new ways.

And the idea that something that we can do, we can succeed where others failed, because. We're fundamentally just better people, I think has never really proven to be true. Especially if the ideas are the same. And I think in this case, the ideas are the same. It's just what's changed is people think we can pull it off now.

And I mean, that's just not the case. It never has

[01:04:46] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Mark, it's because our technology has improved. We think we've improved. It's because conditions have changed, have improved and demonstrably have

improved this technology about which we're doing this, it wouldn't have existed even a few years ago that we think we've improved, but human nature doesn't change, neither does divine nature.

That's why scripture is just as relevant today as it ever was, and just as urgent as it ever was.

[01:05:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah, it is really kind of the height of arrogance to say we can figure out what everybody else has failed to figure out

[01:05:12] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's right.

[01:05:14] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and you know, is enormously full of areas. But as we, as we wrap up, there's so many more questions I would love to delve into, but want to just ask both of you to take a moment to kind of land what we've been talking about.

In terms of practicality as we continue to work our way in coming weeks and months toward this election we know that even after the election, there are no telling what kind of conversations and situations we'll be walking through. together as a nation and as a global community from from where we are today and what we've talked about today, what would be a couple of practical ideas that you would give to both believers and to churches as they try to understand these things and as they try to walk through them well?

As a healthy follower of Christ, who wants to go first?

[01:06:04] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I can go. One thing that's just comes to mind is that I think as we approach the election, as we approach politics in general, it's helpful. It's good to remember the government can be helpful, but it can never take our place. Like, we can never, if we ever get to the point that we try and farm out our responsibility as Christians to help people know Christ, or to help people embrace a Christian worldview for the reasons that it simply, experience proves its best, God's Word demonstrates that it's best, then I think we run a real risk.

I think as we approach the election, there's so much talk about it being, you know, the most important one in history, how, you know, if either side wins, democracy is going to fall apart. And at the end of the day, I mean, Christianity has existed in a number of I think it's important to remember that we have a number of different a number of cultural landscapes, what determines whether or not it thrives is the degree to which Christians live it out.

And so I would just like to encourage our audience to encourage us to not to not buy into any sort of rhetoric that would make us think we can never hand over our responsibility to the responsibility Christ gave each of us in the Great Commission that we can ever, we can never entrust that to the government.

We can never entrust that to politicians and expect it to turn out

[01:07:17] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It's a good word. Jim, we'll give you the last word.

[01:07:20] **Dr. Jim Denison:** All right, that's a little frightening and I agree with Mark with what Ryan just said. I mean, Jesus said to us, we are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. Didn't say that to the politics of the day or the politics of our day, rather to us instead. Just two imperatives and they're things that we already know, but we have to keep emphasizing.

As you watch the news of the day happen, pray through the news. Pray for the leaders that you're seeing, pray for the debates that are coming up, pray for the things that you see as they're continuing to evolve, because you are commanded by scripture to do that. 1 Timothy 2 commands us to pray for those in positions of authority.

We are obligated to do that. And so turn your discernment into prayer, turn what you see intercessor through this time. And then as you do that, the second thing will emerge, and that is that your witness will honor the Lord far after the election is done. Amen. I know we've said this before, but we have to keep saying it.

Your witness is going to matter just as much after the election as it does before. Don't sacrifice it for that sake. Be careful about how you speak of politics and politicians in these days. Be careful of how we alienate others, of how we, even in our own families in the midst of all this. I read the other day in the wall street journal, Mark, about marriages that, according to marriage counselors are struggling right now because of politics and ideology on an unprecedented level.

Where it's not just parents and children, or it's not just extended family getting together at Thanksgiving, but it's even husbands and wives that are struggling in their marriages because they have different positions and political issues or whatever they might be on a level that's unprecedented, according to these marriage counselors, as they've experienced all this.

And so it's just so critical, isn't it? That we love our neighbor as ourselves, that we continue to manifest to the glory of God, the grace of Christ as we speak about this. I'm not allowed to slander. My scripture, I'm not allowed to say about you what it wouldn't say to you. That applies to the president that applies to a candidate that applies to the commentators that applies to all that's in the midst of this.

And then the good news here is as we pray for our nation and pray for our leaders, and then as we pray, the Holy spirit helps us to ourselves, man, be the answer to that prayer. As we demonstrate the grace of Christ and what we do ourselves, we'll draw others to Christ. And now we're back to being that light on a hill.

Now we really, that city on a hill, now we are manifesting the good deeds of the Holy Spirit so that we're drawing others to Christ and, and the, and the Father is glorified. And then there's a

cycle that happens here. We pray and then we speak, which enables us to pray, which enables us to speak. And then at the end of the day, wouldn't it be wonderful if people came to Christ because of how we engaged in the politics of these days, Wouldn't it be wonderful if churches were strengthened, individuals were brought closer to the Lord and to each other?

If this awakening we've been praying for could in large part be birthed because of the way Christians responded to the chaos of these days, wouldn't that be the way that God would redeem these times to his glory? And we should join him in seeking that goal, I think.

[01:10:11] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Gentlemen, thank you for a fabulous conversation that covered a lot of ground and could cover a lot more. And we want to thank the two of you, but we also want to thank those that have been listening with us. And we pray that this has been helpful to you and brings. You a, an amount of clarity to think biblically, to live holy and beautiful lives and to serve others well, even in this season of somewhat chaotic politics, there are opportunities for us.

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