

The intersection of faith, politics, and a culture of life

TRANSCRIPT

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

Mark Turman (00:02.348)

This is the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, Executive Director of Denison Forum and your host for another conversation today. I want to remind you that what we seek to do at the Denison Forum is to bring biblical clarity to today's concerns and confusion. We want to help you do that by encouraging you to think biblically, to live a holy and beautiful life and to serve redemptively wherever and however God gives you the opportunity.

Today we're recording our last in our politics discern differently series. And if you missed any of that, you can go back and pick up any of the previous podcasts. I want to also point out that we're gathering, continuing to gather more resources on our webpage at denisonforum.org/election. You can find a lot of podcasts as well as articles and other, resources from other friends of ours like one of our friends today that I'll introduce you to in just a moment, resources that will help you to think about and to pray about and to navigate, this certain season of politics that we are in as we move in the final weeks toward an election, which we all know will simply be a moment in time leading to other moments of transition. We will have a new president one way or the other.

And we will have a season of transition toward an inauguration and then toward all that comes after that. It seems like we play politics 365 days a year these days. and that's going to be one of things we talk about. we're going to talk about other things like us elections being fair and trusting American institutions. how can we think about character and policy together? we've heard a lot of this lesser of two evils conversation and, the imperfections of our system, as well as our political parties, and sometimes the candidates, obviously as well. Want to remind you that we are nonpartisan, non-denominational, so we're not trying to tell you who to vote for or what policies to vote for. We're trying to equip you to bring biblical framework to all of those thoughts and all of those decisions that you're facing. Today, our friend Curtis Chang is joining us again. Let me remind you of who Curtis is. If you're new, to him, Curtis has been on our podcast before, but he kind of lives in two different worlds. We don't always like to talk about that in the Denison Forum world about dividing the secular and the sacred, but sometimes it's helpful to

kind of think that way. Curtis lives with a foot in both of those worlds, in the secular world, as we call it. he is the, the founder of a consulting organization called consulting within reach.

which serves nonprofits and government agencies His consulting work has won an award from the white house. He teaches also strategic planning to the, a faculty member of America's university school of international service in the Christian world. If we can say it that way, he is a consulting professor at Duke divinity school and a senior fellow with the fuller theological seminary. He's also a former pastor of the evangelical covenant church in San Jose, California. And it's authored several books that you've heard us talk about here on the, on the denison forum podcast, which is the after party, better Christian politics, the anxiety opportunity. How worry is the doorway to your best self and engaging unbelief, a captivating strategy from Augustine to Aquinas. That is a mouthful, Curtis. So why don't you give me a break and say hello to our audience.

Curtis Chang (03:42.342)

Well, it's just a pleasure to be here. This is always one of my favorite podcasts to come on and guest. I'm really glad to be part of this important conversation that you've been convening for a number of episodes and really happy to wrap it up and offer hopefully what are some more helpful thoughts.

Mark Turman (03:59.766)

Well, I'm sure that you will. And I just want to let your, let our audience in on what you just alluded to, which is we've called in Curtis to be the closer, to this eight part series. And so he said he could get the last three outs. I think it's going to be more like five outs for us to win the pennant. but we're going to count on, Curtis's arm as well as this. This is a save opportunity. Yeah.

Curtis Chang (04:14.457)

Okay So this is a save opportunity, Mark? This is a save opportunity? Okay, good, good. Because I don't come in, my agent has contracted that I don't come in unless it's an actual save opportunity.

Mark Turman (04:29.974)

Yeah. And we're not saying that as a commentary on the previous seven episodes, but, you know, if anything, they were long relief and they set us up to have the opportunity to win. So, you know, it's not, it's not great baseball news here in the Dallas area where I'm based this year. but we're still celebrating that we are currently the world champions here in Dallas. And so we're to hang onto that for a few more weeks as much as we can. So.

Curtis Chang (04:33.393)

Let's face it they were they were long relief. I'm the scum the closer so you
Excellent, excellent.

Mark Turman (04:59.736)

Yeah. Well, Curtis, let's just dive in. There's so much that I want to talk about. I think I have a three hour podcast agenda, but we're going to see if we can squeeze that a little bit, but we're sitting here, a few weeks away from the election and not even 24 hours since there was apparently another assassination attempt against Donald Trump, the Republican nominee. and I just want to get you to share some thoughts about that generally. But one of things that really caught my attention, I was, I had just come home, from church and leading worship and having an opportunity to preach yesterday. And so I got home about mid afternoon and was kind of getting my world organized. And my wife said, look at this. Somebody took another shot at Donald Trump. And I said, what? And I immediately went to the television and started trying to move between channels to see who was reporting this. And so I went to all four major networks, two of which had, pro football games, obviously that we love that we were in the middle of the afternoon of football, here in the second week of the season. And I started flipping around and none of the major networks even interrupted their football games or other programming to talk about that there had been an assassination attempt down in Florida. And that just.

I got to tell you, Curtis, that just kind of blows my mind about what that may mean for us. What are your thoughts?

Curtis Chang (06:32.069)

Yeah, I think it is concerning in the sense that it was so downplayed because it at least suggests that we are almost kind of hardening ourselves or coarsening ourselves to sensitivity to the threat of political violence. And that's really problematic because, know, look, we can, of course, as we've talked about before, we can disagree on the substance of politics of who, candidate you vote for and so forth.

I don't think there's a straight line you can draw from the gospel to very clear political decisions on the substance. But there's a very clear line that you can draw from the cross to the renunciation of political violence. The cross is Jesus' renunciation of political violence. He had the option to call down the legions of angels to inflict violence against his political enemies, against the Roman Empire, as well as the Jewish establishment that had conspired against him. And he very much had that option. And he clearly renounced that. He clearly renounced that and forbade his followers to take that road. mean, that's why we have the story of flailing about with a sword against his enemies and Jesus rebuking him for that.

We see over and over Jesus rebuking his disciples when they want to call down fire upon their enemies, like when James and John want to call down fire on the Samaritan village that Jesus

was traveling through. you know, those are the moments when you see Jesus rebuke his disciples with utmost clarity and strength. And then of course, he himself choosing to suffer the actions of his enemies rather than to defend himself by inflicting violence in return. There's a clear straight line from allegiance to Jesus and a renunciation of political violence. And so that is a bright line that all of us should be trying to protect the line against violence, especially as Christians who are following Jesus. And so the extent that what you're talking about feels like a Just like a ho-hum like guess we're gonna have some political violence, and almost a Tolerance of it or just expectation of it that is troubling because that is something that I think as christians It is something we should all regardless of where we are on right or left. We should be united in standing again So I hope that line holds it is It is a threat as a you know the christian friend of ours, Elizabeth Newman, who works in the area of threat assessment, she has assessed that this election, more than any in our lifetime, has the greatest warning signs of political violence. And we need everyone, but I think we especially need the church to be on guard of it. Because as Elizabeth says, there's just the security apparatus, the official security apparatus, the security service,

Mark Turman (09:26.71)

Mm -hmm. Yeah.

Curtis Chang (09:50.317)

even when they're operating at their best. there are some signs that like, so I'm not sure they're operating at their best right now, but even at their best, they cannot foresee and forestall these lone actor kinds of events, which they all seem to have been thus far. It takes communities who these lone actors may be embedded in, or at least, know be have some visibility on, it takes those kinds of communities to be on the watch and churches are an important part of that protective fabric. And so this is an important moment for us to all be on guard and to be also very clear in our messaging, like for pastors that are listening to you, that whenever you say on politics that I hope one of the key messages you are communicating is the absolute renunciation and the sort of placing outside of any acceptable norm of any kind of political violence, whether it's by lone gunmen or by organized mobs. We cannot have a repeat of any of these assassination attempts or something like January 6th. And that's something we should all be united on.

Mark Turman (11:00.406)

Yeah, Curtis, let's bring that kind of down to grass level just right here at the moment is just, that, that one of our responsibilities, as well as an opportunity, but more responsibility in a moment like this is, I'm just imagining, a church leader, a pastor, a, a lay teacher in a church that when we get to next Sunday, they should say something about this and they should pray about this as a small group or as a congregation.

That this is not a direction that our country should in any way go. No matter what you think about either candidate, either party or the system as a whole, if there were ever a moment to pray that God would intervene and would keep us from something, political violence, especially on a national scale, like what an assassination attempt represents is something that we ought to be, like, you said, renouncing as well as praying against. I'm, I'm kind of thinking about that church leader who should I talk about this, not talk about this. This is absolutely one of those things you should call out strongly and pray about would be my, my feeling about it. And then I'm thinking Curtis about that person who is tempted to just shrug this off. and also that person who may be, you know, at the water cooler at work and something comes up about this, that somebody that no matter whether you support or not support.

Donald Trump, should speak to this in strong ways that violence is wrong. Is that the advice you would give to people?

Curtis Chang (12:32.431)

Yes, I think that's totally right. And I think there's I would take it one level further, which is not only the physical act of violence is wrong, and there should be a strong line. But you know, when Jesus talks about violence, he in his Sermon on the Mount, he makes it really clear that violence comes from the heart, and also can be expressed in speech, right? This is why he says, do not call each other Raka.

Mark Turman (12:56.311)

Yes.

Curtis Chang (12:59.429)

Do not call each other fool, idiot, moron, which is sort of the Hebrew, you know, meaning for, for Raqqa. Because that's kind of a form of violence against your, against you, against others, right? It is out of the heart that these, these things come. And so there is a continuum, a connected continuum between what I would call violent speech and violent acts, right? So when you are speaking violently, speaking murderously with an intensity and a demonization and an othering of the others that cause you to use some version of Raqqa, like you know, moron fool, that diminishes the ways that we, the other is a child of God made in the image of God. That sets the groundwork for physical action, for physical violence when we commit verbal violence on one another. And the verbal violence leads to physical violence and, or it paves the way for that.

And so this should be a moment that we also seek to actually guard our tongues and be very careful about the kinds of language that we're using in politics to talk about our opponents such that we're very careful to retain the humanity, the fellow child of godness, you know, that is inherent even in our political opponents. And so this is a moment for us to recapture that language.

Mark Turman (14:21.762)

Yeah, I think you're absolutely right. And as matter of fact, I was teaching on this yesterday from more of the more the proactive side out of Colossians four, where Paul is talking about he's asking the Colossian believers to pray for him and in his ministry and in his making the gospel plain. it's obviously at the immediate context is the opportunities that he desires to share the gospel in very clear ways. But he's he's also in more broadly applied talking about having important conversations that can sometimes be very emotional and very, if very offending possibly depending upon how you have them. but what I loved about that short little passage in Colossians four is he says, spin the first thing you should do. And the most thing you should do is to spend time talking to God about people before you talk to people about God or anything else. And, and if Christians would do that, if

Curtis Chang (15:15.244)

Mm. Mm. No.

Mark Turman (15:19.498)

in all of our conversation, be it about political things or anything else, if we would talk to God first and most, then probably all of our other conversations with people who are either outside the faith or in different mindsets about political parties and candidates, probably all of those conversations would go a lot better. Because one of things I wanted to just touch base, I was listening to some of your podcast people.

Curtis Chang (15:25.871)

Mmm.

Mark Turman (15:48.336)

have heard me recommend the good faith podcast, which is just some excellent, excellent material week over week. but I can't remember exactly what created this frame for me, but it, I'm not, let me just go on record saying is that I'm an, I'm not an MMA, boxing fan. Okay. It's. it does. Yeah. Those people are on a level of strength and, and,

Curtis Chang (15:54.211)

Thank you.

Curtis Chang (16:06.689)

Neither am I. I'm in baseball. do that. Baseball is more my speed.

Ha ha ha ha ha

Mark Turman (16:17.376)

endurance and the ability to take a punch or a kick way beyond it. Just, it is, it's just too brutal for me to watch. Okay. But I was listening to you in a conversation a few weeks ago, and it just made me think, you know what? Every four years is kind of like our MMA, throwdown when it comes to politics. except that there is like there almost is no winner is kind of the way it feels.

We would do well to try to get ourselves to a place where we weren't enmeshed in politics, all the time. that would be one of my recommendations is that, Hey, you, need to moderate your diet towards something that's, a little less brutal and a little less, disturbing as much as you can. So, let me, let me shift the conversation to a conversation that I, I was also triggered when I was listening to some of your other conversations that is just the broad topic of the unique American experiment in the aspect of majority rule and minority rights. And I want to get you to talk about this from a faith and biblical standpoint. I got to hear former attorney general Bill Barr talk about this at a banquet a few days ago. and my question to you, Curtis is this is a very unique part of American democracy. In some ways you might say, the living out of an experiment that the world has been watching now for almost 250 years, majority rule and minority rights. Do you think there's some biblical underpinning to that idea? And then even more than that, do you think that it may just be that in our political life, we may find ourselves at different points in our journey as American citizens. Sometimes we will be on the side that has the majority. Sometimes we will find ourselves being in the minority. And is there a spiritual growth tool that God is implementing when we're on one side or the other? Talk about that for a minute.

Curtis Chang (18:30.029)

Yeah, boy, this is a big topic. It's an important topic, but it's a complex topic. I think what you're really asking is what is the relationship between Christianity and democracy? You know, what is the relationship between the gospel, let's say, and democracy? And it's a complex one. And let me try to mark out some of, think, which are important aspects of that relationships for Christians to realize. I think the first to say is that they are not the same thing. Like, you know,

Christianity has flourished from the majority of its lifetime in non -democratic eras and in non -democratic regimes. So democracy is actually, look about human history, is a fairly modern invention in the last few hundred years. Christianity has been around over 2000 years. And most of those times were dominated by regimes that were very far off from anything you would resemble democracy, like from its very birthplace, right? In the Roman empire, that was an empire, an autocracy. It was not a democracy. And so clearly there's a difference between Christianity and democracy. They're not one in the same. one of the, some of the fastest growing places, even right now where the church is growing is in non -democratic regimes like China. And I think there's actually, there's some reasons for that. So, so let's not think they're one in the same or that Christianity depends on democracy in any way to flourish. However, there is a relationship. There is an important relationship to understand. One way to think about democracy

is that it was a Christian invention to solve a Christian problem. Historically, that's really the origin story of democracy. And what was the problem? It was that we were killing each other, Mark.

We were killing each other Catholics and Protestants in the wars of religion in Rome in the the 15th 16th centuries, right? So This was horrible. mean this was creating devastation In Europe and in the church we were we were ripping each other apart literally over doctrinal disputes and trying to use political force military aims to get our way and

Curtis Chang (20:43.543)

Eventually as a church, I'm simplifying a complicated story, but this is essentially accurate is Christians realize we we can't thrive this way. We're killing each other This is not good for us to to be resorting to military And violence to resolve theological doctrinal disputes And so it was really Christians who said we've got to figure out a different way and they really invented this thing called democracy Christian thinkers Grotia, Hugo Grotias, Locke, I mean, can go on. They were all influential in saying we gotta figure out a different way. And what they invented to solve this Christian problem was democracy, was this emerging way of governing such that people could actually endure and hold differences without feeling like it was a every political issue or even theological issue had to be resolved by force of arms and by violence and by killing your opponent. And the way they did it in democracy was, you you summarized it very nicely. Like we are going to have the majority, you know, sort of rules, because you need to have some way to decide how you're going to resolve various political issues. But we're going to protect some certain basic rights so that even the minority that loses, say, a particular election on a or on a given issue, it won't be life and death. They'll still retain some basic rights.

Mark Turman (21:51.959)

Mm

Curtis Chang (22:07.545)

This way of organizing things actually is really rooted in Christian doctrine, in really Christian truths, because the problem it's trying to solve is basically the fall, right? This idea that human beings are fallen and we are likely to want to kill each other. And so we need to have some checks and balances in place so that we're going to resolve our differences, not by killing each other, but rather by having elections. And also by having checks and balances, so it's that even the winning side isn't always going to

Mark Turman (22:35.288)

Mm

Curtis Chang (22:37.263)

be able to ram through everything that they want. And so it's not perfect, but it's a kind of a recognition that we're fallen beings, we're fallen, sinful human beings. We need to set up a government that kind of governs and restrains our murderous impulses to want to dominate the others by through violence. So that's one. And then on the other hand, in terms of that, that protection of minority rights, you know, you have to ask the question, well, why should the minority have rights? Why should we protect the individual right to have conscience, to practice their own religion, to have speech and so forth. Well, really, if you trace the intellectual history of how you came about this notion of minority rights, it really ultimately draws back to the very Christian doctrine of imago dei, that human beings are made in the image of God, so every individual has some inherent dignity and right that the majority should not be able to trample on. And this is why we know that our own founding fathers talk about inalienable rights given to us from the Creator. And so in that sense, democracy just reflects sort of this duality of we're fallen human beings, but we're also made in the image of God. And the fallen human beings leads to the idea of we need to have some process where the majority gets to kind of have their way on some issues, but human beings are made in the image of God. And so we also need to protect that Imago day by having some minority rights. So I say all that, to say that Christians have a vested interest, I think, in protecting democracy, because it was our gift to the West. It was our gift to the world. And even though, you know, lot of people don't recognize that legacy of that gift, it is our gift. We're responsible for giving it, birthing it into the world. And we should protect it and steward it, because it's both good for the world, but also good for us. And so this is why, again, regardless of where you stand on any short term, political issue like, you know, any particular policy or even candidate, Christians really ought to rally around protecting this very good thing called democracy.

Mark Turman (24:43.664)

Yeah, and one things at the core of that number one. Thanks for a great explanation But one of things that's core in that is that Christians were giving in some ways to themselves But also giving to the world the opportunity in the context of a democracy The opportunity for every person to follow God according to the dictates of their own conscience and not at the tip of a sword because what's what's at the core of this is the very fundamental idea that faith cannot be forced and still be genuine. And that's why when you see in the founding of our country that it was Christians who said they would not support the ratification of the constitution if there were not a bill of rights spelling out very fundamental rights, the freedom of faith, the freedom of religion being the first and foremost that, that, we were having to come to a place where we would have to realize

Curtis Chang (25:15.601)

That's right.

Mark Turman (25:40.53)

somewhat with disappointment that not everybody was going to believe in Jesus the way Christians do and that we were going to have to find a way to live in respect and honor with those people who didn't believe in the Jesus that we believed was the true King. And that came out through a lot of bloodshed and a lot of problems and a lot of terrible violence that that Christians.

Have to confess honestly over 2,000 years Because there were times when we wanted to try to force people to believe at the tip of the sword in democracy is a way out of that kind of living that kind of of unbiblical violence and so democracy gives us the opportunity to do that and like you said, that's

That's one of the reasons that it should be so dear to our hearts as Christians, because it creates an opportunity for that to happen. Curtis, just, help us to think through that. just going forward, because some are, some are, contending, in many ways that, okay, Christians, particularly Protestant Christians have had the privilege of being quote unquote in the majority for most of America's life, and especially some would say, conservative, Christians for the last 50 years. know that Tim Alberta, we were talking about him before we started. He's a friend of yours. He's been on our podcast, wrote a wonderful book, basically kind of retelling this story in very vivid ways out of his own personal experience for the last 50 years, which mirrors my whole time in ministry, and yours as well. But many like Tim are contending, well, Hey, conservative republican christians have had their time for fifty years and now they're going to be in the minority or christians on even larger scale are going to be now in the minority if that's the case what's the what's the word that needs to come to us as christians living possibly in the coming years as a minority instead of now instead of previously being in the majority

Mark Turman (28:01.042)

as some people describe it what what's the message to us if we're going to be more in a minority position

Curtis Chang (28:07.279)

I think the message is good news. It's, actually really good news, Mark, that this is happening because if you are in the minority in this way that you, such that you cannot enforce your values, maybe not at, you know, not at the tip of the sword, but at the tip of cultural, the tip of the cultural sword, right? Like you get to, you get to call the shots and what the culture is. That means you really have to contend with, I have to win hearts and minds. I have to win souls. can't let the government.

Or I can't let just the broad abstract cultural forces do my work for me in terms of kind of getting some basic agreement with my views. So, and that's actually really good news because when you are relying on law or rely on cultural dominance to actually spread the gospel, the gospel doesn't

actually spread very well in that terms, because what you get is at best conform like a nominal conformity that doesn't actually go very deep, but because people are just sort of going along because it's culturally acceptable, they're going to church every Sunday, because that's what you gotta do to belong to the community, but really they're not really paying very close attention. Their hearts and minds are not actually getting transformed by the living gospel, the living presence of the spirit. They're just going along because it's all that you do to be part of the majority. And I think any Christian who has... who has been really thoughtful and has experienced what it's like in that kind of cultural dominance. If you're at home self-reflective, I think you'll grasp of like how thin the discipleship of that actually is when actually people are doing that, not because they're choosing and having to make sacrifices in order to follow Jesus, but really just going along with the crowd. Those are not fertile ground for the true gospel. It's... the conditions for a sort of an easy comfort, an easy cultural feeling at home for Christians, but it's not actually the soil for the growth of the church. I mean, there's a reason why the church, the place where the church is growing the fastest is communist China, actually churches, true, you know, of churches are essentially clamped down in a very hard way, where it's very costly and very risky and dangerous to actually become a Christian in communist China.

Curtis Chang (30:30.743)

There's a reason why the the gospel is thriving there is because people are confronted with the gospel as a real choice that they have to make to follow Jesus as Lord or or not as the Lord right, whereas the communist party has lord and so that kind of stark, choice being presented is actually where the gospel thrives the most and so, I would say So that's why my word to christians of all stripes

But it's but I think especially those who you know, maybe you would call conservative Christians who have been more used to Kind of having a quote -unquote Christian America is to say this is to embrace this moment This is actually when we are called to step forth with the gospel to actually win hearts and minds Not just try to kind of win Votes so that we can feel a little more comfortable with the cultural conditions. No again, that doesn't mean we don't to influence the culture also through politics. I actually think there's a legitimate place for that as well. But to the extent that we think that winning political battles will do the work for us of forming, say, our next generation, that's a really misguided view of thinking how our next generation are going to actually grow up in Christ. They're going to grow up in Christ because we as a church have formed them and we've actually in a very winning way articulated why the gospel makes sense makes better sense in this culture and young people are actually they want to be called to something that actually means meaningful that is actually something that requires courage requires risk not all of them, but but but the ones that of which this is going to stick and I do think that I don't think you can really understand I think especially on the conservative side, a lot of the anxiety and fear around politics is really around like, want my kids to grow up Christian. And there's the misguided notion that the way they'll grow up Christian is if the culture makes it

easier for my kids to be Christian, rather than the church articulating more clearly, this is how you will stand out like light in the age of darkness. And this is the moment for us to embrace that call.

Mark Turman (32:50.028)

Right. Yeah. I think absolutely that's the case. And as you were talking, I was just thinking that, you know, maybe the, maybe the temptation when, you know, yes, there are certain blessings that we should be grateful for when a Christian worldview is a kind of the predominant mode of atmosphere within a nation. And that's certainly never on a perfect scale, but in significant ways been the way it has been for much of American life.

And there are certain aspects of that in which we should be grateful. But the temptation that is hidden inside of that, seems to me, is the temptation to then codify faith into law and let the law be the discipler as you're describing it. And that's never going to be the way that the work of faith and the work of the church should be done. It actually has in it the temptation of laziness. Well, we're just going to let

Curtis Chang (33:32.657)

That's right. That's right.

Curtis Chang (33:43.995)

That's right. That's right.

Mark Turman (33:44.952)

We're just going to let the laws and the rules of the land that we made, we're to let those do the discipling. And if there's, as you said, a real opportunity and something to be excited about is that we now the lines are getting more defined and Christians can and in many ways should expect that their faith may cost them something in a way.

That it didn't in previous times or previous generations and that's not necessarily bad because like said that's that's where the authenticity of our faith starts to show itself It kind of takes me back to the book of Job where the devil said to God about Job Well, he's only following you because you're making his life comfortable if you would make it if you would make him uncomfortable He would curse you and and this this is in some ways when you're in the minority position within the culture

Curtis Chang (34:27.057)

Hmm.

Right, right.

Yeah, that's right.

Mark Turman (34:38.892)

You're kind of in that position to say, no, I love God just because he's God and not because he makes my life comfortable because he may be making my life more uncomfortable, at least in some ways. Right.

Curtis Chang (34:48.655)

Right. Yeah. I was just with Tim Alberta, speaking at Wheaton. shared the story of his conversation with Robert Jeffress, who, you know, well -known pastor in your neck of the woods. And, know, and he, and Tim has a good relationship with pastor Jeffress and, but, but they think about this very differently because, know, Jeffress was talking about just, Tim, you got to understand we're under siege. Christians are under siege. This is a moment when we have to sort of, you know, maybe stomach some heart, some distasteful political allegiances because we're under siege and Tim's point was Wasn't that what we signed up for like to be under siege like that? That is the gospel that that when you read the gospel that this is the expectation to the early church was you're under siege and that this is why your faith in God is going to shine forth because God is going to actually you know shine forth precisely in that moment as people choose him even when it's it's not easy to do so and I think that's right and

And, know, if I could transition to a topic that I know is controversial here, but it's one that I talked about most recently on a podcast with my other, another friend, Pete Wehner, which is on abortion. So, you know, I'm pro -life. I deeply pro -life for a lot of, for both biblical and personal reasons. But I think the politics of abortion really underscore what you said about the limitations of using the law as the discipler, because the pro -life movement, which in many ways I, you know, at a broad level, I support their worldview, if you will, in terms of wanting to protect the sanctity of life, strategically, pretty much put all of their money, literally put all of their money and all of their energies to have law be the discipler, to win enough on the legal front, especially in the Supreme Court, so that abortion could get outlawed. And what's the net result of that? Well, abortion rates are actually higher than ever, and they've risen in Republican administrations. And if you look at the, public attitudes, all the polling, right? That right now, we've seen a massive shift of actually views that are actually embracing abortion more than ever. And such that the average Republican, now the average Republican has an abortion view that is essentially similar to what the Democrat view was like 20 years ago, right? That's how far the center of gravity has shifted towards actually embracing abortion. And I think

Curtis Chang (37:15.013)

What's happened gets to what you're talking about is the limitations of when you rely on the law to be the discipler. Because while all of this energy was going towards winning the election so

that we can get the courts, so we can get the Supreme Court and do that. that's caused us to succeed. What wasn't happening was actually articulating a pro -life vision, a pro -life case to the broader populace that was comprehensible and winning and compelling. We didn't do that people who didn't agree with the pro -life view just experienced the whole pro -life movement as kind of coercion, not kind of, as coercion, as you're trying to shove this down our throats. And I think that's the backlash against that is what's fueling, especially in the younger generation, against a truly pro -life vision of life. Because one, they haven't heard it. They haven't, you know, we haven't really advanced that. We've been too busy trying to win political battles.

Mark Turman (37:53.658)

Right.

Curtis Chang (38:10.979)

And two, now they experience abortion as synonymous or the pro -life movement as synonymous with coercion and they don't want it. They don't like it. They don't want it get shoved down their throats. And so this is, we should be really sobered when we look at what's happening in abortion where we have legal victory on the one hand and yet we're losing the culture and those two things are related. One is causing the other. And so that should be a really sober warning of the very... severe limitations of solely focusing on winning political battles to in order to so that we can win the law.

Mark Turman (38:46.796)

Yeah, it almost starts to sound like the very definition of what we say when, well, well, we won the battle, but we lost the war because we didn't, we didn't choose to engage the larger conversation of the war in the culture, which is to create and to advocate and to serve a wide holistic culture of life to where

If we could paint that picture big enough and beautiful enough, the whole idea of abortion would just be abhorrent to everybody. And, and that's the bigger work. That's the harder work. And, and I mean, I've been actively involved in the pro -life movement. I I'm now serving on the second of two crisis pregnancy boards, which I believe they, they do unbelievably holy work and they are down in the, in the trenches where, where life saving conversations happen. but we needed to do that and we needed to paint a bigger picture to where we could say, look at this evidence scientifically on a sonogram and in every other way, this is a life. How can we all together. Contend not only for this child's life, but for its mother and for its parents and for this entire community in, ways, because, know, as you and others have pointed out, you know, the Notre Dame study that

Curtis Chang (40:06.939)

That's right.

Mark Turman (40:12.778)

across the board, no matter what your views are on abortion, no one thinks that an abortion is a positive life event. Nobody does. No matter what your beliefs are, it's not something you wake up wanting to have in your life. And how do we come as a church? This is our opportunity. This is our... I mean, we ought to understand that the devil hates whatever God creates and the thing God most likes to create are human beings.

Curtis Chang (40:20.069)

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Curtis Chang (40:27.173)

That's right.

Mark Turman (40:42.442)

Of course he wants to do away with them on multiple levels. So how do we create a wide sweeping, beautiful culture of life on a wide scale and not simply rely upon the law. There's a, there's a piece there, but it is not the whole ball game. And, and I think that really brings us back to a conversation that I've heard you talk about with, Peter Weiner as well as with Tim Albert. And then I want to go to this understanding of what should be our expectations of our politics. Because I think one of things that's going on, Curtis, is that we're asking politics to deliver things that politics and government were never ever designed to do, even in a democratic environment. And I'm referencing back to your conversation with Peter Wehner, where part of that conversation was about politics as both crystal ball and mirror.

Curtis Chang (41:15.404)

Mm.

Curtis Chang (41:38.0)

Yeah.

Mark Turman (41:39.042)

So can you kind of frame that for us and around this idea that human beings, both Christian and non-Christian, seem to hate uncertainty and long for stability? And that's why we're rushing to the mechanisms of politics to help us address that anxiety. Talk about that a little bit.

Curtis Chang (42:00.963)

Yeah, I think we hate uncertainty and we all want to crave deeply for security and the only real answer to the deep uncertainties of life and our desire for security Is Jesus is the is our true king

who is actually the promise of the the true promise of security and whose promises are the only answer to uncertainty and yet

Mark Turman (42:25.26)

Curtis we can't see him we can't see him and we can't vote for him

Curtis Chang (42:28.803)

Right. So instead we latch onto our desires for that to human political parties to think, and human political parties are all too willing and eager to collect our money and our votes with an ex with the promise. Hey, if you vote for me, I will save you from this horrible thing you fear happening. and I will provide certainty and security in some way. Now it's patently false. Like we just, we should just like step back and look like

Do we, does anybody really think either the Democratic party or the Republican party, if they win in November, if Trump or Harris wins in November, then my life will be okay. Like, does anybody actually believe that? Like that's just patently false. But yet we're, we're of not tempted to think, no, no, that's gotta be because if that doesn't happen, then life will be just awful. And again, that's part of the, politics works is that they make the other side seem so horrible. That's like, you gotta vote for my side. I'm gonna save you from this awful evil. And,

That's just not, it's patently false and it's patently not true to the gospel because the gospel says, you know, there's actually only one political event, one historical event that will decisively save us from our uncertainty and our fears and will make all things right. And that's the return of the king. The moment when the king returns, our ruler, the king of kings, the president of presidents.

You know will return and it will be a day there that will happen It'll just be a day as much as election day is a day. There's a it be a historical event What happens we just don't know when it is on the calendar We're told not to try to guess and we don't know when that will be but it will happen When the king returns to make all things right and this is really at the heart of the project that you've heard me talk about is the after party people have asked me Why is it called the after party? Let's call the after party one because we're trying to move Christians beyond

Mark Turman (44:17.73)

Mm

Curtis Chang (44:23.837)

after placing their allegiance in political parties and human political parties. So that's why it's the after party. But there's another meaning, Mark, to that term, the after party, which is that historical event that I'm talking about, when the king returns, we might ask, well, what is it going to feel like? What is it going to be like? Is it going to be like an army conquering in? Is it going

to be like a big battle? It's like, actually, the most consistent imagery that's used for that event is a party. Like, that's what Isaiah talks about is the feast on Mount Zion when the king returns to restore all things or in Revelation, the wedding feast of the lamb, the party, the big party, right? The party of all parties for when the bridegroom comes back to be reunited with the bride and restore all things. It's the big reunion of the human race. And so that's the party, that's the real party that we're called to place our faith in. And so that's really how also we are called to actually endure all the uncertainty of these next few months and all, and what may last, what may come after the election and the uncertainty that comes after that is that we can endure all of that because we know how the story ends. The story ends in the after party, the after party of Jesus when he comes to restore all things. And we don't know when that'll happen, but we know all history is headed towards that. And so no human political parties, temporary victory or defeat, is going to actually stand in the way of that final day. And so because we know that, we can endure all of the vicissitudes and the uncertainties that are surely before us, whatever side you're on in the lowercase party, lowercase partisan loyalties that we have.

Mark Turman (46:12.916)

And it really brings to light, I think, the way that politics is an opportunity for us to engage our faith. And as you were talking, I was thinking about, if I'm a Christian and I'm really concerned about the things of Christ, but I'm also concerned about my country, if I'm completely undone on November 6th, because my candidate didn't win on November 5th, if I'm completely undone and full of despair, then maybe I'm participating in disbelief toward Christ and too much belief in our politics. Because, you know, what you, what you, heard you say earlier is no matter who wins on November 5th, there will be uncertainty and there will be certain levels of dis, of instability. there will be a lot of unnamed, unknown and unnamed questions and things that we worry about even on the other side.

Curtis Chang (46:50.203)

That's right.

Curtis Chang (47:10.107)

That's right.

Mark Turman (47:11.458)

that become opportunities for us to have faith toward and to pray about. And that, the other part of the, of, of what I heard you saying is, is not only do we know that there's the ultimate party and the ultimate King coming, that King has promised to shepherd us to that day. Even, even in these mean times, which when I use that word, I just remind myself, and sometimes the times can really be mean. They, it is the meantime and it can be pretty mean at times.

Curtis Chang (47:29.489)

That's right.
Yeah.

Mark Turman (47:41.186)

But that's part of the reason that God has us here is to bring His love and grace and mercy into view in these moments. And so that's where we have to understand that everything, including our politics, is an opportunity for us to engage our relationship with Christ and to see Him as our ultimate King and our ultimate source of security and joy and promise. And that's where we have to keep bringing people back to over and over again.

Curtis Chang (48:10.138)

Amen to all of that, Mark. And by the way, when you say that these are the mean times, have you been peeking at my social media?

Mark Turman (48:16.44)

I have not been peeking at your social media. don't peek at my own social media, Curtis. I, yeah, after reading the, book by Jonathan Hyatt, the anxious generation, I don't know if I can ever look at social media again.

Curtis Chang (48:18.353)

That's probably very wise.

Curtis Chang (48:32.813)

That would be a good advice for all of us.

Mark Turman (48:35.606)

Yeah. Which is, which is my call out to all those that can influence Jonathan Hyatt. I would love to have a conversation with him, but we haven't been able to figure that out yet. So Curtis, we had a few more minutes for a couple more questions before I let you go. one of those is, is we come, come back to this question of the character of candidates and weighing that against the mechanisms of policy and that type of thing. Some of this conversation seems to go in the line of.

There unfortunately just seems to be an underlying American belief that all politicians are corrupt, no matter who they are, no matter what party they come from. We all just kind of start at the baseline that they're all corrupt. We just don't know. Some of them are more obviously corrupt than we can see with others, but they're all corrupt. And we start with that premise, which is a really bad place for us to start by the way. But then you come down to the issues of character versus policy.

party and then there's this argument that kind of goes along the lines of well our government is such set up in such a way with enough checks and balances and a bureaucracy that is big enough to create to keep the bad actors from becoming as bad as they might want to be is that legitimate is that is that a reasonable way to think about any of that

Curtis Chang (49:34.043)

Yeah. Yeah.

Curtis Chang (49:56.581)

Well, I would say it's, yeah, look, let me first say is the after party as a project and in general, me as a person, I'm not trying to tell people, tell Christians how to vote. That's a complicated, very deeply personal question about how you construct your own little personal algorithm to figure out how to check a box.

Because these votes are binary decisions, it's inherently going to be incomplete as a reflection of who you are, right? Because you are, think about how complex you are as a human being in terms of just like, if I were to say, you know, Mark, what do you think about your wife? Right? That's full of so many different variables and complexities. And I were to say, you know, no, I want you to reduce that to a binary choice that sort of reduces that person to a yes or no vote. We can't reduce people to that. So it's very hard, which is why there's always going to be an incompleteness. And we should never try to labor under the sense of, my God, I'm voting for the wrong person and therefore somehow I've made this horrible, disastrous choice or the moral stakes are so high. mean, this is inherently a imperfect process to try to reduce everything to one box, which is why we also should not reduce our kind of relationship to loved ones or friends based on the fact that they check the box differently. You know, because it's just, it's inherently, you're reducing so many complexities to reduce a human being to, to, you know, one box or another is, just, it disrespects the humanity involved. So let me just say that first. I think what you're asking though is like, okay, so given all that complexity, what algorithm should we use in order to vote. And I would say, look, this is up to everybody to figure that out. I will just simply share personally for me that I do weigh candidates' policies. I do weigh their character. And I also, to your point, weigh how committed they are to our democratic system. Because like you said, let me work backwards from that in terms of commitment to democratic systems. Because I think what makes it possible to tolerate

Curtis Chang (52:19.439)

your candidate not winning is if both either way, the system that we've designed, which is imperfect, but still is the best that we've come up with in terms of how to do that, how to balance all the things we talked about, how to reflect the fallenness of human beings while respecting the minority rights of individuals in their day is our current system. And like you said, that there's

some comfort to be taken from, if the other person wins, there's enough checks and balances in place.

This, by the way, and I'm speaking personally here for myself, is why I very much am not very concerned about it. I'm not voting for Donald Trump is because he does not show that kind of respect for the system of checks and balances. And I do think he undermines the way in which this is all set up. So I won't go further into that, but that factors into my voting decisions. I also factor into policies. I want to vote for somebody that is generally aligned with me. I don't expect perfect alignment at all because you can't reduce, especially when you're a Christian, that you're gonna be aligned this way on this issue, aligned that way on that issue. So I don't expect perfect, but I try to get the the big important ones right. And people are gonna be different on what they think are the big important ones. But I think in all of that, I especially also weigh character. Character really matters for me. And the reason for that is because I'm convinced that history tells us

Mark Turman (53:32.141)

Mm

Curtis Chang (53:45.317)

some of the most important decisions that our president will make are not actually even known as issues right now. They're just not. History is too unpredictable in terms of who could have predicted, you know, we would be facing a pandemic or a Russian invasion of the Ukraine, or like there's so many things that are just unknown that you can't state a policy ahead of time. And they become crises, emergencies, unexpected developments that at that point you're just trusting in the way that we have somebody that's overseeing the nuclear, our nuclear forces, our economy, our, government bureaucracy that has good wisdom, good judgment, recognition that they serve the whole populace and not just their side, right? Like these are character traits that you're relying on to, face all of these unexpected issues. And that all of that is to say that's character. Like, you know, those kinds of qualities are what we mean by character.

Mark Turman (54:30.029)

Mm -hmm.

Curtis Chang (54:44.157)

wisdom, prudence, servanthood, ability to think for the larger good and not just for your side. These are character traits. And so because of all of that, I do actually weigh character pretty heavily, not excluding all of the other factors like, do you respect the system of democracy? And, you know, are you broadly aligned with some of important issues I care about? I care about those, but I really heavily weigh character.

Mark Turman (55:10.124)

Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's a really good way to think about some very big complex things for sure. And, and a lot for people there you need to have, and this would be our encouragement to everyone. need to have a serious algorithm. need to, you need to do the work of thinking through these things because being a citizen of any country, but being a citizen of this country matters. yeah, Curtis kind of maybe last word, today you've done a lot of work in talking about institutions and how.

Curtis Chang (55:15.398)

Yeah.

Mark Turman (55:39.562)

institutions reflect the image of God that it's not just something that people do or individuals do, but the organizations, the institutions, and the systems that we build are reflection of our God as well. And one of those big questions these days is the question of election fairness and integrity. Our founder, Jim Dennison, talks about and wrote recently about that for self-government in a democracy to work, you have to have at least three things. You have to have citizens that are free enough and confident enough that they will participate that they vote. These citizens must then support those that ultimately win the election and that they must then, even if they're candidate lost, work with civility with each other, whether you're in the majority or in the minority. How can we have, where is our confidence that our elections are in fact as fair and as free as we can make them. Where do you draw that confidence from?

Curtis Chang (56:43.921)

So I draw that confidence because I have spoken to many many election officials over the last couple years I've been involved in a lot of convenings with high -ranking election officials from red and blue states Who are these are civil servants who are charged with overseeing our election? Republicans like Brad Raffensperger have been in multiple meetings with him and Democratic version, you know equivalents of him in other states and

Look, it is not perfect. No institution is perfect. No institution perfectly reflects the fairness and justice of God. But some do it better than others. And our election institutions do it really, really well. Again, not perfectly. Not if you, you'll never find, boy, there was an error there. That's where human beings are. We are of course fallen. But broadly speaking, Americans should have a very high degree of confidence in our election officials and our election mechanisms. It's, it is really a marvel. The sad tragedy is how much they have been torn down and attacked for partisan reasons. And let's just be really honest here. It's probably mostly come from the right, although there has been elements of it from the left, you know, so in Georgia, when Stacey Adams really undermined confidence in election in Georgia, a Democratic candidate for governor, that was, I thought a real tragedy because it turns out actually she lost that suit.

because the facts showed that actually it was a fair election. And consistently one lawsuit after another, one finding, one investigation after another has shown that in general, our election institutions are really, really well run and fair. And so I think we really, I think it is a lie. It is a bearing false witness to actually malign the integrity in general of our election officials and our election monitoring and running institutions. It's one of the great things about our democracy is that we have constructed this over, and this is something that happened by an accident. It's because America has been a democracy for over 200 years that we've really realized it's important that we do this well, that we've developed practices, institutions and practices. And it's really sad. It is sad to me how much they have been attacked really for partisan reasons by the losers in elections very consistently. It's the losers in elections that are being essentially sore losers and wanting a reason for why they lost to suddenly shift the blame on election officials. It is a form of bearing false witness.

Mark Turman (59:18.216)

Yeah. And it is a tragedy, but also, you know, one the that I've taken hard in, in the last number of years around this issue is, number one, it's a big country with some very complex systems and it's, it'd be a very massive undertaking, probably impossible to pull off to, to, overtake a system of this magnitude of complexity. The other thing is, is I have no problem with a candidate that loses filing a lawsuit. of fact,

I'm glad when they file multiple lawsuits because I think it'd be more dangerous if they only filed one. And the fact that they have have in the past, various candidates filed multiple lawsuits only to be found repetitively to have, you know, no evidence of corruption. think that serves us well, although it's grueling that we seem to have adopted that as the newest tactic or one of the newest tactics as well. so hopefully people can reclaim that sense of confidence and participate in the process with reasonable expectations. All right. I got one bonus question before you go. And, and this is, this this is your final strike. This is a final strike in the world series here. Okay. we get through the election and we get to inauguration day. Okay. and

Curtis Chang (01:00:22.513)

That's right. All right, go for it. Is this my last out? This is a two out spot on the ninth year. Yeah.

Mark Turman (01:00:39.724)

People will remember that when you have inauguration day, then everybody starts asking the question. Okay. What about the first hundred days, the first hundred days for a new president, regardless of who wins, whether it's Donald Trump or Kamala Harris, something happens, Curtis, and you get selected to be a presidential advisor to either of these candidates for their first hundred days. What are the one or two things, maybe three that you're going to say?

I think you really need to think deeply and work on these kinds of thoughts. What would you say as a presidential advisor?

Curtis Chang (01:01:21.713)

You know, I'm reminded of what happened in 2016 after Trump won and he, and I think it was Pence attended, I think this is right. I might get the details right, but Pence attended a performance of Hamilton on Broadway. And the actors on the Hamilton ended up at the end of the performance almost delivering a personal message to Pence. And the essence of that message was be our president or be our government, not just the government of your side, but us as well. We are your people also. And I thought that was very, it's important to say because whoever wins Harris or Trump, they will have won almost certainly by a very thin and narrow margin. Like almost certainly that close to half of the country will have voted against them. and they are in the White House on inaugural day because of the thinnest of margins. And so that would be my message if I was advisor is do something that signals to the other half, the, the half that lost this election, that you are their president also, that you hear them, you care about their concerns, you give weight and credence to their con to their legitimate concerns. And how can you signal in a very clear way, in a reassuring way, you are their president as well because that's what it means is you are a servant. are the chief servant of all, even among those who disagree with you. And so how do you do that in the first hundred days would be my strongest encouragement.

Mark Turman (01:03:00.844)

No, good word, a good word and a reminder all of us that no matter who wins, even in many ways, if our guy or our girl doesn't win, we're called upon to pray for them and to hope for, and to do all that we can to see them and our country succeed in the best ways possible. Curtis, thank you as always for all of your work and for today's conversation. Want to remind folks that they can find you In a number of places in the podcast world, you can find Curtis at the good faith podcast. You can also find his work on better Christian politics called the after party, which is not only an online course you can do as an individual or as a small group, really designed well for church, small groups and for other small groups for conversation. Again, not telling you who to vote for or what policies to vote for, but how to bring your faith. into the context of all of your political thinking and conversations and decision making, making, can do that as a course. You can read a book. if you'd rather do it in that version, that's the after party. And you can find all of Curtis's work at his website, redeeming babble .org. And so check out all of those resources. You'll also find the after party on the Denison forum website at that website. I pointed out earlier. which is denisonforum.org/election. There's a way that you can link to the after party material, even through our website. And we'd invite you to do that as well as to engage the other resources that we have assembled and we'll continue to add to in this political season. Thank you for being a part of the conversation, Curtis. Thank you to our audience. We look forward to you being a part of our conversation in the future. God bless you. We'll see you next time on the Denison Forum podcast.