

Transcript 130

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got questions podcast. So over the past I don't know, few years I would say we see a lot of questions about Christian nationalism. And it's become the volume of questions are increasing, not decreasing. This is kind of a in a sense, like a boogeyman term, in that a lot of people use it and they use it in a negative sense but not actually knowing what it means or what it historically means. So we'll be discussing what is Christian nationalism and then a little bit closely related to that on what should a Christian attitude towards the nation in which they live and the political system they find themselves in, how should we approach that? What should be our attitude? How can we take our faith and apply that to our politics, to our social positions, and so forth? So not the easiest topic, but it's an important topic and again, this is something being asked about a lot, especially with the election coming up.

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today is Jeff. Jeff is the administrator of Bibleref.com and Kevin. He's the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. So gentlemen welcome. And Jeff wont you start us off and start by just defining these terms so it can be very clear what we're talking about. So let's start with what is nationalism?

Jeff Laird

That's always a good place to start is with definition of terms. And unfortunately, you know not to rain on the parade, but no matter what we do, people are going to use whatever definition they have in mind when they're saying these things. So almost any time we have a conversation about this, we may need to ask a person what do you mean when you say this, you say that. Now nationalism per say really just means a appreciation, a love, a loyalty, a devotion to a particular nation. Usually that's used in more of a cultural sense, not necessarily a government sense. And in and of itself, that's not necessarily a bad thing for a person to say. I appreciate, I like, I want to engage in my culture. It's not necessarily bad for somebody to say I like the way my culture does things. I think we do things the right way. I approve of those. That's OK where nationalism starts to become a problem is when it sort of turns into its own form of religion. When it becomes something that overrides the things that we see in Scripture as far as God's commandments about how we treat other people.

Jeff Laird

Good example of this is in Matthew Chapter 3 where you you have the Pharisees are talking to John the Baptist, and they're saying, well, we are children of Abraham, and his response is to say, you know God could make children from stones for Abraham. Jesus has similar conversations with the Pharisees. What had happened in that time was a Israeli nationalism had gotten to the point where instead of just thinking this is a good way to do things, and I'm even willing to say this is the best way to do things where it came to the point of saying this is the only way to be, and anyone who's not naturally innately part of this explicit nation is completely wrong, completely evil, completely bad. So there's a there's a point where nationalism goes from appreciation to obsession and it goes from something that's reasonable to something that's sort of quasi religious.

Jeff Laird

There again, as you were saying, Shea Christian nationalism then becomes a term that gets used as a bogeyman, where it almost doesn't mean anything. And you know, as long as we're going to offend people with political words, there's lots of political words that people use that I don't think they really understand them when they use them. I hear terms all the time like hate, Fascist, Communist, socialist, that people throw around and don't really have anything to do with the actual conversation. They're just scare words that people put out there. So Christian nationalism, the way the term is used, is meant to suggest that what Christians are trying to do is they're trying to enforce conservative, evangelical, biblical, ideas into law. That's what people are implying when they say Christian nationalism. Now in practice, usually they're just throwing that at anybody who in any way shape or form connects their faith to the way they vote, or the way they think about policies, or the way they do anything. If somebody says I'm praying about this, that, or the other. Especially if a politician says I'm praying about this. Immediately, you get the charge of well, that's Christian nationalism, and those are not the same thing. There's there's biblical distinctions between rightly applying what God tells us to our approach to culture and government. Versus unrighteously applying those things in ways that assume that our particular view has to be enforced to the extent that it needs to be legislated on top of other people. And there's enough overlap that I can see why people can try to make the accusation, but at the same time it's being used in a way that doesn't fit with what most Christians are really doing.

Kevin Stone

When I think of Christian nationalism, what usually comes to mind for me is an attitude that Western culture or specifically American heritage, is inextricably linked to Christianity. In that if you are a true American, if you're a good American, then you have to be Christian. That in my mind, is Christian nationalism as an attitude. And it crosses the line because we recognize that we live in a pluralistic society. And that America was founded to provide freedom of religion and freedom of speech and freedom of thought. And so we have good Americans, true Americans who are of all different religions, all different beliefs, all different lifestyles. And so I would reject that attitude. But that's what I think of when I think of Christian nationalism.

Kevin Stone

Some pollsters have have come up with some like a like a scale based on 6 statements and whether or not you agree with these six statements shows your level of Christian nationalism. According to these polls. And the six questions are these, the federal government should declare the United States to be a Christian nation. And now I suppose that there are people who actually advocate for this, that there needs to be a an official declaration that we're Christian, but I, I would think that that goes beyond what what most Christians want. Second statement, the federal government should advocate Christian values. Statement 3 the federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state. Next is the federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces. A statement 5. The success of the United States is part of God's plan. We have a special place in God's plan in in world history. And #6 The federal government should allow prayer in public schools. So this would be the, you know, the official classroom prayer led by a teacher who may or may not be a Christian. And all that, and all of that, and you know, personally, I I don't see the need for non believing teachers in the public school to be leading prayer in a classroom. I I would not advocate for that at all. But in some of these others, though, you know, as far as the government should have should advocate Christian values. The wording of it is kind of is is kind of weird because we want laws to be reflecting righteousness, and if

good laws that benefit society and and promote the welfare of people happen to align with Christian ideals and values then well, that's the way it is I guess. So we're not. We don't want the laws to be, you know, specifically Christian. We do want them to be promoting the welfare of of all of society, and I think there's an overlap there. Doesn't necessarily mean that you're a partly Christian nationalist because you believe in in that type of thing.

Shea Houdmann

And looking at a list like that, it kind of reminds me of like how many points of Calvinism do you believe in? It's like, well, it kind of depends on how you define the terms, and they're going back to how we just started this is that depending on how you define things that we're in Kevin's list, I I'm either a 2-4 point Christian nationalists. So I don't even know how to really answer the question. But the way I'm hearing it thrown about, especially in the news, is that anyone who believes that their Christian faith should influence or inform how they vote. What causes they support what politicians they support, where they send their money politically speaking. That's Christian nationalism. Well, everyone has beliefs that impact the way they vote. That comes from their world view. If Christians have a consistently biblical worldview, it can't not impact how we vote in the political views we hold 'cause the world view of a Christian is to be all-encompassing, supposed to impact every area of our life or coming to faith in Christ makes us a new creation. It changes into entirely new person. To say that we're it infects everything but your politics that no, that's not how it works. We are solely dedicated to Christ and he is the Lord of every area of our lives, including how we vote. So if our Christian beliefs, our commitment to God's word, our belief that God is sovereign, and that he's in control and I need to obey him, if that makes me a Christian nationalist, and so be it. But that's not a negative thing was, as I was saying, every worldview has have impacts your voting patterns, your political beliefs, your the stances you take. And I don't see other forms of nationalism being thrown about in the the same sense. Does these same things for example is there a Muslim nationalism? Is there an atheistic nationalism? Is there LGBTQ plus nationalism? So we all have beliefs that impact our politics. That doesn't make it nationalism and that doesn't make it wrong.

Kevin Stone

Yeah. Just to piggyback on what you were saying there Shea, we live in a representative form of government and so we elect people who are to represent us. When I vote, I vote for people who most closely represent me and the way I think in my values. What I consider to be import. What I prioritize. I want a candidate to be in office who is who is representing truly representing me. And I happen to have a Christian worldview and so that's going to, that's going to affect my vote. A lot of times of course it's the lesser of two evils is what we end up voting for. But again, it's the, it's the candidate who is most like my values, who who's most likely going to be promoting the same things that I would be promoting if I were in office myself.

Jeff Laird

It's also good to remember that Christians do not necessarily think that it's a good idea to put power in the government's hands to make a say about some of these things, and that's another place where I think Christian nationalism is confused. There are an awful lot of Christians who believe that Christian principles are the best way to do things. So I would consider myself a person who would say categorically it would be much better for the United States to take Christian approaches to all these

different social issues, and moral issues, and international issues, and economic issues, and all these other things. Obviously I think those are the best way to do things.

Jeff Laird

But for me personally, I'm very, very leery of giving human, limited, fallible government, more power than it needs to. So in a sense I don't want what a lot of people would define as quote on quote Christian nationalism, and the reason is nothing to do with Christ. It has nothing to do with the Bible. It has everything to do with I don't like the idea of telling other people that I'm going to let other human beings dictate what that Christian approach is to be. I would like to see a position where people have the ability to choose and then through dialogue, and conversation, and evangelism, and so on and so forth, we can convince individual people that that's the best way to go. Now even that sometimes gets wrapped up and called Christian nationalism, but. That is not how most Christians approach it by saying yes, I think that the law should legislate how this happens now.

Jeff Laird

There are some people who theologically disagree with that. We've talked about things on our website like dominionism, 7 Mountain mandate, things like that. Those are ideas where people actually believe that that is precisely what Christians are called to do. I don't see that as even remotely biblical. Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world and we've got other things that we're supposed to do. Kevin, I know that you've had experience with talking about those issues before. I'm pretty sure you've got the same stance on things like dominionism and seven mountain, what's your take on those?

Kevin Stone

Right I I. Well, that I think that when we focus on, you know conquering these these various spheres of influence and taking them over in the name of Christ. And you know, basically becoming the movers and shakers in society. I think it, I think it just kind of is the wrong focus because you know, as Jesus said and Jeff, you alluded to, Jesus kingdom is not of this world. It's true that righteousness exalts any nation, Proverbs 14. But we government is not the Savior. Government is not going to be the route through which we transform a culture. And it's it's got to be a heart change in the lives of individuals. It's going to be making disciples of all the nations on and that happens on A1 on one basis as we tell others about Jesus Christ. So I think I think when you talk about dominionism and seven mountain mandate, we're just kind of losing focus on on what we really need to be doing, which is fulfilling the Great Commission.

Shea Houdmann

Take terms like dominionism and even I've heard it called Christian Reconstructionism where essentially some people believe that we need to our national laws should be based on the Old Testament law. That that is God's universal bannard for all nations to have those sorts of laws. And obviously there's certain aspects of Old Testament law that we have in our laws. Though shalt not kill. It's a clear example. Thankfully it is still illegal to murder people here in the United States in most instances, and I'll keep my mouth shut after that, but but that's not what Christ calls us too. Creating a Christian form of government is nowhere advocated in in scripture. I mean, in the sense of like a formal system, I mean, obviously the gospel is this thing really impacts every area of our lives, and if we consistently were able to elect Christians who would take firm stances on things for Christ, for according to what the Bible teaches, it would have an impact on our government. But our goal should not be well, let's Christianize

our society by electing a government that's going to enforce it. No, that's that's not the gospel at all. The gospel is sharing the good news of Jesus death, and resurrection is the full atoning sacrifice for our sins. Through faith we can be saved, forgiven, promised eternity in heaven and then that message then transforms us and then if enough people are transformed by that, that transforms the nation. It's more of a inward change that produces national change. It's not a let's change our nation therefore enforce Christian principles. So some people who are advocating Christian national to have the process backwards and that they're trying to look to the government in the sense as our savior, like Kevin was saying, rather than looking to Christ as our Savior. We're focusing on national change rather than individual change. And that's backwards. That's the exact opposite direction that the Bible points us to.

Shea Houdmann

But with that said, again, I cannot say more strongly that following Christ will impact your political views, it has to. I'm not saying you always have to vote a certain way. I'm not saying that Christians can only members of one political party. But if you look at the political issues that Americans like to fight about, it's pretty clear which direction the Bible points to. And not all of them, but many of them are most of them, it's very clear what's right and what's wrong, and our Christian faith should inform and even decide our stances on those issues. Again, it's it's not a matter of us trying to enforce our views on others. The matter of us standing for what is right and promoting what we believe honors God, glorifies God, and will eventually be for the betterment of our society. And like Jeff is saying, we firmly believe that applying Christian principles to our legal system, to our political system, will result in a better society that works for everyone but the problem is it's been so poorly done. Every nation in history of the world is failed in many ways. I want to talk a little bit about some of the dangers of Christian nationals. I mean, in a Christian sense, but but Kevin, I I know you are wanting to jump in on this a little bit so take it away.

Kevin Stone

I just wanted to throw out here that I think it's a good thing to keep in mind, it's very comforting, I think to remember that Jesus said I will build my church. And there was there was nothing attached to that. And no, no caveat or no exceptions. He just said I will build my church and nothing is going to be able to stand against it. The gates of Hell even will not be able to prevail. So we see the church through history, flourishing in parts of the world that were far from the type of representative democracy that we have. It so it doesn't matter in the end, it doesn't matter what type of government we're functioning under. The church can flourish under dictatorships. The church can flourish under all types of adverse conditions. We see it around the world, yet today, and so the mindset that we have to have the right people in political office in order for the church to prosper in order for God to be glorified is just false. In the final analysis. Jesus is building his church regardless of the political climate that you happen to be in.

Jeff Laird

We also see in the New Testament that when we're told to pray for leaders and authorities and those in power, it's connected to a desire to live quiet lives. In in a sense, what we're what we're told is that the only thing that we should really, really, really expect or hope for out of government is just to leave us alone and just let us pursue our faith the way that we think is best. And I think it's fair for people to want to have a definition for some of these things that mean something. So I don't think what we're saying here is that Christian nationalism doesn't exist, or that there is no such thing or that people who are

concerned have concerns that are totally unfounded. I think we can, we can distinguish a difference in these things, and I think the difference really comes from either the the bottom up or the top down approach. I think if somebody's belief is we should be allowed to pursue our Christian faith. We should tell other people about it and those individual people should vote and act and do as they feel led by the Holy Spirit because we think that's going to transform society in the right way. I think that's the right way to do things, and that's not the Christian nationalism boogeyman that people are thinking of.

Jeff Laird

At the same time, if you hear people or politicians taking the top down approach, we need to elect this particular politician or we need to install this particular Supreme Court Justice because we need to have these particular laws so that we will become a Christian nation. That's very much the approach that Pharisees were trying to take in Jesus Day. Where they're they're trying to start from the top and enforce things and then make people conform. And that's not the essence of the gospel. That's not the way it works. So as a ministry we're really careful about parties and candidates and everything else like that. So this isn't to call out some particular group, or party, or your candidate. But there is danger in somebody acting like our primary mission or an important part of our mission is to get politicians and rulers and kings and laws in place because that is never going to influence people. We have to start from influencing ourselves and then our family and then our neighbors and then our communities. So that people can make those decisions on their own. All the other things come down to political preferences and there's tons of different ways for Christians to express those. But the most important thing is we need to be starting from our level and working our way up. If somebody is trying to say I don't need to convince other people, I just need to get the laws my way, then this boogeyman of Christian nationalism does start to become something legitimate and it isn't something that Scripture supports.

Shea Houdmann

So I've had several friends who are pastors who have been struggling with what the using their words, Christian nationalists in their church and when they're using the term, they're using it similar to how you just were. Jeff, the making politics your focus, even your hobby horse, soapbox, whatever you want to call it. And to the point of I don't know. Maybe a friend of mine described it as are you an American Christian or are you a Christian American? Like what's your priority? Is your priority in loving your country and trying to accomplish your political goals? Or is your goal to be a Christian? To be a follower of Christ? To exemplify how he lived his life and how you live yours, to proclaim the gospel. The Christian should come first and again, I'm not saying this being a Christian lacks political involvement. It doesn't, and truly being a Christian impacts your political viewpoints. Your every aspect of your worldview, but what's your priority? And churches being divided, fighting over political issues. Some Christians fighting with each other, even outside of churches over these things. Christians being a poor witness while turning people away from the gospel by their political views. You know, ultimately I have strong political views on some issues, and if someone asks me about them, I will gladly share those, but I would gladly keep my mouth shut if I thought even for a second that me sharing this political viewpoint is going to prevent me from being able to share the gospel with someone. I think that's a priority shift that we need to remember is that the our call as Christians is to point people to Christ through the gospel, through the clear teaching of scripture.

Jeff Laird

I think. Yeah, I want to step in to emphasize that where you talk about the priority shift, you know? Just to briefly bring up that I, I think part of the problem is we lose track of our expectations. And I think a lot of the truly dangerous Christian nationalism comes from the expectation that we are going to find approval, and freedom, and ease, and success here in the world. That if we're doing things the way God wants us to do, then society should be friendly to us and we should get our way. And we should have things the way we want it. It's it's entirely possible that Christians are going to live in cultures and nations and places where that's not the case. Where most people don't agree with you. Most people don't like you. Most people don't approve of your faith. So I like how you're phrasing that in terms of a priority shift. We should not be focused on am I getting rights? Am I getting approval, as important as those are and they are. That's not what we're called to, we're called to faithfulness and understanding what that means can be very different in different circumstances.

Kevin Stone

Here are some things that all Christians should be doing. And these come from Scripture. We should be salt and light in our society. We are told in First Peter Chapter 2 that we should fear God and honor the king. So we give honor where honor is due. We pay our taxes. Jesus illustrated that. We have a clear command in in Romans to be paying our taxes. And we should love our neighbors and we should be seeking true justice. And whatever else that we are involved with, and whatever our political persuasion, we need to be at least doing those things and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent thoughts both of you. I've enjoyed this conversation. I've known this episode needed to happen for awhile but it's really trying to even just solidify my thinking and understanding of what do we actually want to communicate that would be productive. So I would attempt to summarize it. Government is not the Savior. There's nothing wrong with loving the nation in which you live. I I love the United States of America. I truly believe it's the greatest nation on Earth. The greatest nation in the history of Earth. In terms of freedoms, opportunity, and so forth. But my love for this nation does not even approach my love for Christ. My dedication to the United States is nowhere near my dedication to Christ. And I have to constantly re-evaluate my my feelings, my emotions on what am I prioritizing? So just remember that government is not the Savior. Government is not the tool through which Christ accomplishes his kingdom. His kingdom is not of this world. In this world, not of this world. So many reminders in scripture that this rule is not our home. We have to remember that. And maybe we close with this, as Christians remember that ultimately we are monarchists who are waiting for our king to return, and that is ultimately the only thing that will transform this world is a faith in Jesus Christ and people becoming new creations and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform everything about us, including our political viewpoints. Let's keep our priorities straight. Let's love our nation. Let's obey its laws. Let's promote godliness but not at the expense of embracing the government more than we embrace Christ, or more than we embrace people we're trying to reach with the gospel.

Shea Houdmann

So this has been the Got Questions podcast on Christian nationalism. I hope our conversation has been encouraging, helpful to you. Jeff and Kevin, thank you for joining me. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.

