

Episode 229

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. This is going to be an interesting episode. Jeff, Kevin, and I have been discussing what exactly we're going to talk about today, just in preparation for this. And we're going to do this episode on politics. And you may ask, and trust me, we've asked the same questions. Got Questions is not a political organization. We don't say, come ask us politically-based questions. But with that said, there are a lot of political questions that do have a spiritual component. And no matter how we quote-unquote advertise ourselves, people continue to ask us questions with a political focus or outright political questions in terms of how could you vote for this candidate or that candidate? How could you support this side or that side of the issue? How could you possibly be a Republican or a Democrat or a liberal or conservative or a progressive? All these things. So we try to point people back to God's word. We try to point people to have the right focus.

Shea Houdmann

And if I were to summarize this episode as anything, it would be the biggest struggle I'm seeing, I think Jeff and Kevin would agree, is that there's two extremes we want to avoid. The first, viewing this election or a particular candidate as the Savior. Essentially, if we could only get this person elected, that would solve all of our country or all the world's problems. Only Jesus can accomplish that. And he will when he returns. I'd like to say that Christians shouldn't be Republicans or Democrats. We're all monarchists waiting for our King to return.

Shea Houdmann

And then the second extreme is to, well, all the candidates are horrible. Therefore, I'm not going to be involved at all. I'm not going to vote. Both of those are unbiblical extremes. So it's kind of what we want to cover today to try to give a biblical balance on to what degree, to what extent and how should a Christian view politics. So Kevin, why don't you start us off? What are some things that you've noticed in people or what are some things that God has been particularly laying on your heart during this political season?

Kevin Stone

Yeah, it's quite an interesting time in our country, isn't it? With all of the discussions, to put it mildly, all of the arguments, all of the division, and Christians get caught up in this too. But I like those two extremes and how you laid that out, Shea. With the one extreme of people not wanting to be

involved, Christians that just kind of take a hands-off approach, I think sometimes they put a kind of godly sheen on that by saying, well, God is sovereign and so whatever happens is what God wants. It's going to be His will being done and I don't have to be involved. But I think that is an extreme position and it's one that we do need to avoid because Scripture gives us some guidelines that would say we need to be involved in the political process. Christians need to be voting. They need to be taking that responsibility. I see it as a responsibility to be doing what they can with what they have. And we have been given the right to vote and we should be using that for the glory of God because we have, as Christians, a dual citizenship. We are citizens of heaven, yes, and Jesus is our King. Jesus is our Lord. But at the same time, we are also in this world and we are citizens of a particular country. And we have rights and privileges as citizens here in this world as well. We need to be responsible citizens of both realms.

Kevin Stone

And John chapter 17 is Jesus' high priestly prayer. And as part of that prayer, Jesus says this, I do not pray that you, He's speaking to the Father, so I do not pray that you should take them, the disciples, out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They're not of the world just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have also sent them, the disciples, into the world.

Kevin Stone

So some important truths here in this prayer. One is that we are not of the world. It does not possess us. We do not belong to the world, but we have a different nature. We are sanctified, verse 17 says. We're set apart from the world and God's word is what sets us apart. So we are enmeshed in the world. We are engaged with the world. We are to be making a difference in this world as Christ has sent us into the world. We are to be salt. We are to be light. And we're to be making a difference. It is our home for now as we pass through this world. So we know who our Lord is. Ultimately, it's Jesus. Even as I put my hand on my heart and say the pledge to allegiance, I know that my ultimate allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I have a responsibility to be honoring him in all things.

Kevin Stone

And my identity, my main identity, is that of a child of God. However else I want to identify myself as an American citizen, as a citizen of my state, as a husband, as a father, whatever I use to identify myself, I understand that my number one identity is as a child of God, that I belong to Jesus Christ. Galatians 2.20 says, I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. In the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by

faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. So that's my life. Christ is living in me. I have a responsibility to him. I also have a responsibility to be a good citizen here in this world. It's a temporary citizenship, but it is nonetheless real.

Kevin Stone

Peter says in his epistle that we are strangers and sojourners. We're pilgrims passing through this world on our way to our final destination. Whatever candidate gets elected, whatever happens in the election, that is not the answer to the world's problems.

Kevin Stone

But we do have a responsibility to do what we can. And we have a responsibility to vote for those that would take our nation closer to righteousness rather than closer to moral destruction. And so that means as we vote, as Christians, we need to be informed in our vote. We need to be informed on the issues. We need to be informed about the candidates. We also need to pray. We need to be bathing this process in prayer. We need to be in the word because that's what sanctifies us and gives us discernment and wisdom. So I think Christians need to vote. I think it is incumbent upon them to be involved in the political process. They need to do so prayerfully. They need to do so humbly, being in the word on a daily basis.

Jeff Laird

And it's important that we actually take the tools that God has given us and do something with them. God does not intend us to just sit on the sidelines and do nothing. That's sort of like the parable of the talents, where one person just buries his in the ground and does nothing with it. That defeats the purpose. Very few people in human history get the privileges that people in our country, which is the United States of America, have when it comes to selecting our leaders and having influence on what happens in our government. That's a pretty cool thing to have access to. And to decide to do nothing with that at all seems like a bit of a waste. It seems like we're just taking an advantage. We're taking a resource God has given us and choosing to do nothing with it.

Jeff Laird

But in all these things, I think one of the things that I see happening is people tend to lose their sense of priority and understanding exactly where things are and where things are not. So it's been mentioned that politics is not the ultimate solution to the biggest problems that we have. No earthly politician is going to be the answer to the biggest and most important things we have. And I think believers also have to remember that as we go through trying to understand what we're supposed to vote for, who we should support, who we

should not, which candidate, which issue, that we need to remember that God is ultimately supposed to be our priority. And that some of the things that we are talking about are essentially optional. They are secular issues. There are things that are preferences, and there are good and bad answers to those things. But having a particular kind of life, having a particular kind of government, a particular kind of politics is not the purpose for which we're meant to be on this earth. It is an important thing. It is something that is good for us to do, but that is not the ultimate end goal. Jesus did not put us on this earth in order that we might, for example, win elections or have a particular kind of government.

Jeff Laird

So as long as we understand that when we want to see righteous things done, when we want to see good in the government, that we're doing that because we want to have a positive influence. And we don't see it as if we don't win this, we are somehow failing in our Christian responsibility. I think that's important because that gets to the idea of this sort of almost fear issue where we seem to be afraid in some cases that if the culture does not have certain legal or political leanings, that somehow we as believers are therefore not doing it right, or we're not accomplishing what God wants us to, or that we're being cheated out of something, or we're losing something that's very important. And it's hard to hear, but it's important to remember that most Christians throughout history have had to suffer with many, many worse things than most believers in the United States will ever have to cope with. So the worst that is probably going to happen at the end of any given election, including this one, is probably just that some things are not going to go the way I would prefer. That does not necessarily mean that all is lost and Christian faith is now on the ropes or anything else like that. So I see a lot of this fear sort of thing where we put too much emphasis, too much priority on the victory here in what we're really doing and what we're really saying in politics.

Jeff Laird

A lot of other things that come up with those issues, and I know we're going to get into talking about some of those and how they play out and how they don't, but the other thing that I see is people who don't really pay much attention to understanding where other people, whether those are brothers and sisters in Christ or non-believers, they just don't take the time to understand why other people see things the way they do and it oversimplifies things. So like I said, I know that we're going to get into discussing those, but the big thing that I see right off the bat in this is we just see a lot of people who they misplaced the priority. They hit those extremes

where they put too much emphasis on a personal stake in the victory in a particular moment. And to be honest, even from a secular perspective, I think that that's unwise. If you want to grow good apples, you don't hang apples in the tree and then wait for branches and roots to grow down. If you really want good trees, you start at the bottom and you work your way up. And I think sometimes we get fooled into thinking that the way we're supposed to affect change in this country is by putting people up at the top and letting them do things.

Jeff Laird

Sometimes we have the same attitude when it comes to our churches. We look at pastors and we say, he should be saying this, he should be doing that, he should be advocating for this. Or we look at our church and say the church should be doing this when we ourselves are not. And that's not what God called us to do. He called us to do what we can with what we have where we are. And that includes voting, but it also includes a lot more than that. So instead of looking at this as the answer to the problems, we just need to look at it as one of the tools that we have that lets us work towards a solution that we can hopefully turn things in a good direction.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, I think you hit the nail on the head with the fear factor that goes on in all these elections. And a part of it is the apocalyptic language that political candidates will use. That if this person wins, it is the end of our nation as we know it. If this person wins or if this issue passes or whatever. And I've been hearing that. And I think every election, I've had the opportunity to vote in since I turned 18, that if the wrong person gets elected, it is going to be an absolute disaster. Now, I will fully admit there's been some, especially presidents who I think made a whole bunch of wrongheaded and foolish decisions that did hurt the nation. But it kind of leads me to the main article on GotQuestions. Should Christians be a Republican or Democrat, conservative or progressive slash liberal? And in it, we discuss a lot of issues about, okay, the size of government, socialism versus capitalism. I can argue very strongly for which I think is better, which I think leads to more freedom, which leads to more prosperity. But I can't exactly say this is completely biblical and this is completely unbiblical.

Shea Houdmann

You look at the United States and where our government is supposed to be a representative republic, not a democracy. And so we are not as far down the socialistic road as some other nations are. But look at some of the nations that are almost fully socialistic. And do I want to live there versus the United States? No, I don't. Could I? Yeah, I could. I mean, it's got problems. I

definitely prefer a free system versus a government control system. But I mean, it's not as bad as some people make it out to be. They take, they're going to transform, they're going to do this and this and this and this and this. And then someone's in office for eight years and didn't do any of those things. They made some decisions that I was strongly disagree with.

Shea Houdmann

So yeah, it's this fear that people, if this person wins, basically your life is over and you're now a slave to the government. That thing leads to the polarization when like, yes, there are important differences and different stances between the candidates. And I believe one candidate versus the other is the much better choice. But to put it in the language of basically, it's the end of the world as we know it, if this person wins, I think that leads to far more conflict than is actually necessary on some of these issues.

Kevin Stone

The Christian is only to have one fear, and that is to fear God. And that's exactly what 1 Peter 2, verse 17 says very succinctly, fear God, honor the King. So there we have our dual citizenship again. We fear God, we honor the King, we give respect to whom respect is due and all the rest.

Kevin Stone

One of the things that I think gets lost in the political process a lot of times with believers is that we lose sight of the greatest commandments that Jesus gave us, which were to love God. And then the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. And then I would also throw in there the great commission. We have the greatest commandments and we have the great commission, which is to share the gospel. So we can do this, we can serve God in this way, no matter who is in the oval office. We can love God, we can love people, and we can celebrate the gospel. So what does this look like? Does this mean that when I look across the street and I see my neighbor has signs in his yard for somebody that I just can't stand, they're supporting a candidate that I think is anathema, and am I supposed to still love my neighbor? Yes, I am. And I cannot allow the political wranglings of our culture to affect my love for God, my love for people, regardless of who they vote for, and my celebration of the gospel. These things are most important. And that's one thing that I think that the church just really needs to focus on and never lose sight of.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, Kevin, we're called to be in the world, not of the world. And right now, at least here in the West or in America, we're seeing this drift towards this extremely tribal and divided sense of politics, where the idea of us versus them is just overwhelming. And it's to the point that once you've identified yourself with a particular team or particular side, you cannot even consider

that there might be a reason why somebody would think differently on particular issues. And for believers, that's especially a problem, because we're told that sometimes things look right until somebody else questions it. In the book of Proverbs, we're told that we're supposed to search and see if things are true, and cautious skepticism, that we're supposed to be known for being reasonable.

Jeff Laird

So another thing I think we need to remember as believers is that so many of these things that scripture does not give explicit, obvious answers to really come down to questions of preference in how we accomplish the same goal or the same Christian goal. Yes, there are some issues, life and sexuality and things, where scripture is extremely clear. There's some where it's just not. And there's times where we need to try to understand why does somebody else take the position that they do. And sometimes when we look into those, we find out that they have the same goal and really the same motivations as we do. But what they disagree on is simply the mechanism behind that.

Jeff Laird

To give a few examples, it's conceivable for a believer to vote in favor of allowing certain things that they personally think are immoral, that they think are wrong. But the reason that they want them to be legal is they don't want to give the government the power to someday clamp down on Christian expression or churches. Maybe you agree with that principle, maybe you don't. But it's not the case that when somebody votes that way that they're just voting that way because they don't agree with what scripture says. That can be applied to almost anything.

Jeff Laird

And the big elephant in the room on all this, probably the most contentious of all these, is the 500 pound gorilla elephant, whatever we want to call it, in the room right now in Christian circles is Donald Trump. And you know, again, to clarify, we as a ministry, we do not endorse nor do we refute particular candidates or parties. That is not what we're doing. That is not what we're intending to do. So if somebody says that in the comments, they're not paying attention. They're not listening. And I know they will because they're not paying attention and they're not listening. But it is important for people to understand. So just for the sake of understanding, I think it's for people to know why there is a divide and there is a divide within evangelical Christianity about Donald Trump. And the things I'm about to say are simply so that we understand. And the reason I'm bringing this up is because I talk to people about this constantly, constantly. So I do have a good understanding of where

people are coming from. If you are completely and totally opposed to Donald Trump, you need to understand that if there was absolutely no reason for people to vote for him, nobody would. And if you're very, very pro-Trump and you can't understand why people are against, it's the same thing. You have to remember that there are going to be reasons. So just so that people hear them and they understand them.

Jeff Laird

There are some people who are very, very for Trump because they see him as one of the only people who's willing to go against a certain brand of politics. They perceive it as anti-conservative, anti-Christian. To some extent, it's a little bit of rebellion. You know, it's sticking your tongue out at the establishment. Obviously, some people are in support of Trump purely for policies. They like what he brings to the table when it comes to, we're going to do this and do that. A lot of people in evangelical Christianity would go with the lesser of two evils argument that they do not approve of many of the things that Trump is and does and stands for, but they see what he does and stands for as being less of a problem than others.

Jeff Laird

And yes, there are some people who basically are just selling out completely because they are worried about protecting culture and they're not really thinking about faith. None of those apply to everybody. Some of those may apply to some people. Some may apply to others.

Jeff Laird

Now, on the flip side, there are people who are very opposed to Donald Trump because they think that his attitude towards Christianity and faith is very cynical and shallow and insincere, that it's just a facade that's being put on. Sometimes they don't like the policies that he has. They're skeptical about his commitment to actual conservative values. Some Christians reject the concept of the lesser of two evils, and they say, the reason that I cannot vote for this candidate is because I think that there's a certain threshold that every candidate has to pass, and I don't believe that that candidate passes that threshold. And then, yes, some people who are passionately against Trump are just being hyper idealistic or escapism. They're being too whatever you want to call it.

Jeff Laird

So the point of all that is not to say that one of those sides is absolutely right, one of those sides is wrong, or that every single one of those applies to people. But all of us listening need to understand that when it comes to that candidate or any candidate or any issue or any party, hopefully there are different reasons and nuances why people would go in one direction or the

other. People can have very different reasons for having the exact same vote. They can have very different reasons that lead them to the exact opposite vote. So we need to remember that this is not something that is simple, easy, non-complicated. This is not sports. It is not a tribal thing that we can just snap our fingers and know what another person's heart is. So as we look at this, as we talk about this, we have to remember it's really important in conversations to ask the questions, why? What brings you to that idea? Why do you think that? Where are you coming down on this? Where are you coming down on that? And usually when we do that, we find out that the people we're talking to, especially in Christian circles, we really are on the same page with the things that we want and we want to accomplish. What we're disagreeing about is the nitty-gritty, complicated, practical side of what do we actually do in the world to make it happen or not happen. And I think if we spent more time trying to understand why other people have the views that they have, instead of just assuming that they're evil or stupid, I think we would take a lot of the heat out of these conversations and add a lot more light.

Shea Houdmann

I read a book not that long ago that addressed this issue. And it was written by someone who was very against evangelical Christianity. She would say she is a Christian but disagrees with the whole evangelicalism as a movement and its support of Donald Trump. And her whole reasoning is Christians don't care about some of the lack of godliness in Trump's character. I've not met a single Christian, and I know a lot of Christians, who would agree with that statement. That basically goes down to not understanding the other side, as you were saying, Jeff, and then assuming things that aren't true. That because Donald Trump has some policies maybe that we agree with, we are just gung-ho, we love everything about the man, he's perfect, we love him, yay. It's like, no. I think a lot of Christians in this election and past elections, not even involving Donald Trump, have had to go in to an extent, hold their nose as they vote. Because yes, there are things that I like about this candidate, and there are things that I don't. But of the two, this is one I think will make the best decisions or will at least surround himself or herself with the people who will help make the right decisions. So not demonizing the other side, actually trying to understand the reasons why someone may vote one way or another, despite the obvious flaws in candidate A versus candidate B is very important, because that helps us to avoid this extreme polarization where assuming evil intent and evil desires and thoughts amongst the people who vote differently, when really, no, it might just be a different strategy. And it might be, these issues are so important to me, I'm willing to support a flawed, very flawed candidate, because at least these issues I think will be taken care

of well. And I think that's important for us to understand, no matter which side you land on, voting for a candidate does not mean that you agree with or support everything that candidate says or does.

Jeff Laird

And just as a point of clarification to make sure that everybody understands, you know, we're only really trying to speak from the Christian, the biblical perspective on this. And it's important for people to remember that with many of the issues, whether it's ballot issues in your state or particular candidates, or things like a presidential election, there is disagreement and controversy on some of these things within the Christian community. So we don't want to get into that mindset of thinking that this is the obviously Christian response, whether you're a believer or non-believer, that's not true, especially with the more contentious issues. And to be honest, especially with somebody like a Donald Trump, there are going to be people, and there are people who do not agree with the conclusion that says that they should or should not vote in those certain ways. So there is not lockstep within the community. There are people who are prayerfully, soulfully searching and coming to different conclusions about these things.

Jeff Laird

And we need to remember that it's going to be the same thing on most sides. There are always going to be people who are just shallow about what they do. They don't really know what they're doing and why. But at least within the Christian community, these are issues that people really are grappling with. And there is a variety of answers to the way that we've come across these things. And it's really just about that question of which one do we think is best or not? And it's a recognition that you're not obligated to vote for someone's polar opposite just because you believe that they in particular are not suited. That's where we are. And it's important for people to remember that this really is something that we're grappling with.

Kevin Stone

If I'm hearing you guys right, it sounds like you're advocating for dialogue and having friends that maybe disagree with you, and being able to talk to them and understand where they're coming from and not make assumptions and all of that. And I think all of that is very good. It's good to have friends that disagree with us. Iron sharpens iron. And we need this in our lives. We need to be talking with people and not making assumptions. We need to be loving our neighbor as ourselves. We also need to be praying for our country's leaders. That's exactly what 1 Timothy 2 says. As Paul exhorts Pastor Timothy with this, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and all who are in

authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

Jeff Laird

Christians need to be responsible and faithful in their prayers for our country's leaders. And then celebrate the gospel, love God, love people, and remember that, I think as Jeff was saying, we have it much better than most generations of Christians and even a lot of Christians around the world today. The early church, who was in charge of their government back then, they were putting up with Emperor Nero and some of the other emperors that came after him weren't any better. And yet they could still serve God. The church grew by leaps and bounds as Christians focused on what is truly important and remembered that their citizenship is ultimately in heaven.

Jeff Laird

Right. A year from now I'm still part of his kingdom and everything's going to be all right in the end.

Shea Houdmann

So maybe in closing, let's just go back to our main focus today. Obviously not advocating candidates or issues or political parties. What we're advocating is that Christians to be responsible, Christians to be balanced, Christians to not give into fear, and Christians to not become so, I don't know, laser focused that only one candidate could possibly be the right answer that it becomes a divisive thing.

Shea Houdmann

So for Jeff and Kevin, for you, what's the key heart attitude change that we all need to help us to have the right perspective in a very divisive election like we are currently experiencing?

Jeff Laird

It's a very good question.

Kevin Stone

I'm sorry to step on you there, Jeff. For me, it's just that thing of loving God, loving people, and celebrating the gospel. For me to be able to see my fellow citizens in my country and maybe even people in my own church that may be voting differently than I am and be able to love them. Find ways to love them. Find ways to appreciate them. Pray for them. And seek to understand them. That for me, that's what keeps my attitude right, and my wife. My wife is very good at letting me know when I am getting a little bit too upset over a particular issue or a particular thing that a candidate says. She very good to pull me back from the brink and to help me keep a Godly perspective.

Jeff Laird

I think for me, if I could encourage one change in perspective it would be to almost obsess over the idea that we are citizens of heaven. And that this is not our home. We need to be able to look at these issues, these candidates, these politics and understand that while they are important in the now, and they mean something now, absolutely none of it in any sense is going to affect my eternity. There is no reason what so ever for me to be terrified or afraid or obsessed with a particular outcome. If things don't go the way I think they should or the way I don't want them to or they even turn out tragically, He is still on the throne. I am still going to be with him in eternity because I put my faith in Him and that's the only thing that really matters. I can urge myself to do the right thing but I always have to do it with the understanding that I am doing this as a visitor. I am this as someone passing through. And passing by. So for me I would say there's one thing for believers to remember, its just to keep that sense of healthy detachment. Not irresponsibility. Just that understanding that everything we are experiencing right now is vapor. It's just a flash in the pan. And eventually it's actually not even going to matter because we will be with Him and like Him.

Shea Houdmann

As I said earlier, the saying, we are all monarchist waiting for our king to return. For me that's a powerful reminder. Even the form of government that we happen to prefer in our country, the United States of America, isn't a explicitly Biblical form. It's not like specifically this is the form of government we should have. I think it's great. I think it works better than anything else. I'm so grateful to live in the country that I do. But ultimately my status in this world does not depend on the country I live in. I'm a follower of Jesus Christ.

Shea Houdmann

We sent out a question of the week a couple weeks ago about politics and some people wrote in saying why are you discouraging people from voting by saying government is not the ultimate solution. That a candidate is not our savior. For some people it lead them to think that thy shouldn't vote. Even when the article specifically says we should vote. We should do our civic duty and vote for candidates, for issues to what we believe best matches what the Bible describes. Let me just say, vote! Research. Study the scriptures to try and understand what's going on in the world and which candidate actually best represents what the Biblical ideal is. Both candidates are going to fall short of that. Voting for the lesser of two evils, that' the reality of any election unless one candidates is God. It's always going to be two evils. Two imperfect people. Two people plagued by sin that we have to choose between. So don't view politics as your savior. Don't view an election as, in apocalyptic terms, if we don't get this right, it's the end of the world. Maybe someday that might be the case but God is in control. And ultimately that needs to be our attitude.

That no matter who wins, no matter which ballot initiatives win, no matter who wins, governors, senators, representatives or I even think we vote for the county coroner in my district. I understand why that's a voting issue at all. But no matter who wins any of these things, God is in control. And we can trust him. We need to vote. We need to try to vote rightly. Try to vote wisely. Try to vote for what will produce the best result. And on clear Biblical issues we are to vote that direction, what the Bible informs and teaches. Ultimately trust that God is sovereign and that He is in control. We can trust Him no matter what. In our relationship with Him, as Jeff said, is secure no matter who wins this election.

Shea Houdmann

Hope our conversation has been helpful to you as you navigate this political season. Get out there and vote. And if there's any core solution in terms of our attitude, trust God. Remember that God is in control. This has been the Got Questions podcast on, I don't even know what to title this one, How does a Christian live a dual citizen life in a politically hot season? Maybe that's it. Got Questions? The Bible has answer an we'll help you find them