

# OpenTheo

## 4 Questions for Divisive Topics

September 9, 2020



### **Life and Books and Everything** - Clearly Reformed

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Kevin shares four questions to ask regarding the most divisive topics in the church today: voting, police shootings, and Coronavirus.

Kevin also shares 4 book recommendations of some of the most recent and enjoyable titles he has read through.

This episode is sponsored by Crossway, a publisher whose goal is to publish gospel-centered, Bible-centered content that will honor our Savior and serve his Church. The Crossway title we want to highlight in this episode is *Unfolding Grace: 40 Guided Readings through the Bible*; discover the overarching storyline of God's Word as it is revealed through forty Scripture readings drawn from key points in the biblical narrative. Each passage, coupled with brief and accessible commentary, will help you follow God's grace as it unfolds from Genesis through Revelation. *Unfolding Grace* includes 40 illustrations by Peter Voth, excerpts discussing the flow of God's plan of redemption, a single-column format, a Smyth-sewn binding, and a Study guide. Timestamps: Introduction + 4 book recommendations [0:00 - 22:31]

Books mentioned: *The American Dream Is Not Dead: (But Populism Could Kill It)* by Michael Strain

*The Morality of Laughter* by F. H. Buckley

*The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* by Jason A. Josephson Storm

*J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* by Ned B. Stonehouse - cover done by Marina Amaral

4 questions to ask when discussing voting [22:31 - 34:52]  
4 questions to ask when discussing police shootings [34:52 - 42:05]

4 questions to ask when discussing the Coronavirus [42:05 - 54:25]

## Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations, I am Kevin DeYoung, and I am NOT joined as always by my good friends Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen. Many apologies, I am recording this on September 7. Labor Day, holiday here in the United States, and Collin and Justin Selfish Creatures they are, are not joining me. They are doing something better, no doubt.

Don't worry, I am not doing this all day, and I will take some time off and spend some time with my family many projects do on this beautiful day in Charlotte. But I am holding down the fort and so you are going to have a shorter Life and Books and Everything, and it is going to be a solo venture, but hopefully there will still be something that can help you pass the time on your commute or mowing the lawn. I ought to mention that we are sponsored again by Crossway, so grateful for their partnership on the podcast, and want to mention the book *Unfolding, Grace, 40 Guided Readings Through the Bible*.

Great book for discovering the unifying story of scripture from cover to cover through 40 different scripture readings, each passage with newly written introductions will enable readers to follow God's Redemptive Plan as it develops throughout the Bible. There are 40 illustrations, study guides available, *unfolding grace, 40 guided readings through the Bible*. Thank you Crossway and check out that book.

This is going to be shorter than usual, but let's talk first about books. I am always going through books and I should hasten to add because less people give me too much credit. I do read a lot of books, there's lots of other things I don't do.

Reading is one of the things I do, but I read books in many different ways. And so often I will read the introduction carefully. I'll read a conclusion carefully, and depending on the book, I may plow through some of the middle section or skim through some of the middle section.

I don't want you to think that every book that I ever mention is meticulously, laboriously read line by line. Some parts are read more quickly than others. But let me just mention four books that I have finished lately, a couple of these I mentioned before because I was going to read them over the summer and now I have finished them.

So I'm just going to take them in the order that they're sitting in front of me, which means nothing to you because you can't see me. This is a little book by Michael strain. You could read it in an hour or two.

It's called *the American dream is not dead, but populism could kill it*. Now, sort of unfortunately for Mr. strain, this book comes out and then a global pandemic sends the

economy crashing, but the basic arguments and I've heard an interview with him where he maintains the basic arguments still stand. That the American dream is not dead.

The cover of the book has a chart, a graph with an upward slope to it. And that chart forms one of the central arguments in the book as he looks at wages for typical American workers. You'll have to get through all of the economic speak and in the inflationary adjustment that he uses and the sort of workers he's looking at.

He's looking at production and non supervisory employees. So he's trying to think of workers, maybe blue collar, but just workers and their wages and his argument, which I find convincing is that for typical workers wages have risen 44% over the past three decades. That is adjusted for inflation.

Now he is clear that there is much room for improvement. It's clear that the this increase in pay is has been more at the top end of the economic spectrum. But he wants to make the point and I think it's an important one that the American dream is not dead and by that he means economic mobility.

So he has a number of statistics in here. Seven Americans out of every 100 raised in the bottom 20% of the income reach the top 20%. Three quarters of Americans have higher inflation adjusted family incomes than did their parents.

So he's making the case that there still is economic upward mobility. And one of the reasons he thinks this is important is because he argues that on both the right and the left now if you listen to almost any political candidate, the description they will give you is not one of hope and optimism or growth or dreams. But rather crashing, burning, nightmares, degeneracy and dreams falling short.

And he wants to say that can give the impression that things are only getting worse. Greg Easterbook, Brooke, we've mentioned a book by him before the book, not mindfulness but factfulness often makes also makes the same case that actually things are not all getting worse. And in fact, by just economic measures and standard of living measures, which as Christians we know are not the most important measures, but they matter.

Things actually have been getting better. And so the payoff in strains book he says, if you are bombarded with this message that it's only a nightmare all the time and in particular then you hear from both the right and the left that it's because entirely of forces outside of your control colluding against you you begin to believe that you have no agency and that others are always to blame. So he says this could be the elites or immigrants or the wealthy or the game is rigged or free trade or capitalism.

And he wants to make the argument that in fact there is much reason to have optimism. Now he's very clear that many economic factors are not as good as they ought to be and

not as good as they always have been in American history. But his argument the American Dream is not dead.

Good little book that perhaps give you something to think about. Second book I mentioned this before the summer break by FH Buckley called the morality of laughter. He is a professor of law at George Mason University at least he was at the time of the dust jacket that I'm reading the morality of laughter.

It's actually an academic and somewhat technical book looking at two different theories, one called the normative theory and one called the positive theory on what makes laughter but here's the big idea in the book. He argues that laughter always reveals the laughers sense of superiority to a but to someone who is thereby degraded. Now this doesn't have to be a real harsh degradation.

It could be. It's a joke. It could be ingest.

It could be that everyone is laughing and there's nothing mean spirited about it. But he's arguing that there is always someone or something that is the butt of a joke. And in the act of laughing, even if it's self deprecating humor, that the laugh is indicating some sense of superiority over the object about which they are laughing.

Now I have to admit I'm not sure I find the technicalities of that argument entirely convincing but it's a new field. I'm not a scholar of laughter. And so I could kind of take it or leave it on the academic thesis itself.

But what certainly is very instructive and helpful in the book is the recurring point that laughter almost always has as its underlying principle, some vision of morality. That those who make us laugh and when we laugh, we are upholding some set of comic norms. Quote our laughter identifies a set of comic vices and the sting of laughter contains its own sanction for transgressors.

And that's why the book is called the morality of laughter. I enjoyed the book enjoys too strong a word I benefited from the book and it has been something I've thought about over the years. I've thought saying whether my family or friends think that I'm funny but I have always enjoyed a good laugh I've always enjoyed a joke that makes people laugh.

And it was a struggle with me for many years, feeling like being the funny person or the person who likes to laugh is less spiritual. And if I were truly godly and more spiritual and more holy, I would be more resolutely serious all the time. And I've come to see that so much of that is dependent upon God given personalities and temperaments and people who are very serious are often very serious about most everything.

And so they need to be challenged to find Mirth and to find even jocularity and those like a Spurgeon who was often using humor in the pulpit warned against a irreverent humor and irreverent jocularity and so that's a caution for those who like to laugh and like to

make people laugh that they don't make other people in a nasty way. The butt of their jokes, but this book makes the compelling case that we need laughter and laughter serves a good purpose, not only because it feels good to smile and to laugh but there is an underlying sense of morality in laughter. And it is something that brings not only zest to life, but brings ethical bearings on life, what we find funny, what we laugh at says something about our values, our virtues and our vices.

Third book, which I also mentioned I believe before the summer break by Jason Josephson storm the myth, the myth, excuse me of disenchantment magic, modernity and the birth of the human sciences. The myth of disenchantment what he means is that in the modern world supposedly we no longer deal with superstition or he often uses the all encompassing word magic which doesn't mean illusionists can mean that doesn't mean necessarily David Copperfield he's using it in a bigger sense of magic. And he's arguing that to say that modernity has meant a complete disenchantment we no longer have superstition we no longer have magic.

We no longer have alchemy even if it's named something different he says is a myth he begins with Paris 1907 Marie Curie, famous scientist who is sitting there at a seance. He talks about Francis Bacon. Bacon, the father as it were of empiricism and leading to the scientific method.

It means that bacon was very interested in alchemy and brought to many of his intellectual pursuits findings from the occult. He's not trying to say that bacon was good or bad he's just saying it's a myth to think that we suddenly reach the modern period and the enlightenment. And now we have a complete disenchantment.

He's not arguing one way or the other this is not a Christian book he says at the end that he's rather ambivalent about it and on the one hand he's thankful for science and what the modern world has given. So he's not saying if only we could be enchanted again what he's really saying is we never became disenchanted. He makes the interesting point that in anthropology for example it has become absolutely taboo that you an anthropologist would look at some tribesmen somewhere and describe them as primitive you can't talk about primitive people that would be very un-PC Yet he says in effect that is how all of anthropology works but not with tribes people but with modernity and people who existed before modernity.

Most academics have no problem thinking of them as primitive people and look at their belief in the supernatural and they must have been superstitious or they were enthusiasts. And then comes the modern period where people now believe in science rather than in these traditional animistic or religious senses of the world around them. And so it's a helpful book if nothing else in the big idea that modernity and its disenchantment is a myth and he has lots of examples of that and it's helpful for us to remember as Christians that we of all people inherit a view of the world that isn't one

sense going to be irrefutably modern whether we like it or not.

But also believes we ought to resolutely believe in the existence of the supernatural, unexplainable. And it's not hard to show how even if traditional religious beliefs in the supernatural are declining at the same time you have all sorts of other enchanted magical beliefs that are on the rise whether it's with conspiracy theories or extraterrestrials or any number of theories. In other words, we are undeniably and will always be an enchanted people to use the language of this author and to think that we put it behind us is a mistake.

And then finally here's a fourth book, Jay Gresse-machin, a biographical memoir by Ned Stonehouse who of course was one of the young faculty that Machen brought to the founding of Westminster and went on to be a well known writer and outstanding New Testament scholar himself and Ned Stonehouse wrote this biographical memoir. So this I've read the biography of Machen from Darryl Hart a number of years ago which is very good and have read lots of Machen and consider him to be one of my heroes in the faith. And so I read this biographical sketch from Ned Stonehouse and I know you can't see the book but I have to say something about this edition of it which is a new edition so I'm looking at the copyright first edition, Erdmann's 1954 and then Westminster's Seminary 1977.

This is the fourth edition that I'm holding from 2019 published by Banner of Truth. I love Banner of Truth for the content of their books but I also love physically holding their books. So this book is a beautiful, handsome, hardback with a really outstanding cover.

You don't often talk about the dust jackets on a book but look this one up. It has this old photo of the Westminster faculty and from 1931 and the image has been colorized by, I'm going to say her name right, Marina Amarell. You can look up this young woman, a Brazilian artist I believe who takes old photos and through a painstaking process of research and sometimes guesswork fills in the colors and so it really produces an exquisite looking book with the dust jacket and then you can open up either the back or the front cover and look inside and there's a picture of the Westminster faculty in color John Murray, Ellen McCray, Ned Stonehouse, Oswald Alice, Machen, Paul Woolley Cornelius, then Till.

So just to hold the book is a pleasure. Just a few things that I probably had learned before but had forgotten. First is there's a footnote here and I don't believe I had heard this before but that the correct pronunciation is not Gresham but the H is silent and the correct pronunciation is J Gresham, Machen.

So there you go, if you've been saying this wrong for all of these years. As a professor at least in my second job, a professor of systematic theology, I was heartened to read this account later in the book at the formation of Westminster theological seminary, where Stonehouse recalls that Machen said, as far as he was concerned, the most important

chair to fill in the seminary was the chair of systematic theology. And that's a remarkable comment coming from Machen who was of course a New Testament scholar that he thought that was the most important position to fill, doesn't go into detail but why he thought that perhaps anchoring the other disciplines.

But I'm going to remember that one, someone who teaches systematic theology. I was often reminded again, I mean I hadn't forgotten about Machen's very close relationship with his mother. Machen was never married, more about that in a moment but at least as I recall from Hart's biography he certainly mentions that but Stonehouse goes into great detail and often will quote at length from the letters that pass between Machen and his mother.

Over a thousand letters passed between them. So Machen found in his mother, really his, in many ways, intellectual companion, a spiritual nurturer, a confidant, there was no one to whom he was closer than with his mother who died when she was 83 and Machen who died. Machen who died early didn't live much beyond that.

It's not that Machen didn't have any interest or any possibilities with romantic interludes with young women. There's one story that Stonehouse recalls, one real romance in his life that did not end in marriage, of course Machen never married. He referred to the woman as intelligent, beautiful and exquisite, a young woman from Boston and they exchanged letters and they knew of each other and they were very close to one another devoted to each other.

But Stonehouse says the devotion never developed into an engagement because she was a Unitarian. Miss S as he calls her, Stonehouse does. Made an effort to believe but could not bring her mind in heart where she could share Machen's faith.

And so of course Machen was not going to marry a young woman no matter how much he loved her, no matter how beautiful she was, no matter how close they had become if she didn't share the same faith and being a Unitarian. I mean, can you make Machen would not be Machen you cannot write Christianity and liberalism and then marry a Unitarian. And so Machen was true to his principles there.

So I always love reading a good biography. This one is long, is hagiographical at times but still good to be reminded of these things in Machen's life. Four books.

What I'd like to do for the rest of this solo jaunt is to think through why many of the most divisive issues in the church right now are in fact so divisive. Now this is pulling together some disparate strands, some things that Colin and Justin and I have talked about over previous months but I want to try to pull them together and press home on three particular issues. I'm going to go where angels dared to tread in talking about these three issues which are divisive in the church and in the months ahead will likely become even more divisive in the church.

So I want to talk about voting. I want to talk about police shootings. And then I want to talk about COVID.

So, if I got your attention does that sound like a foolish thing for me to do to try to talk about these three issues. What I'm not going to do is try to tell you what to think about each of these issues but rather try to press home in our disagreements as Christians. What is it we are really disagreeing about.

Perhaps that's at least a place to start because one of my contentions is on many of these issues where we talk in exalted language as if the disagreements were always about the very first principles when in fact they're often about very many secondary or prudential matters. So it's not really doing theological triage I'm not saying that we're dealing with lesser greater importance in theological matters but rather sort of doing logical triage. Because if we can at least understand what we're really arguing about it's not to say that we don't have an argument or that we don't make arguments or that some arguments aren't better than others.

I'm not arguing that there's just an obvious third way. When it comes to voting when it comes to police shootings and race when it comes to coronavirus clowns to the left to me joker to the right here I am stuck in the middle with you. And so I think that's a third way that we all could find it and we would all be happy and that's the same middle way.

That's not the point rather want us to talk about what is it that we are actually arguing about and maybe that can get our rhetoric in the right place. Maybe it can advance the conversation in some of these areas. So let's just move through these three and then we'll be done.

Voting. And I imagine Colin and Justin I will say more about this in the months ahead as at least here in the United States we are two months away from presidential election and governors and many senators and all of representatives are going to be on the ballot so it's always a big deal especially when we come to the presidential election and there will be lots of talk about who you are voting for. And those things matter.

But I want to think about what are we arguing about. What are we doing because so before we tell one another. Unfaithful, ungodly, unbiblical for whichever way you're thinking.

Let's at least get to the matter what is the argument about and what is the nature of what we do when we vote and if you're listening outside of the states I apologize that this is going to be very American centric our two party system in how we think about voting. Let me just give you. I think four different ways people can understand what they're doing when they're voting.

And I guess a fifth way would be you just don't vote but let's say you are voting. Number



one simply you go to the polls and let's just simplify your thinking about who to vote for for the president. One way to approach your vote to say I am simply going to vote for the best candidate period.

There will be many people on the ballot you could write in someone and you are going to vote for the best candidate. What does best mean? Well, it probably means someone who most aligns with your values, the one who stands for the things that you think are most important in politics, the one who is going to use the presidential bully pulpit for the most good who will sign into law, those laws that are best for the flourishing of the church and for human flourishing you're going to look at the best candidate just going to go in there. That's what I do when I vote whoever is the best candidate.

A second way to approach voting is to say, look, in this two party system, it is the case and it has been the case ever since. The Republican Party founded with Abraham Lincoln that a Republican or a Democrat is going to win. The Republican or Democrat is going to be the president of the United States.

And so the argument is you should vote for one of these two major party candidates and then vote for the best. Now, the best may be someone you're really excited about. It may be someone you hold your nose for.

It may be someone as the saying often goes who you consider to be the lesser of two evils. I don't really like that expression because I don't think that God ever puts us in a situation where we must sin, that we must do evil, but I understand what it means. The least bad of what you may consider to be two bad options.

So in voting for the best, so one is just vote for the best candidate period, two vote for the best of the two major party candidates because you think, well, you know that one of those two will be president and so you want to put your vote, you want to put your thumb on the scale toward the one you think is better. And what does better mean? Again, that requires discussion. Better may be based on the party platform.

Well, parties didn't present a platform this year. Or you may think of it not just as the individual you're voting for, but the whole apparatus that win that person and that party is in power with the presidency. A whole constellation of appointments, whether judicial appointments or bureaucratic appointments or the whole kind of apparatus of think tanks that will have access to the hospital to the White House, a people who will have the ear people who will be put in positions of influence that you're thinking, I'm not just voting for a person, I'm voting for what will come with the whole package that will be put into power voting for the person that has an R by their name or a D by their name.

And make the calculation whether you really are excited about either one or either party, you think one is going to be better than the other. A third way, and really this is a nuance on the first two ways of thinking about voting, is to say I'm going to vote for

maybe the best candidate period, or I'm going to vote for the better of the two major party candidates. But there is a basic threshold of character or ideology without which I cannot vote for this person.

So someone, they think, you know, if no matter how much better one candidate may be than the other, if this one candidate doesn't meet a certain basic threshold whether it's defense of the unborn or the sort of character or history on racial issues, there's a basic basic character threshold that if you don't cross that so by this thinking, if the, you know, it is Stalin versus Hitler, in one of those two are going to be elected you still reason to yourself. So I cannot put my name or pull the lever or punch out the hanging Chad is a moral act for someone who does not pass a basic threshold so I cannot in my conscience have voted for Stalin or Hitler. So that's not what we're facing here but just to make it reductio ad absurdum.

That's another way of looking at voting. I'll give you a fourth way, and that is you may think in voting, specifically for the president, you're thinking of how to vote in a way that you believe will best advance the long term goals in your most important convictions. So you may reason that perhaps this person or that person may be better in the short term, but you may think to yourself what signal does this send or if this sort of person is elected will this type of person be put forward again and again, or maybe this person you think has better ideas in one way but makes other ideas that you believe in very strongly less palatable.

In other words, you're doing a moral calculus as best as you can to discern not just which would be better for the next four years, but you're thinking about voting for the long term and trying to gauge what sort of vote cast will yield the best outcome for the beliefs that you have as a Christian and your convictions over many years to come. Now, I'm not telling you which which of those four I think is the best way to approach voting. I do think that all of them can be justified not theologically, of course, but they they they're logical and there can be a moral coherence to them vote for the best candidate period vote for the best of the two parties two candidates that will be president.

Third, the first two but with a basic threshold of character or moral decency or the fourth thinking not just for the next four years but long term what is going to best serve the interest of the party you adhere to most or the country and the aims that you have for it or the church and for human flourishing. So again, I'm not telling you I didn't even mention any candidate is saying, let's let's have the argument. Even sometimes before we get to the who, let's talk about what what is the nature of voting because often we're firing at one another and we're really arguing about well what what is it that we're doing when we vote.

And we're assuming one of these ways as better than another or one of these approaches to voting as godlier than another. And then we come at each other with the

full force and all barrels when what we're really arguing about is how do we understand voting. And that's not as simple as it sounds.

Let's take another issue. I've written a lot about race and want to narrow it down to talk about police shootings. And I should say here that I'm going solo as you know and Justin and Colin aren't here and Justin and Colin are very good friends we agree on most things we don't agree you can tell on every single thing and that makes for healthy friendship and healthy discussion.

So, and all of these points here that I'm making I'm I'm not I don't know if Colin and Justin would agree with me on all of this or where they might dim you or but let's just focus on police shootings, which are in the news and it seems likely will continue to be in the news. Sadly for the foreseeable future is very, very difficult to think that in a country this size, there aren't, you know, you're not going to have videotaped on someone's phone, some shooting that seems either questionable or seems all right heinous so it's going to be in our public purview. And when we talk about these things it brings to bear a lifetime sometimes centuries of racial tension and difficulty and sin and guilt so we're we're almost never just talking about this particular incident but I do think it's important.

Come let us reason together to try to think through these things as Christians. Four questions that I would ask anytime we see one of these police shootings. What happened.

How often does it happen to whom does it happen. Why does it happen. Again we're Christians are going to disagree and they're going to get their news from other sources and they're going to look scour the internet and find different understandings of how this happened and even when the person may have their day in court and you still might not agree.

So this isn't a panacea that we all just get along now it's not a mythical third way but I do think we owe it to one another in talking about these things that we don't quickly elevate it to the, the highest level of rhetoric so that any disagreement with one another on these matters means that you are wholly a pawn of the cultural Marxist or you are basically a white supremacist and you don't care about race and you don't care about racism and you're enjoying your privilege. It seems to me not in but but there's a good faith way to ask these four questions. The next time heaven forbid there's a next time where we see a shooting.

An officer involved shooting what happened. We may not know exactly what happened. We may have one sense of what happened and then later there's more information that tells us we didn't really have an accurate sense of what happened but surely that's not an unimportant question.

What actually happened here? Maybe the snippet recorded gives an accurate sense of what happened or maybe it didn't. I'm not talking about obfuscating with questions so that we never have to own up to difficult situations but it is important to actually understand what happened and then how often does it happen. If what we see and we have a good sense of what happened is this something that happens hundreds of times a day hundreds of times a year thousands of times a week.

How often is this because it will be brought to our attention and it will sear the mind and the imagination with such a force that it may or may not accurately reflect how often these things happen into which we can see. What do these things happen and to whom does it happen meaning we is it only to black people? Is it to black and white people? Is it black white and Hispanic? Is it to men, to women? Is it in basic proportion with the population? Is it in basic proportion with the rates of violent crime? To whom does it happen? I know that even asking these questions can sound insensitive. I don't mean it to be that and I understand that some white Christians may want to throw an endless stream of questions to never really get to the place of empathy or grief.

At the same time there must be a place to legitimately try to come together and say what we are disagreeing about may not be what the Bible says about racism. It may not be a love for justice. It may be about what happened, how often does it happen, to whom does it happen and then the fourth question why does it happen? Why do they think there are many possible explanations? And I think it is worth asking the question.

Is it because of racism? Is it because of poor training? Is it because of human error in a stressful situation? Is it because someone reached for a weapon? Is it because bad apple? Is it because of systemic problems? Is it because of the way that law enforcement officers view minorities? The why I don't believe can just be presumed. That is that we know the answer automatically to the why. So when we talk about these racially charged police shootings, yes tensions run high, emotions run high, and we have real important disagreements and real important things are at stake.

But let's try to look at what is it that we may be disagreeing? What are the arguments that need to be made? And again, make the arguments, but understand that we're making arguments about what happened, how it happened, why it happened, to whom it happened, how often it happened, which can be made by people who share the same theological convictions and commitments, but maybe approach or maybe answer some of those questions differently. Okay, finally, coronavirus. If you're in a church, chances are your church has experienced some level of contention, division, whether mild to extreme based on your church's approach to COVID-19.

Do you defy government orders and open up? How do you insist on people wearing masks? Is it a hard insistence? Is it a soft insistence? Do you provide an area for people in the sanctuary? If they don't want to wear masks, are you really encouraging your

people to come back? Are you leaning on sovereignty? And if you trust God's sovereignty, why wouldn't you be here? If you love worship, why wouldn't you be here? Are you leaning on if you love your neighbor, then you're going to wear a mask and you're going to be very careful around people who may have underlying conditions? So just to highlight the questions or the issues is not to answer all of that. But I think it can at least focus our attention to understand what we're really talking about and why often we are arguing in theological terms when the real disagreement comes down to what you think about the virus. And the Bible's not going to tell you the nature of the coronavirus.

So again, we'll just force. I have four ways of voting, four questions. Here are four questions I think when it comes to coronavirus that we at least have to be honest about.

One, is the virus a very serious health concern or has the threat been greatly exaggerated? That gets to the heart of the matter. That's what we're arguing about. Two, is the government exercising its authority in consistent ways or does it seem to be singling out churches for worse treatment? Third question, is the government trying to achieve its ends in the best or in the least burdensome way or are its rules arbitrary and unreasonably heavy-handed? A fourth question, is the government to be trusted as sincerely, even if imperfectly looking out for the best interest of its citizens or is the government ramping up oppressive measures that they will be slow to relinquish? So you're going to think different things and I think there are better and worse answers and some of you are frustrated.

Okay, you're giving us the questions. You're not telling us what I think. What you think? Maybe another time.

What I'm trying to do here is simply isolate that I've seen too often Christians talking past each other on COVID-19, trying to bring to bear and they're coming with the force of scripture and theology. And that's great. But what I really see is, you know what? You've assumed a certain, I shouldn't say assume.

That's not fair. They may have come to their own mind a reason conclusion, but what they are presenting looks as if it's an assumed position on whether COVID is very serious or whether it's greatly exaggerated on whether the government is really looking out for our best interest or whether the government, this is just a step toward oppressive measures and once you wear a mask, they're never going to tell you to take the mask off. So by focusing our attention on what the issues are, at least we have maybe some hope that we can, if not agree, we can at least see the nature of our disagreements.

And I think it's really important on all of these very divisive cultural flashpoint difficult issues right now that we try to think as clearly as possible. So what's the takeaway of all of this? Okay, very helpful or actually not helpful. You've given us some questions to ask and now I just know why I'm so mad at everyone.

Well, let me just land this plane with maybe a few takeaway thoughts. One, and this is what I've been saying all along, let's be clear about what we are arguing. So let's try to isolate the actual disagreement.

What we're really disagreeing about is whether, for example, police officer shootings happen disproportionately to African Americans. What we're arguing about is a statistical finding. That's not all of it, you can't separate the personal from it.

Or what we are arguing about is whether the COVID numbers are accurate or they've over counted or they're under counted. See, what's so difficult is if we're arguing about A, B and C, we think, but we're actually arguing about X, Y and Z. So let's be clear. What are we actually arguing about? Maybe a second takeaway is surely as Christians, we ought to be less dogmatic about these things than we are about articles of the Christian faith.

Less dogmatic doesn't mean you haven't researched, you don't try to persuade, but if we are more passionate and more dogmatic about our reading of someone's vote, what it means, or reading an officer involved shooting or our understanding of epidemiology, we're more dogmatic about those things than we are about the articles of faith in the apostles creed, then something is wrong. There's a different level of knowledge and certainty. And then lest you think that I'm just saying, hey, we just ask questions and that's all we do, we do have to be honest.

Third, that likely you will have to come to some conclusions about these contentious matters. Likely you already have some thought in your head, perhaps unarticulated about these matters, about how you view voting, about how you assess when you see another shooting, or how you have assessed the danger or lack thereof with COVID-19. So yes, it's going to be hard in today's world to live your life without some sense of conclusion on those matters.

So at least be honest with it. Read well, listen well, listen to people who disagree, do your best. None of us, or almost none of us, are going to be experts in any of those areas.

And we can't forestall any conclusions unless we're absolute experts to understand that. But then when we have made a decision, or we have come into a conclusion, let's hold it somewhat tentatively knowing it's not an article of the faith, our understanding, and then try to persuade and try to listen, try to learn. Here's a final thought, and I'm thinking as a pastor, understand, I'm speaking to congregation members out there, understand that most pastors, certainly not all, but most pastors are going to try to split the difference when it comes to these contentious issues, these prudential matters.

Now, splitting the difference sounds negative, and it can be. It could be that your pastor or me, I'm a pastor of a local church, are just cowardly trying to take a weasel way out

how not to make people upset. Don't want to come to a real decision, don't want to really make any waves.

And so, just going to try to find a third way, I'm just going to say, is there a way that sort of the golden mean between these. So yeah, there's a bad way to do this, and there's a bad motivation for it. But it may also be that your pastor is trying as best as he can to shepherd a flock with diverse viewpoints and understandings and different access to knowledge.

And different sources of media input, and as trying as wisely and as graciously as possible to not have the whole place blow up. And that, I think, is a commendable aim by the pastor. So typically, on these matters, most pastors will try to find, is there a way to try to hold this together? So that means that you're likely not to find, again, you can think of other examples, but you're likely not to find pastors who have extreme views in these matters, or at least extreme views that they're stating extremely explicitly.

And now contrast that with most of the media input we're getting are going to be the strongest, most strident voices, because those are the people who are entertaining. Those are the people who get followers. Those are the people who get shows.

Those are the people that get our attention. And so you have this uneasy equilibrium, it's not even an equilibrium, where you have folks who are most passionate about it, and there's the ones you're going to hear the most from. And many of the voices they're getting are probably the most trenchant strident voices, where the pastor and the leader in many organizations or institutions is going to try to find a way that holds the constituency as it were together.

All of that means pastors. Let's have appropriate courage, and let's have appropriate wisdom and Christians. Let's be appropriately patient.

And let's all of us do our spirit led best to set the world an example in thinking carefully about these things. Not afraid to state opinions strongly. I know the tone police are out there.

No, no, state our opinions strongly. But we ought to state the most important opinions, the most strongly. And that means that some other less dogmatic convictions and conclusions.

We will have a bit more epistemic humility and perhaps grace toward one another as we seek to learn. Well, I said this was going to be short, and wouldn't you know, this pastor can monologue very well for nearly an hour. Looking forward to have Colin and Justin back next week.

And thank you for listening. Thank you again to Crossway. Thank you for subscribing and checking us out on leaving a view only if it's good on one of the many platforms.

And thanks for being with us. Until next time, glorify God, enjoy him forever, and read a good book.

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