

# OpenTheo

## What the 2020 Election Means

November 9, 2020



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

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Kevin, Collin, & Justin wrestle with the current state of the 2020 election. Why doesn't it seem to be a clear victory for the Left or the Right? What does it mean for the church? Does your vote have an inherent meaning, or is it entirely dependent upon your intentions? And they do indulge in just the right amount of rank punditry.

Timestamps:

College Football [1:32 - 5:05]

Talking about the Election [5:05 - 33:11]

Does a vote have an inherent meaning? [33:11 - 48:48]

Alex Trebek [48:48 - 59:06]

What book, movie, or music do you go to when you need to reorient yourself? [59:06 - 1:08:49]

Book & Music Recommendations:

Collin:

The old, red United Methodist Hymnal

Kevin:

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Valley of Vision

Preaching & Preachers by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

any systematic theology

The Planets, mvt. 4, "Jupiter" (Thaxted) by Gustav Holst

The Mission: Original Soundtrack from the Motion Picture by Ennio Morricone

Justin:

Psalm 131

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way" by William Cowper

## **Transcript**

(gentle music) Welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. This is Kevin Dion with Justin Taylor and Colin Hansen. It is good to be with you all.

We are recording this on Monday, November 9. So whenever this airs, maybe Tuesday or Wednesday morning, we should not be held responsible for any breaking news, catastrophes, anything else that has gone on in the world. We meant to record a post-election podcast last week but we decided there was so much news unsettled, so much news still happening, so much noise going around at the world would be quite all right without the three of us blow-veating for an hour about what we saw. So we decided to put that off a few days and you can get some of it right now.

So we are glad to be with you again. We do not have a sponsor, so all of the pizza ranches, the Bojangles of the world. Mountain Dew Zero.

Yeah, Mountain Dew, well, let's get the real thing. Let's some code red Mountain Dew, whatever's out there. - Go build the game off.

- Yes, we're all ears. - Draskaway, we'll be back as our sponsor. - We're also, we'll be back.

- We're back. It's not that they were upset or offended by the material of this podcast. - Hopefully not.

So start with what's important, college football, so it looks like Michigan State is probably gonna go one in seven, but the one win is against Michigan. And almost, I mean, I think every Spartan fan, they said, you wanna go seven to one or one in seven into you, we'll take one in seven and we beat Michigan. How bad must Michigan be to lose to the team that loses to Rutgers and gets blown out by Iowa? - How good did that feel, Kevin? - What? - How good did that feel? - To beat Michigan or get lose to Rutgers? (laughing) - Bull.

- Yeah. - After we lost to Rutgers, I decided, I just one less thing for my emotions to care about this year. So I didn't even pay attention until I decided to check about half time of the Michigan Michigan State game.

I said, hey, we're winning. And I told my kids, guys, turn this on, we're not losing. And then Iowa, Iowa was so bad as I texted you guys.

We were so far behind, not even male in ballots from Philadelphia could save us. (laughing) We were in bad shape. - I'll tell you where my heart is as a Husker fan.

I don't know if you saw that little excerpt that Tim Keller posted about how you know if, you know, one of your political parties is becoming idolatry. And I was thinking about rewriting the whole thing for sports. So that's all, that's all my snatter day went.

- That's what losing to Northwestern does for people. - Northwestern might be good. - Three and a half.

- Hey, hey, look. It's a top three national defense. Maryland struggled in their first game, couldn't score and has gone on to blow everybody out since then.

Iowa that struggled against Northwestern's defense. They went on to blow you guys out, Michigan State. They might be legit.

We'll find out this week against Purdue. So they were not as bad as they should have, they looked last year. That was an aberration anyway.

- Well, don't you feel like with Memphis Gerald, you generally think we're gonna play better than we should. And that's what, that's what all you can hope for is in Northwestern. We're gonna be better than we should be on paper.

- Yeah, and the style of football is going to frustrate the opponent like Nebraska. It's just gonna frustrate them 'cause they're gonna say, wait a minute, this just doesn't, it looks like we can win. This is kind of ugly.

But then if you're Northwestern fan, you realize that every game is like that. Every game is that way against Iowa, against everybody. It always feels ugly.

Why aren't we scoring? You don't realize Northwestern's entire defense is designed to allow you to move between the 20s. Fool you into false hope and then shut you down in the end. - But no.

- More than one Nebraska reporter independently referred to the game as a rock fight, which is not typically like what you, get up early on Saturday morning like, hey kids, come let's bunch of rock fight out in the backyard. (laughing) - Whenever Northwestern's playing at Northwestern, my kids say, is that a high school stadium? - Well, I was actually thinking this last week that I'm really glad there were no fans there, like Justin, who was there two years ago for a game that I'm sure he'll remember. Because then Northwestern did not have to run a silent count at home.

- I know. - When Nebraska's fans there. So God bless us Northwestern fans.

We're just spread all over the world. And we're not there in Evanston to support our team, sadly. - All right, this is a transition to talking about the election, which we'll do for a bit.

We won't do for the whole time. But a semi-serious question, Justin, since you're close to Nebraska, and for a moment in time, it was very conceivable that Nebraska's Omaha district could have put Biden over the top for the win. If all the states that were still in play, people were saying, what if he won 272-68 because of Nebraska? Was there a lot of chatter about that just over the river? Because that doesn't usually happen that Nebraska gives any of their delegation to the Democrat.

- Yeah, I actually was, I had gallbladder surgery that day. - Yeah. - So I was not paying attention to myself for part of the day.

Yeah, I didn't actually hear about that very much prior to the election. I mean, I think people know that it's kind of this quirky little thing, but I didn't hear a lot of talk about it. It just seemed like given the way in which 2020 has worked so far that it was going to end up with some weird glitch like 269-269 or the only thing that felt like it was inevitable was that it wouldn't be a boring night.

And I guess that proved true to some degree. - How are you feeling, by the way, Justin? - You feeling better after this surgery? How are you doing? Yeah, everything hurts and I feel like I'm dying. No, I feel fine.

You had your gallbladder removed or just things that were not good in the gallbladder. - I think that they only remove it. Like if there's anything wrong with it, they just take it out.

- Did you see it? - I have it like, yeah, I have it like on my desk in a formaldehyde jar. - You named it. - It was the picture.

- Yeah, great. I asked the surgeon later, like, so how many stones were they and how big were they? Like, he's like, we don't count, we really don't care. We just take it out.

You like a surgeon, he was a man of few words. - Yeah. - We're getting it out of there.

- I'm not here to entertain, I'm here to take out body parts. - Exactly. - So here's where we are on the election and there are so many political podcasts and there's so many other things people can listen to or follow on the news to get their fix of rank punditry.

So we'll try to steer clear from just the political ins and outs, though some of that may come into our analysis. But my question for you guys is, as you think about where we are right now, and let's just say that I know that there are lawsuits, there are things coming to the courts about recounts or possible ballot handling shenanigans. And I think it's safe to say that doesn't seem like that's going to go somewhere, but I think most everyone agrees.

We want every ballot, every legal ballot counted, nothing more, nothing less. So if there is more of a process to go through, certainly some people listening this may be absolutely convinced that there is something to find out and others quite sure that there isn't and just want to put the whole thing behind us. So for the most part, we want to let that play out and pray for transparency and honesty and that the end result would be a better trust for our system of government.

So if there's something to find out, we find it out. But where we stand right now, certainly looks like and seems like Joe Biden is going to be the next president. We may or may not have a Republican Senate to run off elections in Georgia.

Republicans surprisingly picked up a number of seats in the House, which no one really saw coming. So there's a lot of different ways to describe what happened and what is still unfolding. So Colin, I'll start with you.

What are two or three takeaways you have for yourself as you think about the election and in particular as it relates to Christians and to the church? Or some things you're thinking about or some lessons that you're pondering one week after the election? - Well, bear with me, these will all be contestable, just like the election. And with a range of in and out of the politics and as it works into the religion, there have only been four presidents who have lost after one term in the last century. And so what we've seen this last week is historic.

It's not common. It's very, very, very difficult to defeat an incumbent president running for reelection. Republicans have also lost seven out of the eight last popular votes for president.

Now, caveat, of course, nobody's campaigning for winning the popular vote. So it's not necessary. At the same time, it's probably just not a good sign for national party.

And so something's not quite working in the Republican coalition, at least for president, but nobody has a clear idea of what's not working or why. So a lot of the time in the upcoming weeks, months, years is gonna be spent trying to sort that out. I mean, four years ago or before Trump was elected, I was convinced Republicans were going to ditch social conservatives and go for a more libertarian-type strategy.

That couldn't have been more wrong. And now moving in a more populist direction. And I think that probably has better possibilities in terms of contrast with the Democratic Party and for just for sheer numbers of votes.

But the point being politics is great for making seemingly smart people just dumb about stuff. So I'm not trying to make a sort of a statement about exactly what I think should be done about that. Just to say what we saw was historic and is part of an ongoing long-term trend that's problematic for Republicans.

You mentioned Kevin the House and in a number of different places, Republicans generically are running for Congress or state houses or governor performed better than president Trump. It wasn't the case everywhere, but it was the case in some notable places. And so you could see there was not the anticipated, it's what a lot of media had expected, the anticipated sharp leftward term.

The blue wave. Yeah, exactly the blue wave, the turn for the whole country. In part because, yes, President Trump did turn out huge record numbers of people to vote against him, but the Republicans and President Trump also turned out a lot of people themselves.

And so there wasn't that big shift. I don't know how you guys read those results because it's clearly not some kind of radical leftward shift. And yet we now have recreational marijuana in South Dakota.

And we also have a president Trump who was very open himself, but especially through his wife, proudly boasting of being the first president of all time, the United States to support gay marriage when he came into office in 2016. So what is Republican is not the same thing as what is conservative or what is socially conservative there. And so it's hard to read no major huge leftward shift.

And yet the Republican party and its voters have shifted to the left on social issues to a certain extent. So that's hard to kind of get a read on. Let me give you one more.

Well, let me interject quickly. I go ahead. Especially with that California, Cali Fornia rejected, whatever they're calling it, that diversity measure by pretty significant margins.

And Louisiana banned abortion or affirmed their earlier ban with Roe v. Wade. If that gets overturned, that it'll be written in that it's not going to be legal in Louisiana. But then also Nevada wrote gay marriage into their constitution.

If that gets overturned. So you're right, that's why I'm saying it's hard to get a read on exactly what happened. So it's easy to say there was no huge leftward shift, but it doesn't appear necessarily that it was a victory for social conservatives.

It's just kind of muddied. But then you look at places like Orange County, California, with it looks like to, if I understand correctly, to pro-life women, house members who ran ahead of President Trump in that area, listeners can correct me if I'm wrong on that. I haven't done a ton of research on that.

But Orange County was one of the notable places that two and four years ago, just got Republicans really got thumped there. So my last two points, one is that this is President Trump's Republican Party. And I think you see that in part with, I mean, that seems obvious, but the fact I think we've only had two senators come out and sort of acknowledge the results as we understand them so far, Lisa Murkowski in Alaska and

then Mitt Romney in Utah, which is not surprising 'cause they've been the two biggest critics of Trump from within the Republican Senate.

So, I mean, he really does lead the party, but what's gonna be difficult for Republicans is that what's best for President Trump specifically and personally is not necessarily what's best for the Republican Party in general. So typically, I mean, unless they can find a way to increase his constituency as a presidential loser, they've gotta be able to move on. But that's not what's best for him.

What's best for him would be to continue to stoke the, stoke interest in his own personal brand and his own candidacy and to keep the dream alive that he'll run again to be the only the second president of all time to win two non-consecutive terms for office. And so I'll be watching to see which and how many Republicans believe it is in their best political interests to oppose President Trump to carve out a space for them in the end. One last point, and I know I've gone on too long here, but this is specifically related to the religious side of things.

'Cause like you said, Kevin, there's plenty of people they can get all the punditry from. We've seen a very interesting Christian alliance that come together around President Trump and he's inspired a lot of confidence and conviction in a group of people. And it ranges all the way from post-millennial reconstructionists to prosperity gospel all the way from Paula White to Kenneth Copeland to Bethel in Redding, California to Baptist revivalists to reform the Southerners, whether it be Southern Baptist or PCA.

That is a coalition that has pretty extreme theological differences from one another, but for whom the politics and specifically President Trump has brought a great amount of co-baligurancy. And I wonder, does that coalition continue without President Trump to draw them all together? I don't have any answers, but that's something I'm looking for. That's really good.

That was a lot. No, that's good. Let me jump in with mine, then we'll get to Justin and then we'll see what questions we have for each other.

So I have three thoughts. One, we should not over interpret the results of the election. You hit on some of that already.

It's very difficult. You can make out a plausible case for all sorts of interpretations of what happened. And as we were texting over the last few days, in one sense, it's not a lot different from 2016.

These are just rough estimates, but if you take California out of the equation, and I know it's a big state, the biggest, you can't just take it. But if you did, it's about 50-50 Republican and Democrat who you voted for for president. With California, it's two or three percentage points more toward the Democrats.

If in 2016, you rearranged about 25,000 or 30,000 votes in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, Hillary's the president. We're not having this conversation. If, depending on how everything turns out in some of these states, but, you know, if you rearrange 40 or 50,000 votes this time around, you're talking about shocker again, Trump wins.

So we should be careful, both in reinterpreting 2016 as some Trump landslide, or reinterpreting this, the Electoral College does what it does, and that number is what matters. But we're not talking about a vastly different outcome. So this reminds me of, in sports, one of my pet peeves in sports is you can have, you know, two teams playing basketball, and it comes down to the end, and the guys foul in here, down by one, and he misses two free throws.

And now suddenly, all of the post-game commentary is all about, well, you know, the team that won, they just have the heart of a champion, and everything is described as if it were inevitable that they are in every way superior when, from a human point of view, it was the luck of a roll or a bounce, and suddenly we're telling a completely different, one little thing changed, one free throw, win in, win out, one small thing changed, and now we're telling a completely different story. No, everything else about that game was the same, but now you're describing with an entirely different narrative. And so I think we need to be careful not to over-interpret, and, you know, that's what both sides tend to do.

All of a sudden, there's a mandate. Well, I don't know how you determine, I guess I would say if you're Reagan in 1984, you can say you have something of a mandate. I don't think any of the elections, since we've been voting, could be described as a mandate.

They're very close, we're a very divided country politically. So don't over-interpret. Here's a second takeaway.

This maybe has more to do with the church. Justin, I agreed with your post on where you are going against a pro-life case for voting for Biden. So let's just talk about pro-lifers listening to this, some of whom voted for Trump, some of whom didn't vote for Trump.

I think we in the church have not done enough to try to understand why people who have most of the same political convictions on paper, most of the same important theological convictions on paper, come to very, very different opinions on Trump. So what I mean is, I think if you are in the church, and it's not all generational, well, let's just say if you're our generation or older, and you're not at least thinking about why is it that the younger you are, the more distasteful a conservative Christian found Trump? If you're not at least trying to think that through, and trying to have some creative imagination of how someone could come to that conclusion, even if it's not your conclusion, and conversely, if call them the elites, call them whatever, call them never Trumpers, if those sort of folks in our circles, don't try to understand why someone might find Trump to be not just to hold your nose, but okay, I don't like what he stands for



personally and his character, but consider him to be their sort of champion. Now, I'm not even saying whether I agree or disagree with both of those views, but I think we've been very quick to just think if you come to a different conclusion about Trump, it's so patently obvious.

And in particular, I don't wanna say in particular, 'cause I think it goes both ways, but I think what I'm seeing, and saw again with these election results, there are a lot of people who, and they're probably the ones not listening to this podcast, they're not on Twitter, they're not, and they're not following them, it was we're an anomaly to know what's going on in all the states, and I mean, I had very smart people that I know and am friends with who have advanced degrees who are texting me on Thursday, like, so what happened, what states are still out there? Like, how do you not know that? Aren't you down to like Bucks County and Allegheny? And aren't you following the precinct by precinct? No, most people aren't. And so I think we need to try to understand why there has been this affinity for Trump. Some of it has been, you know, certainly we can see ways in which it's misplaced.

And then there's other aspects that I think we need to say, okay, what's going on here? Because it's not just about Trump, Colin, you're the one who's so good at macroanalysis, but it has to do with Brexit, it has to do with a number of movements around the world, call it populist, call whatever, but there is this sense of, you know, Trump certainly has formed a populist sort of coalition. And if the exit polls are to be believed, actually more women, more minorities voted for him in higher percentage than before. So there's something there to at least think through.

And then the married, and one married women were the strongest constituency for Trump. Yeah, which is interesting because I saw something, you know, one of the things that President Biden will likely do is push for something that I think a lot of people are going to imagine to be just an obvious good, which is for federally funded preschool. Okay, that's been a common thing throughout.

And you just, you might think, well, what's, okay, well, who would be against that? That's great. I don't know if you guys saw the division of like, which professions or jobs are most supportive of Trump and which ones of Biden? I don't know if you guys saw the one profession that is the most supportive of Trump homemakers, women at home. And that did not surprise me at all.

A lot of, I mean, within the bigger division, you can break down little divisions. And one of the biggest divisions we see in politics in America today, which includes our churches. This is a message to church leaders, to us and others, is a division between married and single women.

Right. Very, very significant divisions there. So as a political lens that reflects a reality within our churches, and that's something we can learn and pay attention to, and a little

bit surprising from what people would expect.

So yeah, married women, more likely to vote for Trump than married men were. - Yeah. So last point, and then we'll get Justin.

By the time this comes out, I think my blog will be out where I argue that I think we would all do well, or most of us would do well to just say a lot less, that Alison Krauss song wasn't first with her, I think. But you say it best when you say nothing at all. I just sometimes think all the caveats of sometimes we speak and some people are really good at it.

But I just look at my Twitter feed or Facebook or online in particular, and I think, "Why do you need to give your running commentary? Is there any special expertise you have, any special knowledge that you were called upon to give?" And one of my biggest concerns in all this is how politics has become our national pastime, even our national religion, because think about it, we don't watch the same movies, we don't watch the same television shows, we don't live in the same, but we have all these pluriformity of cultures, and the one thing that is nationalized at a massive scale now are electoral politics. So it's the one thing we all can kind of be into, but it's the one thing that brings us together that then brings us apart. And we may think that giving our constant hot takes is really influencing the culture, really disciplining others, but it's probably just annoying more people than it's helping.

And how much is it really transforming the culture when I think it reflects that we have already been inundated by the culture, because we're talking about all the things that the media tells us we should be talking about. And yes, I have thoughts on almost all of these things and restrain myself from sharing most of them, because I'm jealous that when people think of Kevin DeYoung or Christ Covenant or RTS or TGC or whatever I'm affiliated with, they think Bible teaching, good theology, reform doctrine, and they don't think first of all, that's the guy that is for or against this candidate. Now, if we're going to talk about politics, because we should, it matters, Christians have always talked about it, then let's get back to some first principles or let's argue about what Thomas Sol calls the constrained vision or the unconstrained vision.

Let's talk on that level of moral philosophy on Christian theology engaging with politics rather than here's the latest breaking news and I need to tell you why it already confirms what my priors are. So end of sermon, Justin, you have been patient with us. Set us all straight with your oracle from on high.

- Let the refutations begin. Yeah, a number of thoughts, of course, probably not as cleanly, neatly organized as you brothers, but one thing that strikes me is just that Twitter is not real life. I think that's a good follow up.

Follow up from Kevin's observations just from the exit polls. And if you're only portal into

reality is Twitter, you're going to be very confused by what happened and the ins and outs. - Did you see the Biden campaign said the last two weeks, they all turned on Twitter? - No.

(laughs) Yeah, that was probably a smart move. - Yeah, very smart move. So that's one thing, just we all need to get out.

We need to talk to people. We need to listen. We need to not think that a certain self-selected slice of virtual reality is full reality.

Of course it is part of reality, but it's not the whole thing. I think we should explicitly acknowledge the blessings of a peaceful transition of power, even if a President Trump takes various states to court and does not readily acknowledge defeat. I think that we will end up having a peaceful transition of power.

I don't think there's going to be bloodshed. I don't think he's going to refuse to leave the White House. And I think that's one of those things that is so easy for us to take for granted that we live in a country where every four years it may go back and forth between each party, but that tradition exists and it is a blessing.

Another blessing I think is just that we have a free press that can report things from an explicitly conservative viewpoint, from an explicitly progressive standpoint. I think that that comes with drawbacks. I think in particular, the curse of 24/7 news is we're reaping the results of that.

There is not breaking news every minute of the day, 365 days out of the year. And at some point, I think we have to acknowledge that the media is not the problem. The media is entirely dependent upon us as the consumers of media.

And so we enable the press to be what it is. And I think it's problematic. I think another reminder for me out of this election, this is not the rank punditry that you guys are so eager for, but what's my country? - No rank punditry.

- I know, but I know you love rank punditry. - Oh, okay, I'll give you one rank punditry thing. The Democrats every year with two exceptions that I can think of have nominated an exceptionally boring person to be their standard bearer.

So go back to Carter, 1980, loses. I mean, just the prototypical boring white guy. Who do they follow up with four years later? Walter Mondale.

Four years after that, Michael Dukakis. I mean, you cannot pick more boring, less charismatic people on the planet. They make an exception with Clinton.

He wins back-to-back elections. A guy, even if you hate him, he's got charisma. He's interesting to listen to.

Year after that, they go to Gore, then the carry. No surprise, they lost both of those. Then they make the exception with Obama, and then Hillary, who is just sort of in a category of her own.

I think people are excited about her because she was a woman, but nobody thinks that she has extraordinary gifts of charisma. And then Biden, I mean, another sort of boring white guy, but this is the one election where the one thing that you needed to be is just boring. You don't need any other accomplishments.

I mean, they had all sorts of other interesting characters that they could have nominated, but finally nominating the most boring candidate that they could pay off for the Democrats with the exceptions of Clinton and Obama in there. So that's my rank, punditry. Striking to me that as I've reflected upon what does it mean to vote? My working proposal is that votes actually do not have a meaning.

There's no inherent meaning in Catholic people. - Dude, that's really deep, man. No meaning in your vote.

- There is no inherent meaning. I think it all resides in somebody's intentions. So that means that we must not be judgmental upon somebody for the mere fact that they cast a vote, whether they voted for a third party, or they voted for one of the candidates.

It all depends upon why. Would you discipline a person for voting for a particular candidate or not voting for a particular candidate? I think we need to think more deeply about what is the meaning of a vote? And I think we've sort of just had a simplistic approach to that. - So let me push on that because people listening will push and say, well, aren't you the guy who wrote about there's not a good pro-life case for voting for Biden? Are you just saying then, Justin, that vote doesn't matter? Wherever you vote for, is fine, Christians can vote for anybody? - No, I'm not saying that.

And I think we can make good arguments for voting against voting for somebody. But the act of voting in and of itself with no other contextual information does not give us a lot of information. Because for somebody, it can mean a full-fledged endorsement.

I wanna publicly endorse this person, everything that they stand for. Somebody could cast a vote for a candidate and say, I hate these 10 things, but this one thing rises to the surface in a disproportionate way. I just don't think that we can tell what a vote means in and of itself without knowing background, without knowing arguments.

And I think somebody could argue a convoluted in my perspective, it could be unpersuasive, pro-life argument for voting for Biden, which I would disagree with, and I would wanna argue that. But that's why I think we must be very slow to kind of go to the church discipline button when it comes to voting without knowing more information. So in other words, I think only way to disagree with me would be to say, yes, voting has

such an inherent meaning that no matter what your intentions are, no matter what you think you are accomplishing, you have committed a de facto sin by the mere fact of using your pen to color in a certain circle.

- Go ahead, comment. - So you'd say the same thing then about party registrations. - Right.

- That registering for a certain party has no inherent meaning? - Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think that what our understanding of meaning is, is that you have to think through intentionality. What are the motivations for that? And in a country of this many million people, there's gonna be tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of different motivations and rationales and proposals and putting things together.

So I think we've just started with that assumption that a vote has an inherent meaning, and I would just wanna push back on that a little bit. - I think there's a reason for that, Justin. I think when I saw Republicans responding to the election results, it wasn't even necessarily about President Trump winning and him being able to have certain kind of power and to carry out a certain vision for how to govern the country.

It was more about, hey, look at us. There are so many of us. They mock us, they call us names, they think we're losers, but see there are tens of millions of people who agree with me.

So I think the reason, Justin, that people wait the vote with so much meaning is because it's a tribal marker. And I think that's one reason why when I've seen people criticize folks like Devere or Piper or others when it comes to their denial of identifying with the Republican Party and calling them elites, well, that to me is the sign. That to me is the sign that what you're talking about here is not, it's about a tribal marker.

And you're not, by voting a certain way, you're not identifying with the right tribal marker. And I think that's what makes people so upset is 'cause I think, wait a minute, you're not part of our group anymore because the intent has a lot to do with whether or not you're in the right group and everything that comes with that. Do you think that's fair, Justin, or not? - Yeah, I do.

And that relates to the last point I was gonna make is the dis-ease I have about Christians and churches dividing not so much over strategy and not so much over position when it comes to voting and support, but to posture. That there's a certain inclination to say, "I'm with these people who take this posture and this tone and this tactic." That seems to be uniting people into a greater tribe than our doctrine and our shared commitments, which I think should have a deeper foundation and deeper resonance with us. - Yeah, I agree.

Yeah, so I agree, I think with 85 or 90% of all of that, I definitely agree, and I've been

trying to say this on my blog and on this podcast, that what we mean by voting is ambiguous and elastic. So I'd have to think if, philosophically, if I wanna use the word meaningless, I know what you mean, you don't mean it's unimportant, you mean the meaning is not inherent, that's the word you use inherently without meaning. - Yeah, I wouldn't say a meaningless.

- Right, not meaningless. So I could imagine scenarios where perhaps a referendum, a ballot measure, that's so clear that there is an inherent meaning to are you for allowing husbands to kill their wives, yes or no. So I think you would agree with that.

There are certain extreme scenarios where there may be an inherent meaning, but I do agree with what you're saying, which is why I think it's dangerous to cast aspersions when what we think we're disagreeing on are these matters of first importance, and what we may really be disagreeing on is how we construe of the act of voting itself. The other thing, and I don't know if there's a pushback against anything you guys are saying, but maybe a pushback against some of what I can sense out there. I do not have, I'll say, I think that the anti-baptist and some anti-baptist is listening and saying, that's not how we think of it, but what I think of as a historic anti-baptist approach to politics, maybe the neighbors Christ against culture or the Shane Clayboard, Jesus for presidents.

Well, Jesus is not on the ballot for president. So I think there is an instinct that some people can have that we just need to rise above all of this messy partisan politics, not get our hands dirty in it. I'm for Jesus, I'm for King Jesus coming on the throne and kind of a pocks on both of your houses.

And I don't like the Republicans or the Democrats. Well, of course, there's a lot that's true in all of that. And yet, for the foreseeable future, and it's been this way for 150 years, if you're going to have at least legislative or electoral impact, you're going to do it in this country through the Republican or through the Democrat party.

And so I don't think we can just wash our hands of that and say, I don't belong to any of them, and they're all equally bad and equally, that's not what you guys are saying, but I just wanna push back on anyone who thinks we can avoid somehow the messiness of it. - You agree with that, Justin? - I completely agree with that. And talking about political homelessness, I get that and I resonate with it to some degree, and yet it always strikes me as, ironically, some sort of, I am superior to all of you out there who just can't see the light and are so blinded by your partisanship, whether to the left or to the right.

And as if Jesus somehow, if he were to come back, would disagree with half of the GOP agenda and half of the Democratic agenda and would propose some third way that nobody's ever thought of before. Again, I think like you're saying, Kevin, there's grains of truth in there. If there wasn't grains of truth, it would just be ridiculous and it would be dismissed out of hand.

But this idea that we're kind of perfectly calibrated, Jesus is too liberal for the conservatives and he's vice versa on the other side. Those are all pet peeves of mine and I totally agree with you. - I see where you guys are coming from that, but I do wanna say that I don't think this is the best our two political parties can be.

And you have limited options of being able to send a message to politicians who tend not to respond to any message other than you're fired. So it's just, it's a tough situation there. So how do you come in and say, this is how politics works.

It's approximate good. None of us is completely above sort of the act of loving our neighbor through politics. Yet the same time, surely we shouldn't settle for this.

Surely this has gotta be better. What are my options of being able to do this? And how do you break the cycle of a political dynamic where the only thing necessary is that you're not as bad as the other guy. And that's explicitly how campaigns are run.

I don't have any good answers here guys. I'm just saying that's where the Anabaptist part of me comes out a little bit more. And I think I share a little bit of Kelloran Piper's distaste for politics, but it's not because I have a distaste for politics in general.

I agree in principle. I have a distaste for where we've arrived to at this political moment. That's what's frustrating to me.

- At the risk of descending into some rank punditry to counter intuitive inclinations. Wonder if you agree with them. One, and I hear this all the time, and you guys probably are listening to some of the same people I am who make this point.

And that is that our political parties are too weak, not that they're too strong. Stronger political parties would tend to give us not foolproof, but better political candidates. It often has not been this way for most of history that you essentially have a general campaign, election campaign for your two nominees.

We can decry backroom deals and smoke filled rooms and conventions deciding and all, but the convention really doesn't decide it. And you can make a case that stronger political parties would do more to weed out candidates that they thought were worse. Certainly, I think you saw the Democrat party do that this year, all coalescing to get the person that they thought they didn't think Bernie Sanders was gonna beat Trump, and he probably wouldn't have.

- They did in 2020 what Republicans did not do in 2015. - That's right. - And by the way, there is a movement, just speaking of what you're talking about there, with the senators, Ben Sasse, Mike Lee, and Rand Paul, I'm trying to see if who else have all come out in favor of repealing the 17th Amendment of the Constitution, the direct election of senators as a way of trying to strengthen the institutions of the party, as opposed to the platforming of more radical direct appeals to the people.

Basically, a move back toward Republicanism, broadly speaking, not party, but Republican identity as opposed to Democratic identity. - And the other counterintuitive, who wasn't Greg Forrester who said this, or we got heard this through some of our friends, but others have made this point. We can, in America, sort of think, if only we had more parties, if we only had a third party, that would get the best of both worlds, and that would be the home for everyone.

Well, maybe, but lots of other countries and parliamentary systems have multiple parties, and they have huge disappointment with who they get to vote for. Of course, a parliamentary system is different and with a prime minister from the party than a president. But it's also the case that when you have two parties, they have to be very broad coalitions.

As bad as we think it is, when you have to hold together, both parties do a very disparate coalition of interests. You talked about just the different theological camps, let alone all the different rival interests that voted for Trump or voted for Biden. There's something that can be very good when it prevents extremes by saying, well, we have to be a whole lot of things to a lot of people if we're gonna try to get these votes.

And in some sense, it comes down to, is government working better when it has a really hard time getting things done? A conservative would say, yeah, I mean, who was it who tweeted something that's summary of the Federalist Papers? Did you do that today, Justin? - I think I retweeted it from Paul Miller. - Yeah, what was it? - Something like the Federalism is designed to dilute stupidity or decentralize stupidity. - Yeah, decentralized stupidity.

So if you think good government is doing all sorts of stuff, then that's frustrating. But if you think frustrating government and gumming it up and slowing it down is better than it's not all that bad. - I would imagine Greg, by the way, has in mind Israeli politics.

When he's thinking about multiple parties, he's thinking about how rarely do one of the major parties win an election outright for the Knesset. And so what you've seen in year after year is the Likud party needing to incorporate basically make a deal with the far right parties to be able to get power. And that ends up actually making their politics more extreme and entrenched.

At least that's an interpretation. I'm just passing that along. That's one that can create an example of what you're talking about there.

- Right, if we had five political parties and you could win states with 25% and 75% of the people did not want you, but you won, that makes even more people unhappy. More people feel as if their voice is not heard. All right, we're ready to land the plane in the last 15 minutes with a couple other topics.



- Let's do it. - So real quick, this isn't more fun because it's sad, but you would have seen that Alex Trebek passed away on Sunday, age 80, pink, red, and cancer for anyone listening outside of the US. I'm not sure if you see Jeopardy syndicated wherever you are, but it's been a mainstay of American television since the 80s, Pat Sejak doing Wheel of Fortune, and then Jeopardy, which is the classic quid show in Alex Trebek, who was beloved by Minnie and led with a kind of cool, if at times, a disdainful professionalism, but was beloved by Minnie and I just wonder, thoughts on, did you guys grow up watching Jeopardy, is it something that you did? I do admit that normally, Justin knows this, normally when some famous person dies and everyone starts tweeting, "Gut it, crush, I'm gonna pool in my own tears, I couldn't go outside today." - Kevin Deung, Pat Peves, Kevin Deung, - Kevin Deung, Pat Peves are all the people crying all the time.

My favorite character on Save by the Bell, he's gone, I can't go out. Okay, but I really-- - Kevin is secretly British for all of his own. - I think he's secretly.

- He's Dutch, American, but actually British, person anyway. - So, but I have watched Jeopardy for years and years and years, and most nights at my home, if I'm there, we turn it on, and at least some of us are watching it and the kids watch it, and I love Jeopardy, I love the questions. I've tried out for the online, I filled that out and never got the call to go on the show, my kids are waiting for it so we can get rich, but I love Jeopardy, and Alex Trebek was great.

I have some funny clips of him doing funny things, but I'll get back to that. What do you guys take? Do you care about this news, any lessons to draw? - I just, this is one of my favorite stories, guys. My college roommate, Tom McGrath, appeared on Jeopardy, it was the Christmas 2012 episode, December 25th, 2012, and here was the answer.

I'm gonna ask you guys, okay? I think it was a daily double, okay? This common Irish prefix comes from the French name for son. What is the question? This common Irish prefix comes from the French name for son. - I'll give it to you.

- What is Nick? - Okay, that is what Tom McGrath said. And what Tom said. - What is O? - The correct answer is what is fits.

And what I loved about this is that Tom responded with a phrase that Alex Trebek did not understand. He said, "Sorry, coach." Alex Trebek said, "It's all right." Actually, Tom had said, "If I get this wrong, I'm gonna be in a lot of trouble." And I'm sure it's because he's Irish. - Yeah.

- Okay. So then he says, "What is Mick?" And then Alex is like, "No, it's what is fits." And he says, "Sorry, coach." And Alex says, "It's okay." Obviously, he wasn't talking about Alex Trebek. He was talking about Coach Fitzgerald.

- Yeah. - The first one wild guess. So of all the questions for Tom, and Tom is die hard.

We're both die hard. A college roommate's we're in the band together. So that's one of my favorite Jeopardy and Alex Trebek stories.

- Some of the classic ones to go find on YouTube. He could be very disdainful. I mean, sometimes you get to the final Jeopardy and he'd say, "I knew this one instantly.

"I'll be very surprised if you don't all know this." And then you just feel like, (laughing) (laughing) Do you remember the one, this was a few years ago, the category was football, I think. - It was fun. - I think they got a question.

They got all five. They didn't know any of them. - Nobody even rang in, right? - Nobody even rang in, right? And the last one was about the Minnesota Purple People leaders and he just says, "If you get this, I will die." (laughing) Or last one, the lady, you know, they do the little two minutes about yourself, which is what my wife likes.

And I just think, "What a waste of time." We could get 10 more questions. And I'm gonna be these awkward interviews. - The nerd lady, right? - Yeah, the nerd lady who talks about, you know, nerd rock and with her friends and he just says, so I get together for losers then.

(laughing) And of course, when Cliff Clavin was on, for Cheers. Do you remember seeing that? Cheers episode. - I do not remember this one.

- Okay, but again, go look at the Cheers episode. - Okay, okay. - Cliff Clavin, the category is-- - The master.

- Yeah, the categories are like-- - Which is our third Cheers. - Our postal zip codes, celibacy, bars or something like that. And so he racks up, he's ahead by a mile and they get the final jeopardy.

And I don't know, it's the name of three actors or something. And his question is, who are three people who have never been in my kitchen? (laughing) And then Alex says, "Well, you have to reveal, "but surely you are so far ahead. "You don't have to wager anything." Of course, he's Cliff, but he wagers everything.

And he protests, "Well, they haven't been in my kitchen." Well, clearly Cliff, that's not what we're going for. Okay. (laughing) Justin, you a jeopardy fan? - You know, honestly, I haven't seen it for so many years.

I end up watching a YouTube clip here or there, but it was a mainstay growing up just like, you know, in our family, there'd be 60 minutes on Sunday evening and the nightly news with Brokaw or Jennings or Rather. And then, yes, Batsy Jack and Alex Trebek were just there every night. - What about celebrity, Jeopardy, Justin? - What about celebrity, Justin? - Yeah.

- To lose Sean Connery and Alex Trebek in one week. It's a blow to all of us celebrity, I don't watch as much TV as you guys. So, because I read the next books, right? - That's true.

- We sing to them. - And books and everything. No, there was a little write up by Washington Post, reporter Hank Stuver.

Maybe I'll just read it 'cause it's four sentences, but I thought it was really a beautiful little tribute to Trebek into the show. He says, "Never outlandish or garish, "that Jeopardy, that Trebek hosted for 36 years "championed intelligence with a rare "and relatively quiet hush, "especially if you compare it "with the rest of television's constant blur, "with subdued buzzers and a soft musical interlude "during its final question. "The loudest thing about this show was the exclamation point "in its title and perhaps the alarm "that accompanies the double Jeopardy question.

"Trebek maintained a safe space for smart viewers "in the darkest, dumbest times. "His show and the way he hosted it proved "that polite order can be more fascinating "than brute chaos. "In 2020, that seems like a downright revolutionary idea." I thought that was just a beautiful little paragraph about a show that really does not have some overarching, great significance for us, but he was just a constant, quiet, witty, semi-circastic, well-dressed, polite-- - No, it was new.

- And he always had impeccable accents to it. You knew what he was doing. And it's changed a little bit in recent years.

There's more pop-culture-y kind of stuff. Those are the old questions. - Video questions.

- Yeah, but still, I mean, it's every few weeks and they have a category from the Bible. I mean, so it really did a lot with classic categories of Western civilization. I mean, where else are you gonna have something about the opera or ballet or the Bible or American history? Just straight up questions about American history.

So we will miss Alex Trebek. I don't know what his faith was if he had any, seemed to be sort of a genial, general, God's good in my life. I didn't hear a real Christian commitment, but we will miss him.

Any last thoughts before our final book question? Okay, so I wonder who's gonna follow, Alex Trebek. - I haven't even seen any speculation. I mean, has it gone well on other shows? - Well, they've transitioned.

I suppose it has, like Steve Harvey seems to have done well. I don't know that Drew Carey's done very well. - No, I don't know.

- Alex Trebek said he wanted Betty White to do it. - Come on, no, no, no. - That might have to say it makes a difference.

- Yeah, but there is something, here's the last thing I was gonna say, is there's something a lesson for us, and that's Christians, about the unusual power and simple elegance of longevity. To do the same thing, to do it with a level of excellence for a long time. You know, I think, you say it just in one sense, it seems like, how could that job be hard? But to do anything well for a really long time is really hard, and I'm sure there were things about it that were harder than we could see.

So there's a lesson there for, you know, with the Pat's A, Jack and Alex Trebek, or your favorite radio announcer for baseball, you do the same thing, and you do it where you point to not yourself, but the thing that you're hosting or doing, and for a long enough time, and people will miss you when you're gone, and if you do that in the church and with eternal things, you'll even leave a much bigger legacy. Last question for you guys. 2020 has been, I don't know if it's a year, unlike any other, but certainly been an unusual and difficult year.

I wonder what's a book? Maybe it's a movie, maybe it's a piece of music. What's something you go to, you come back to when you need to be encouraged? You're feeling discouraged about our day, you're feeling despondent, or maybe you just kind of need to be recalibrated. You feel like you've gotten off track in a certain piece of music or a book that you read? Okay, that's right, that's right.

That's what really matters. Do you have a couple of suggestions for us, Colin? - Yeah, I do. So I've been thinking about this lately, the last four years, and I'm not speaking here about President Trump's policies or things like that.

I'm talking about a lot of the divisions in the church, and friendships that have severed or weakened, and it's just been a painful four years. I'll put it that way. And I've been thinking about how I've learned a lot in the last four years that I didn't want to know, and that I'll never forget.

But what God has done in these last four years has been very encouraging just for me personally in my faith, but one major reason that this is the case is because of a book, and that is the hymnal, the hymnal. Specifically, I use the only one I have, which is, which I need a recommendation on the best contemporary hymnals, by the way. But I still use the old Red United Methodist one, and it's good enough for me for now, because it has a bide with me, it's got to be still my soul.

It's got Jesus' lover of my soul, complete with the Welsh tune, originally composed for. And just sitting there, I remember in 16, feeling like so many things were falling apart, just sitting there with that hymn book open, and just just singing myself. And then my son at the time, my oldest child was young, and we hadn't really gotten into a rhythm of family devotions at the time, and we were doing some things, but he was one.

And so that year is when we really started doing family devotions with the hymnal, and

now this year in 2020, we bought a piano. Actually, somebody gave us a piano, and I've been playing through the hymnal, there as well for the family. And that book, that's the constant.

And what I love about it is, above all, God, and how he reveals himself to us through song, and through these hymns and spiritual songs. And, but also there's a, just love the connection to previous generations, of believers, that's such a ballast to me. And then on top of that, it's especially encouraging to me to be singing the same songs that my grandparents, my great-grandparents, my great-grandparents, and then in my family's case, going all the way back to the Welsh revival in the mid-1700s.

Not all these songs, obviously, but I mean the same Methodist, predilection for singing goes back there. And all of that really, God uses to help keep me grounded, and faithful, and hopeful, and joyful, even when things are changing. So, I hadn't really thought about it in those terms, Kevin, until you posed that question to us, and that boy, that was the one book that came to mind.

- That's great. - That's how the Bible. - That's great.

Let me quickly rattle through some, and I'll give Justin the last word. Not surprisingly, the books, I think of books that I'm, that bring back some memories, there's some nostalgia, they've played an important part in my life, so the Heidelberg Catechism. The Valley of Vision is always reorienting to slowly read through one of those prayers.

One of the books for me as a pastor and a preacher is Lloyd Jones preaching and preachers. I've read that book several times. I've been listening to some of, I haven't listened to it before, but I'm listening now to some of the lectures.

You can get them on the Lloyd Jones app. And I find that reorienting and recalibrating. Any of my favorite systematic theologies, I know that's not your thing, Colin, but I find to get lost in another century in the complexity and the beauty and the precision of it.

But let me give you, since you mentioned music, we mentioned two pieces that I love. One is the Gustav Holst, the planets, and the Jupiter, and to narrow it down even further, there's a two minute section in Jupiter that's now called the Hymtune Thaxed. And look it up, there is a hymn set to that tune in the Trinity Hymnal, and I won't hum it for you here, but it's just an exquisite melody and I love that whole suite and Jupiter in particular, and those two minutes are really rich.

And then more than anything else-- - Mars is the one that the college bands all play, right? - Yeah, Mars is fighting and-- - Dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun. - Dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun. - Right, right, that's cool.

Probably my favorite most comforting music outside of the Hymnal is the soundtrack from the mission. You guys seen that movie? Dun dun dun dun dun dun dun. It's got

Gabriel's oboe, it has so many good pieces.

Actually, if you go to a Getty concert, you will hear their violin player at times play the theme from the mission. I actually heard it when they were at, played the music for TGC one of those years, and I came up and I said, "That's from the mission," so yeah, it is. So I can put that on, and it's amazing how good music, and sometimes you want music without any words, can transport you in a way and bring a sense of calm and peace and comfort.

So I love that. Justin, go big red. - Bam, bam, bam, bam.

- Yeah, I should make that my ringtone, but maybe it would depress me more than help me these days. (laughing) Let's see, I think for me, I'll just give one song and one song. So in terms of the song, this year it's been Psalm 131, which is just a very short, I think it's three verses long, a prayer to the Lord is telling him, "My heart's not lifted up too high.

My eyes aren't raised up too high. I don't occupy myself with two things too great, and tomorrow it's for me." But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a ween child with its mother, like a ween child as my soul. Within me, and if I'm being honest, that is not my default position, but that Psalm sort of helps recalibrate my heart and mind and soul that I can be at rest with the Lord because I don't need to be occupied with things that are beyond my control.

He cares for me and he carries me along. And so I can rest in him. So that's been sort of a default song for me lately.

I think the hymn that I come back to, perhaps as much as any other, is "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" by William Cooper. He wrote it four years before 1776, before our country's independence, so 1773. And if you don't know the story of Cooper, it's worth... Worth listening to John Piper's biographical address on him, which is really moving a man who struggled profoundly with very dark depression, but I think it's one of the more beautiful hymns ever written.

On YouTube, there's a ministry. I'm not even familiar with who they are, but I don't know if it's a husband or wife, or just a man and a woman doing a rendition of it, Crossroads Music, that when I'm discouraged, when I'm down, I like to go and listen to that song and listen to the beautiful theology and lyrics. And I find that it always brings me back, refreshes me, encourages me.

So those are two places I might go back to office. - Great, those are good answers. I mean, Cooper was a renowned poet.

I mean, it's a good example of the best poets writing the best hymns. He had a famous poem "Epitaph for a Hair," writing about his pet rabbit. It would sound so... I was almost

moved to tears and you know, I don't cry about anything.

You know, I mean, it's just very moving and I really commend all of Piper's addresses, but I do remember that one on Cooper is really good. Colin, Justin, good to be with you again. Good to talk through these things.

Lord willing, we'll have a couple of more episodes in this season. Before we take a break for the holidays, thank you all for listening and being with us. Until next time, glorify God and enjoy him forever and read a good book.

(gentle music)

(gentle music)

(buzzing)

[buzzing]