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What Should Christians Look for in a President?

By Freddy Davis

It's not 100%, but evangelical Christians in America tend to be conservative politically. The reason that tendency exists is not because there is a particular focus on politics. Politics is just one of the places where values get expressed in the culture. But since the other side generally promotes values that go against biblical teachings, it is only natural that Christians would tend to side with the party that most shares their values.

But for Christians, there's a lot more involved in the political landscape than a mere abstract understanding of biblical values. Those values must also somehow be tangibly expressed in real life. And the way that happens is through political policies – which is where much of the culture war fireworks occur.

It is at this point that things often get a little tricky for Christians. Since political policies are visible and tangible, it is much easier for people to latch onto those as a matter of first priority, rather than staying focused on the values themselves. That is, once a particular political policy position seems to correspond to values we like, it inevitably takes on a life of its own. While we may start out supporting a policy because it corresponds to our beliefs and values, after a time, the policy starts emerging as dominant, while thoughts of the value recede. And before long, the focus shifts entirely to the policy, and the values that originally underpinned it get decoupled. That is not a good thing, but it tends to be the way things trend.

The same thing happens when it comes to getting behind a presidential candidate. One candidate

seems to represent the values we hold (at least to a greater degree than other candidates), so we support that person. Inevitably, our candidate also promotes other policies we don't agree with. But because we see them as better than the alternative, we tend to overlook the things we don't like.

In real life, it can hardly be any other way. But it does create a certain amount of tension, and Christians are, or at least should be, sensitive to this dilemma. We are sensitive because we don't believe the ends justify the means. We don't believe it's okay for some immorality to exist as long as we mostly get our way. So how are Christians supposed to navigate this conundrum?

What Are We Looking for in a President?

Every societal institution has its role, and government is no exception. Government's role is to provide societal order and promote justice. But there are different ways to do that. And the different ways are based on differing sets of values.

It is possible, for instance, to create societal order and dispense justice based on totalitarian values, where the collective, or the preference of the ruler, is put above the interests of the individual. On the other hand, it can be based on biblical values where the individual has priority.

So, for Christians, one of the primary things we are looking for is a leader who will promote societal order and justice based on biblical values.

Interestingly, a leader doesn't even have to be a Christian to do this as long as they have bought into the biblical value system. Obviously, the ideal is to

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have a committed Christian leader who upholds biblical values. But for a president to do a good job of governing while implementing values Christians hold dear, it is not necessary.

As an example, one of the people originally running for president is a Hindu who has bought into the Christian values that made up America's founding. While religiously he is Hindu, based on values, he is a cultural Christian. He actually articulates those values about as well as anyone I have heard. While I believe he would do some things I disagree with, overall, he would probably govern based on the values I personally hold.

On the other side, there have been president's in the past who have claimed to be Christians, but have been horrible in their policy positions. While claiming to be a Christian, they have promoted policies based on non-biblical values.

As mentioned before, the role of government is to promote societal order and justice. The church's primary role is different from that. It is to spread the gospel. The biblical values that go along with the gospel message are an essential foundation for good political policy, but it is not the work of the church to do politics. The church's role is just different.

With that understanding as a starting point, in a presidential election, we are electing a president, not a pastor. This is not meant to excuse, in any way, the bad behavior, or bad policies, of the person we might end up supporting. What we want, though, is someone who will implement policies which create an environment that allows the church to do its proper work in the world. Without that environment, it becomes much more difficult to do the

work of God. Just look at places like China, North Korea, Iran, and the like. (In fact we don't even have to look that far. Look at the states during the pandemic that forced churches to close and threatened to jail those who insisted in continuing to hold worship.)

Should We Consider the Alternative?

As we explore this problem, we have to understand that, in politics, there will always be compromise – and some of it we won't like. So the question becomes, "What politicians should a Christian support?"

In dealing with this question, while there is a pragmatic element, it is not simply a matter of being pragmatic. We all know that we will never achieve heavenly perfection in this world. Sin rules our world, and has since the Fall. As we live life, the best we can do is strive for the perfection God desires, and work to mitigate the effects of sin wherever we can. So we should vote for the person who mostly shares our biblical values. If we don't, we end up helping those who specifically promote non-biblical values. In that case the end result will be policies that hinder us from doing the work of God in the world.

How Should We Think of Voting for President?

So how should we think about voting for president?

Perhaps the most traditional way of looking at political leadership in Christian circles is to see leaders as people we must acquiesce to. We are told in Romans to "be subject to the governing authorities," and in Hebrews to "obey your leaders and submit to them."

But in the American system, we have an interesting dynamic at play. In the time and place where Romans and Hebrews were written, the leaders were part of a specific political system. In America, we don't live in that sys-

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tem. In the American political system, it is the law that is our ultimate leader – especially the U.S. Constitution. So the leader we are to submit to and obey, in a political sense, is the law itself.

So what about our president and other elected officials who are in positions of power? Well, those people are not our leaders in the sense spoken of in the New Testament – they are our representatives. We, as citizens, place them in their positions of responsibility for the purpose of representing us in the arena of politics. And if they do not represent us well, we have a responsibility to replace them.

You see, the principle we are working under in America is not a dictatorship like what existed in the New Testament era, but a constitutional republic. That means the citizens of the country are responsible, as stewards of the political offices. They are not the subjects of politicians. And as Christians, our stewardship involves voting for and supporting people who not only do what we like, but who will promote biblical values that create a societal environment favorable to the work of God in the world. And even after we have someone in office, our stewardship responsibility continues as we monitor their work and hold them accountable.

Who We Support

I feel pretty certain that whoever ends up getting elected as

president will make a lot of decisions Christians will not agree with. That will be true no matter who is elected. There are, though, some candidates who will provide leadership that will promote societal order and justice better than others – that is, those who will promote an environment that allows Christians to do the work of God in the world with less hindrance.

We will never get everything we want in an earthly political leader. We can, though, be the best steward possible by selecting people who will be faithful in promoting the values revealed in the Bible, and rejecting those who don't. As faithful stewards, it is our Christian responsibility to figure out who will be those faithful servants, and to faithfully vote. If we fail in those tasks, we are not being obedient to Christ.

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