

# How Should a Christian Vote?

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Is there a Christian position on the political issues facing us today?

[We have seen](#) that all in the body of Christ are exiles in this present world, citizens of another kingdom. Our primary responsibility in this period of exile is to serve as ambassadors of our King, speaking and living out His message of reconciliation.

At the same time, we are to “seek the welfare of the city” where we are in exile (Jeremiah 29:7). In a democracy, this surely implies voting; for some individual Christians, it might well mean deep involvement in the political process. But our hope is never to be in any political candidate or party; our hope is in our coming Redeemer King.

Here are some biblical principles concerning voting that I commend to you during this political maelstrom.

*1) Our political involvement should include voting in a way that we believe will move our society to become more just, merciful, and moral.*

God is specially concerned about the weak and powerless. Surely our voting should reflect His concern.

**Zechariah 7:9-10** <sup>9</sup> **“Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, <sup>10</sup> do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”**

**Proverbs 24:11-12** <sup>11</sup> **Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. <sup>12</sup> If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?**

This has implications for numerous issues in political debate, from education to immigration, from health care in the US to the AIDS crisis around the world. [As I argued last week](#), the abortion issue is clear, and in and of itself could disqualify a candidate from office. But on many other issues, Christians may well disagree on what public policies are more likely to help “the fatherless, the sojourner, [and] the poor.”

- Some may believe that cutting taxes on the rich will generate a more dynamic economy that will help the poor through job creation; others may believe that raising taxes on the rich and using that money to provide public services to the poor is a better option.
- Some may believe that US military power can be used constructively as a force to save lives, advance freedom, and prevent genocide around the world; others may believe that any exercise of military power will inevitably lead to abuse of power, deaths of innocent civilians, and a consequent stain on this country.

- Some may believe that the best, most humane way to deal with illegal immigration is to enforce border security while simultaneously streamlining and expanding the visa application process; others may believe that the emphasis should be on providing a clear path to citizenship for those already in this country with a track record of honest hard work.
- Some may believe that vouchers for use in any type of private or public school would improve substantially the education of children from poor families; others may believe that this would divert needed resources from public schools that already serve the vast majority of the poor, and would thereby make most of the them worse off.

These and other disagreements could well lead Christians to vote for different candidates. But surely the passages quoted above and the overall thrust of the Bible should lead *all* of us to vote *not* for our economic self-interest, but for the candidates that we think move our society towards greater justice.

*2) Our political involvement should include voting for candidates who have the character to make wise decisions when facing the unexpected crises and challenges that will arise in the years ahead.*

Political campaigns put a lot of emphasis on specific policy proposals to solve problems facing the country. But most politicians end up governing quite differently from the way they campaign. In some cases, this is simply deceit; the candidate says whatever he thinks will get him elected. But in very many cases, the most important decisions politicians make concern unexpected, unanticipated challenges.

Thus, when voting we need to look past specific policy proposals and to the character of each candidate. For character will be necessary when facing the unforeseen challenges ahead.

But discerning character isn't easy. We certainly can't listen simply to what the campaigns on either side say. Instead, we can often discern much about a candidate's character by looking more at what he has done in the past rather than what he says. Has he displayed a heart of genuine compassion? Has she been firm when under attack?

Here's one piece of data on character: The candidates for president and vice-president have all tried to convince us that they really care about other people. They all have many ideas about how to use taxpayer money to help the country. Question: How much of *their own* money do they voluntarily contribute to charitable causes?

The answer is disappointing: None of the four is exemplary. From 2000 to 2004, the Obamas gave an average of less than 1% of their income to charity. From 2005 to 2007 they gave 5.5%. The Bidens were worse, giving less than one quarter of one percent of their income to charity from 2000 to 2007. The Palins gave about 2.3% of their income in 2006 and 2007 to charity (and have released no earlier returns.) While at first

glance John McCain looks considerably more generous, he and his wife Cindy file returns separately, and she earns the vast majority of the couple's income. The information released is not sufficient to calculate the McCains' total charitable giving, but in 2006 it was definitely more than two percent and almost certainly less than five percent of their combined income.

*3) Our political involvement is no substitute for our personal involvement.*

We do not discharge our responsibility to love our neighbor as ourselves by voting in an election. Nor do we do so through advocating a particular political position.

By all means, contemplate the issues. By all means, inform yourself. By all means, discern what you can about the candidates' character. By all means, vote. And by all means, display kindness and mercy personally. By all means, help the sojourner and the widow personally. By all means, spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples personally.

God is advancing His kingdom. We have a key role to play in that advance. We also have a minor but important role to play in making this country more just through our involvement in the US political process. Keep the key role in view – and play that minor but important role. Please vote.