

“Christian Voting”

By: Doug Warren

Should my religious faith affect my voting? If so how?

With elections upon us again there has been much talk about the right and wrong place of religious belief of both voters and candidates. As a pastor I am often asked not only if Christianity should show up at the polls but also in what ways. It is my conviction that not only should our faith commitments lead us in our civil responsibilities, but that it is impossible for them not to do so.

First, God calls us to be good citizens. In our geo-political setting that is as part of a self-governing state and nation. While it might be possible to be a responsible citizen in other cultures without keeping informed and exercising voting responsibilities, in our culture it is not. One of the most frustrating things is to hear of professing Christians who simply have abdicated their role as citizens. Jesus commanded us, “Give to Caesar, what is Caesar’s.” In our nation that involves informed voting because we the people are Caesar. While the level of our civil involvement will differ based on God’s calling in our individual lives, it seems to me that we are all called to this threshold of responsible citizenship.

Second, all governance is an expression of power. Immediately we are confronted with a myriad of questions—the power to do what? For whom? To what end? All of these questions involve the outworking of moral choices. It is impossible to do anything in government without making faith-based judgments, whether your faith is in Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Secular Humanism, or your bank account.

Take for example the role of government in establishing justice. Our government has dozens of laws, police forces, courts, and administrations whose business it is to seek justice. But justice according to whom? What are the standards of justice? That is a question that will be determined by your faith commitments. Any legislation, political candidate, or referendum that you consider will have elements of the justice question that voters cannot discern apart from their religious (or irreligious) convictions.

Third, for the Christian we believe that Jesus is the King over all the earth and so any act of civil governance needs necessarily to yield to His power and authority. As one author phrased it, “There is not a single atom in the universe over which God is not Lord.” The idea that a follower of Christ could make any decision in affairs of state apart from their convictions is rooted in something other than the Bible.

Christians should agree on the need for justice and on its rootedness in God’s perfect justice described in His Word while at the same time disagreeing on how that justice is best administered while we wait for His return. And that is where things get really interesting.

I started with the brazen statement that our faith commitments will necessarily influence our civic participation. How then can two individuals with the same faith commitments reach opposite conclusions regarding a proposed law, candidate or other issue? The answer lies in the brokenness of this world as it currently exists. You see until Jesus returns we have a world that has *begun* to be transformed, but that is still powerfully controlled by evil. In this world we often have to choose between justice and mercy. But these two were never meant to be divided.

In the complexity of our life in society this is multiplied a thousand times over. So that often what might be best in caring for the poor is pitted against stewardship of wealth which is in conflict with humane treatment of animals that runs against individual liberties which seem irreconcilable to protection of the environment. And so with all of these concerns—each and every one of them spoken to in the Bible—we struggle to prioritize and strategize. Which concerns are more important? Which are more urgent given our setting and resources? What is the best approach to reaching good goals? Should this be addressed by local, state, or federal government or by non-governmental bodies?

While this maze is difficult enough to navigate we have an additional difficulty in our nation's history. The Church has inappropriately taken sides in any number of social debates so that in revolutionary times there were loyalist churches and patriot churches advocating particular policy positions. Today we likewise see both liberal and conservative churches working on various issues. All the while a prevailing majority outside the church is calling for an imaginary neutrality that separates the issues of the day from any faith commitments (which in itself represents a faith commitment).

The choices we make will represent the values we have regardless of what values we espouse. What is needed is not a separation of our citizens' faith commitments and their civic involvement, but rather deep convictions expressed in respectful dialogue that help us as a community to weigh the priority and urgency of any given social policy. We need churches that will unashamedly preach, teach, and model true biblical justice and mercy instead of picking one to the exclusion of the other. We need to recognize that the brokenness of our society is beyond our ability to fix, and then rejoice that the God who is not only able to fix it, but who has promised He will has called us to be involved in that very restoration.