

Christians, Parties, People, or Policies? Who Should Christians Vote For?

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So there's an election due soon. Are you ready for it? Have you obtained a list of the candidates and their policies and decided who you will vote for? Or like many people, are you still working out whether Christians should be involved at all in the political process, and if so, can we make a difference? Australian Christians live in one of the world's showcase democracies, and have a great opportunity to advance the values of the kingdom of God through participation in the political process. But there are many challenges. For one thing, while democracy creates the possibility of Christians voting as a block and exercising a controlling vote in our State and Federal legislatures, the reality is that single-issue campaigning, the dominance of local issues over national issues, and the lack of suitable tested Christian candidates tends to fragment the Christian vote. For another, while all Christians would acknowledge the existence and reality of an eternal order where Christ rules as 'Lord' (a word equivalent to Caesar, Prime Minister or President), there is considerable variation in how Christians see that eternal order impinging on this present worldly order.

Should Christians be Involved in Politics?

Some Christians believe in the complete separation of Church and State. This overly 'principled' approach leaves many Christians unwilling to participate in the political process in any form, and condemns the Church to shout criticism from the cultural and political fringes. Other Christians believe much more strongly in the necessity for Christians to participate in the political process of the present worldly order as we await the coming of the kingdom of God in its final cataclysmic arrival. This more pragmatic approach accepts that in order to be 'salt and light' in the Australian cultural setting, Christians must be willing to participate fully in the political process. This means—contrary to the willingness of terrorists (Islamic or otherwise) to re-write the rules to suit their own purposes—that Christians must act according to the agreed rules of the Australian *polis* (city).

Christians of all persuasions should remember that while Christ *is* Lord in the coming eternal order, the point of our discipleship is to make him Lord of *this* present temporal order also.

The 'obedience of faith' to which we are called does not allow us to skip out on the political process. Christians enjoy dual-citizenship in the present earthly order *and* the coming kingdom of God, and in order to fulfill the demands of such citizenship Christ must receive our loyalty and allegiance. This allegiance ought to work itself out through the policies and people we vote for in the political process. Ultimately our vote is a tangible placement of our values into the contested public space. As such our attending a polling booth is an act of discipleship, and every Christian voter should attempt to honor God with their vote.

Christians? Policies? Parties? or People?

There is much confusion among Christians about how they should vote. We ask “Who should I vote for?”, and “Whose policy platforms demonstrate a commitment to Biblical values which honor God, support what is good in humanity, and protect the weak and vulnerable?” These are important questions because not every electorate has a standing candidate who is identifiably ‘Christian’, and when Christians are to be found standing as political candidates, questions such as “Can Independents actually influence Government?”, and “Will his/her Christian views be stifled in the Party-room?” arise.

Sometimes a particular Political Party has within its platform a policy which is recognizably ‘Christian’, such as an anti-abortion policy; but elsewhere in their platform an equally ‘anti-Christian’ stance might be expressed, such as pro-euthanasia. Political parties invariably write their policies on what might be called a ‘soft’ ideological platform, with a ‘hard’ popular opinion element. This puts Christians who prefer to vote for a particular Party in the difficult position of having to decide between two evils, creating the sense of compromise for the voter.

There are times when a suitable Christian candidate can be clearly identified, but inevitably they are either affiliated with a marginal Party which is not likely to generate enough votes to exert an influence on the political outcome, or they are standing on a single-issue ticket which in the overall scheme of things seems not to be significant. This sense of powerlessness in the political process is commonplace among Christian voters, and has led to a disillusionment in the political process among Christians. But that powerlessness would change however if Christian voters were able to observe from the political process a greater number of outcomes which were positive to Christian aspirations.

It may also subside if Christian voters came to understand the implications of the second-preference system. Let’s assume you have a Christian Independent candidate standing in your electorate. You vote for him, but he fails to poll heavily enough to feature in the outcomes. While he has not won the seat in the election, nonetheless because he has received so many primary votes, he has the ability to influence the outcome by which candidate or Party he gives his second preferences to. Granted, this means the Christian voter must trust the failed candidate with the placement of his second preferences, but that should not be an issue if you trusted him with your primary vote in the first place.

There is also the potential for one or more candidates standing in your electorate who are not necessarily ‘Christian’, but who are upstanding citizens whose policies have enough moral basis to represent an approximation of Christian values. These people have been referred to as ‘people of peace’ through whom God can work to implement his purposes in the world.

In the event of no other suitable candidates, Christians should feel free to vote for such people on the principle that “whoever is not against us is for us” (Mark 9: 41).

Suggestions for Christian Voters:

- Believe you make a difference. Many Christians find themselves feeling that they can’t make a difference through their vote. We see the decline of morality and the increase

of evil in our world, and we despair. What can the righteous do when the foundations are being destroyed? (Ps. 11:3). We can be responsible citizens who like Jeremiah are to seek the peace of the cities and countries that God has sent us (Jer. 29:7), by making our vote count for good in the world.

- Get to know who the candidates in your electorate are. If possible attend 'Meet the Candidates Forums'. Ask them question like; do you support marriage as a relationship between a male and female; would you oppose bills on abortion and euthanasia; what are your views on the censorship of pornography; and what is your platform on the illegal detention of so-called illegal refugees in Australia?
- Visit the Australian Christian Lobby website (www.acl.org.au), where you can find up-to-date, non-partisan information from a Christian perspective on the issues. For example Brian Pickering of the Australian Christian Prayer Network lists 5 useful steps: (1) Pray, (2) Register to vote, (3) Become informed, (4) Help elect godly people, and (5) vote wisely. Enquire about the video they have produced on 'How to Vote'.

There is no time like the present to step up and have your vote counted. Our allegiance to Christ requires that we participate in the political process. If we are silent, the very stones will cry out! (Luke 19:40).