

Character Matters:
According to God's Word, What Should Christians Look for in a
Political Candidate?

Introduction:

Character matters. And it matters more than political party affiliation because character dictates actions. Some live in countries where they cannot cast votes for their leaders. However, Americans are free to vote, to choose who will or who will not rule over them (but this does not mean Christians living under tyranny in foreign countries are at a disadvantage). The Word of God is clear in its delineation of qualities the Lord values in a political leader. And God values character more than political platforms or hot-button issues. We will explore some of those values, but first, a few Biblical principles to uphold during any election year.

I. God Established Divine Institutions for Believers and Unbelievers

1. Free Will – Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:16-17 (Tree in Garden of Eden)
2. Marriage – Genesis 2:20b-25 (Garden of Eden – Eve created FOR Adam)
3. Family – Genesis 1:28 and 4:1-2 (“I have gotten a man child with the help of the Lord.”)
4. Nationalism/Government – **READ** Genesis 11:6-9 (Tower of Babel and the beginning of people groups, or nations, from which political leaders emerged.)

II. God Reserves Some Powers for Himself Alone, but Still Bestows Power.

1. God is the supreme ruler over all rulers on earth: “...the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it [a kingdom] on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men” Daniel 4:17.
2. God Makes it His Business to Choose Governing Powers in Authority, **READ** Romans 13:1-2
3. God can control the heart of a ruler: “The king’s heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes” Prov. 21:1.

III. God Gives Governments Certain Powers, but Not SUPREME Power

1. God grants authority to political rulers. “Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, “What are you doing?” (Eccl. 8:4).
2. Government leaders are charged with upholding laws of the land, and punishing citizens opposed to the rule of law. **READ** Romans 13:3-5
3. Governments collect taxes to finance institutions that protect citizens and deliver services for their general welfare (military, commerce, trade, law enforcement, justice, prisons, etc.). **READ** Romans 13:6-7 and I Peter 2:13-14 and 17
4. Remember, God established government, NOT political parties, which often try to redefine the job of a political ruler.
5. God did not grant governments power to creep and peer into citizens’ bedrooms and then censure citizens for what occurs there. Such actions are an abuse of political power.

IV. Character Traits of Leaders God Personally Produced

1. Leaders God created, valued and exalted had humble origins and learned how to govern from shepherding sheep and/or enduring harsh living conditions for years.

2. From *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller: "... I would, as their owner, have to lay down my life for them, if they were to flourish and prosper. Sheep do not 'just take care of themselves' ... They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care. ... It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways ... Our mass mind (or mob instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance" (20-21).
3. **Joseph** – **READ** Genesis 37:1-2 and 12-14 [Note, "I will go," in vs. 13]
 - a. What character traits are apparent in Joseph in those passages?
 - b. How would such traits come in handy as a Prime Minister of Egypt?
 - c. **READ** Genesis 45:4-11
 - d. Note that even after becoming Prime Minister of Egypt, Joseph still possessed caretaker traits learned from shepherding.
4. **David** – "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." **READ** I Samuel 16:1-11
 - a. Was there some insinuation that God may not have chosen a shepherd boy to be king?
 - b. **READ** I Samuel 16:17-19, 17:15, 17 and 20
 - c. What character traits are apparent in David in those passages?
 - d. Why would God consider those traits valuable in a king?
5. **Moses**
 - a. Though groomed to be a Pharaoh, God personally "re-groomed" Moses into the leader He needed to lead the Jews from captivity in Egypt.
 - b. **READ** Exodus 2:11-14
 - c. Was Moses ready to lead Israel at this point? What character traits was he lacking?
 - d. **READ** Exodus 2:15-21
 - e. What leadership character traits did Moses exhibit here?
 - f. **READ** Exodus 3:1-2
 - g. How many years passed between Chapters 2 and 3?
 - h. What leadership and character traits had Moses developed as a shepherd?
 - i. An apparent contradiction: While the Apostle Paul wrote that "not many mighty" are called in I Cor. 1:26, God called Moses to lead, even though he had been groomed to become a Pharaoh. But notice that God let him shepherd sheep for 40 years before elevating him.
 - j. Rarely does God call a mighty person (military leader, wealthy business leader, socially famous) to lead a nation unless He has first humbled him/her through years of suffering and/or humbling service to others.
- V. **Protected Categories of Citizens (sheep) in a Nation**
 1. **Widows** – **READ** Exodus 22:22-24
 2. **Orphans** – "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" James 1:27.
 3. **The Poor** – "Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their case and take the life of those who rob them" Prov 22:22-23.
 4. **Immigrants** – Exodus 22:21 "You shall not oppress a stranger (immigrant) nor torment him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." and "... if you do not oppress the

alien [immigrant], the orphan, or the widow ... then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land ..." Jer. 7:6

5. The Lord will and has destroyed nations for oppressing one or more of those categories.
READ EZEKIEL 16:49-50
6. A political ruler must possess some commitment to protecting these four categories of citizens God is determined to protect.
7. A political candidate must possess character traits that will not prompt them to abuse the four protected categories of citizens in a nation.

VI. Noteworthy Character Traits in a Political Candidate

1. Humility. "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6
2. A Sense of Justice/Mercy/Kindness/Compassion: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness (mercy), and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8
3. Calmness / Composure – "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city." Prov. 16:32
4. Honesty vs. Lying: "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight." Prov. 12:22
5. Pride / Arrogance – "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." Prov. 16:18
6. Anger / Wrathful. "Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools." Eccl. 7:9. and "A man of great wrath will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again." Prov. 19:19.
7. Undisciplined tongue. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. ... the mouth of fools spouts folly." Prov. 15:1-2
8. Given to strife / division. "Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife." Prov. 26:21 and "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression." Prov. 29:22
9. Plotting and talking about trouble: "Don't envy bad people; don't even want to be around them. All they think about is causing a disturbance; all they talk about is making trouble" (Message Bible).
10. Plotting and taking revenge: "This is what the Lord GOD says: "Because the Philistines have acted in revenge and have taken vengeance with malice in *their* souls to destroy with everlasting hostility," therefore this is what the Lord GOD says: "Behold, I am going to reach out with My hand against the Philistines and eliminate the Cherethites; and I will destroy the remnant of the seacoast. I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they will know that I am the LORD, when I inflict My vengeance on them" Ezekiel 25:15-16.

VII. Principle of "the lesser of the two evils" Since all political candidates are flawed, we often must select the one with the fewest number of negative character traits. So, ask yourselves: Who exhibits the most positive character traits?

1. Which candidate has a track record that includes shepherding people, especially those in the 4 protected categories mentioned in #V. above?
2. Whose character would be most mindful of people in the 4 protected categories?
3. Was the candidate involved with the shepherding of people BEFORE they sought political office?

4. Who exhibits the most humility? Has this trait been ongoing?
5. Who better controls their tongue?
6. Who better controls their temper?
7. NOT “who hasn’t made a mistake?” but, rather, who is quickest to acknowledge their mistakes?
8. Does the candidate toss dollars at charities, or invest personal time and effort serving them? (Example: Sending money to an after school program versus sacrificing time and volunteering AT an after school program.)

VIII. Political leaders are NOT required to be: pastors, mature Christians, upholders of free-enterprise/free market economies, business owners, gun-rights advocates, liberal, conservative, right-wing, left-wing, Democrats, Republicans, evangelists, upholders of the “agendas” of certain segments of society.

IX. The Limits of Government: What Jesus Christ Knew about Rome

1. Jesus Christ did not rely on the Roman government to usher in the Kingdom of God.
2. Jesus Christ reinforced the idea that what citizens owe the government are their taxes, not their worship. **READ Matt. 22:15-21**
3. Jesus knew Caesar wanted (and needed) taxes for Rome’s purposes. He also knew the Roman government was heavy-handed and corrupt, but He did NOT overthrow it, nor slander it. (Upon whom did our Lord levy most of His criticism?)
4. Jesus did not march on the Roman bath houses to protest immorality occurring there, nor did He censure the Roman government for permitting same-sex relations and orgies.
5. Jesus Christ did not charge the Roman government with upholding morality among the population at all.
6. Jesus Christ did not order the Roman government to establish and uphold a *preferred culture* throughout the empire.

X. The Influence of the Christian in Society, or what Government CANNOT Do

1. The late Dr. Billy Graham once said: “I can identify with them (the religious right) on theology, probably in many areas. But in the political emphasis they have, I don’t, because I don’t think Jesus or the Apostles took sides in the political arenas of their day” (*Quotable Billy Graham*).
2. Jesus Christ was determined to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth by way of those who believed in Him, thus the power of the ordinary, spirit-filled Christian to influence culture in a society as salt and light. **READ Matt. 5:13-16**
3. The prayers of believers hold great sway over the culture in a society. God will prosper a community when Christians pray. **READ I Timothy 2:1-2.**
4. James 5:16-18: “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ...” Elijah’s prayer affected the economy by causing a drought (I Kings 17:1).
5. Christians are not of this world order. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; ... He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ ...” (I Corinthians 5:17, 19b, 20a).
6. Christians are never to label themselves liberals or conservatives, nor swear allegiance to Republicans and Democrats because these are earthly labels, and we are heavenly ambassadors living on earth **temporarily**. **READ Colossians 3:1-4**
7. God has charged the church with being change agents in their communities. Dr. Tony Evans says Christians are really to be “the dominant cultural influence,” and that “... God brings kingdom principles through the church to the community” (KHCB Radio Broadcast, 27 July 2016). **(So ... Witness ... Evangelize ... Disciple Others!!)**

8. However, when believers “leave their first love” as per Rev. 2:4, they lose their power as salt and light on the earth and take on divisive, non-Biblical identities: Black Christians, White Christians, Evangelical Christians, liberals, conservatives – all signs Christians have forgotten who they are.
9. When Christians become “nationalistic,” they forget their true home is heaven, not earth. (Consider what happened when German Christians embraced nationalism ... and Hitler.)
10. Be wary of any politician who inserts a nation’s constitution in the Bible, and then sells it for profit.
11. When believers abandon their identities in Christ and their collective purposes as salt and light, then their influence in society wanes and they are apt to attach responsibility for changing society to political leaders.
12. When believers abandon their identities in Christ and their collective purposes as salt and light, they will formulate political agendas consisting of their *group concerns* and form political *parties* or *platforms*. Then choose leaders who represent their *concerns*.
13. Consider what happened to Israel in the Old Testament when they rejected God as their king and demanded a human king ... so God gave them Saul!
14. Believers in the Church (universal) are charged with influencing and building strong marriages and families, as well as upholding moral values. If we see weak families and weak morals in a nation, look in the mirror, not at the government.
15. When Christian families send virtuous children into society to work as civil servants, they are a blessing to the government.

XI. Questions to Ponder

1. Do Christians today resemble first Century believers at all? Do Christians in this country know their roles in society? Has the salt lost its savor?
2. Where in scripture does the Lord encourage believers to elevate their identities as citizens of a certain nation ABOVE their identity in Christ?
3. What obligation do Christians have in defining and upholding marriage and family in a nation? If marriage and the family pre-existed government, is it really a government leader’s purpose to define and uphold marriage and the family?
4. Concerning polls, who is being polled?
5. What is the political persuasion and the number of that persuasion polled?
6. Would the Holy Spirit guide a Christian to cast a vote as a result of pressure from a poll?
7. Is there something amiss with a poll that only surveys “white evangelical Christians” concerning their vote and views? (SRN News on KHCB Radio, July 2016).