

O Gladsome Light

Anonymous (c. 200); tr. Robert Bridges (1844–1930)

O gladsome Light, O Grace
of God the Father's face,
th'eternal splendor wearing;
celestial, holy, blest,
our Savior Jesus Christ,
joyful in Thine appearing!

Now, as day fadeth quite,
we see the evening light,
our wonted hymn outpouring;
Father of might unknown,
Thee, His incarnate Son,
and Holy Ghost adoring.

To Thee of right belongs
all praise of holy songs,
O Son of God, Life-giver;
Thee, therefore, O Most High,
the world does glorify
and shall exalt forever.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

How to Vote 2020

Kevin T. Bauder

The church's place is not to address political questions. Rather, its work is to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Christian individuals, however, are responsible to act upon moral and spiritual concerns before they address merely temporal ones. Matters of principle should take precedence over matters of preference. Therefore, part of the church's responsibility is to instruct the people of God in every moral principle that applies to their political decisions. In other words, while churches should not tell their members *who* to vote for, they should teach them *how* to vote.

Political contests raise many issues that are not directly moral. Christians can certainly weigh these issues, but non-moral concerns should never take priority over moral ones. For example, candidates' religious beliefs and affiliation do not usually determine how well they will govern. Christians might better vote for an unbeliever with just policies than to vote for a fellow-saint whose policies are naïve or misguided.

Furthermore, governments have no moral duty to manage the economy, and when they try, the result is usually destructive. Governments have no moral duty to create jobs. Governments have no moral duty to increase the wealth of their nations. Governments have no moral duty to supply the financial or medical needs of their citizens. Governments do not even have a moral duty to educate children.

Citizens may wish that their governments would do some of these things. Since these are (at best!) matters of convenience, however, they must not be the primary issues that Christians consider when they are deciding which candidate to support. Rather, such issues must take a very distant second place to genuinely biblical and moral concerns. I here suggest seven biblical concerns that Christian people must weigh as they consider their voting choices, and an eighth that also comes into play.

Right to Life

From the time that government was established (probably Gen 9:6), its most important duty has been to protect the lives of the innocent. Civil authorities must use their power to defend those who are too weak to defend themselves. No one is more innocent than the unborn, who are clearly presented as human persons in Scripture (Psalm 51:5). No candidate is worth a vote who will not work to end the holocaust of abortion on demand.



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Rule of Law

The clear teaching of the Bible is that law binds civil authorities. Any law that contradicts God's law is, of course, unjust (Acts 5:29). More than that, rulers are bound by the law of the land that they rule (Ezra 5:13; 6:1-7; Acts 16:36-38). In the United States, the Constitution is the highest law of the land. But a Constitution that can mean whatever five justices want it to mean is exactly the same as no Constitution at all. Christians should support candidates who will read the Constitution for what it says, not for what they think it should say. Most of all, Christians should support candidates who will only appoint or confirm judges who will abide by the meaning of the Constitution itself.

Restraint of Evil

One of the most central functions of government is to restrain evil (Rom 13:3-4). Externally, this means that the government must both maintain a strong defense against national enemies and control the country's borders against intrusion. Internally, it means that government must both maintain the peace through effective policing and enforce retributive justice against criminals through a just judiciary.

Respect for Property

The right to private property is protected by God Himself (Exod 20:15). Few rights are more critical than this one. Great wealth rightfully gained is not a wrong but a blessing. Governments act immorally when they disintegrate the accumulation of wealth, whether directly through confiscation or indirectly through "progressive" taxes on income, estates, and capital. Christians should support candidates who resist the pressure to make the government an expression of envy and an agent of economic redistribution.

Recovery of Moral Responsibility

God makes able-bodied people responsible for their own welfare (2 Thess 3:10). He has mandated that we should live by working. He expects mature people of every station to earn their living and to prepare for times when they cannot. For those who are overcome by circumstances beyond their control, God has ordained institutions such as family (including extended family) and church (a second family for believers) as agencies of support. Such institutions can provide help while holding individuals accountable. Casting government in the role of provider inevitably uncouples assistance from accountability and, consequently, is deeply immoral. It is especially dangerous when the government's activity supercedes the role of the family and negates its responsibility.

Recognition of Israel

God has not canceled His blessing for those who bless Israel, nor His curse for those who do not (Gen 12:3). While the modern state of Israel is not equivalent to the biblical Israel, it is related. Christian respect for and friendship to Jewish people ought to include support for the existence, autonomy, and liberty of Israel.

Responsible Use of Nature

God has given humans dominion over nature and has authorized humanity to subdue the natural world (Gen 1:26-28). Pristine preservation of nature is the opposite of what God intends. We must use nature responsibly. While we do not wish to pollute or defile, we recognize that the earth has been created for human use. Contemporary "environmentalism" often thwarts this divine design, and it must not be advanced by governmental regulation or policy.

Reputation for Integrity

The Bible teaches that when the wicked rule, the people mourn (Prov 29:2). The personal character of political candidates is important for their ability to serve in office. A candidate whose word cannot be trusted is one who cannot govern well. Integrity is particularly important when it comes to a candidate's sworn word. For example, a man who will violate his marriage oath is the kind of person who will violate his oath of office. Yet a candidate who has erred in the past may show a change of heart by consistent promise-keeping in the present.

In our present situation we may find no candidate who displays truly commendable character. In this circumstance some of God's people may choose to vote for none of the candidates. If, however, one candidate has demonstrated commitment to biblical perspectives on other moral issues, then Christians can vote for that candidate's policies without endorsing his character.

For the record, in the last election I took the first approach. We had two candidates with despicable character. I could not bring myself to vote for either the Wizard of Oz or the Wicked Witch of the West. This time around we again have two candidates with bad character. One of them, however, has actually kept good promises and made good changes. I don't believe that voting for that candidate betrays any Christian principle.

Christian people must resist being driven by material concerns. Their primary interests are not economic. Their duty is to seek first the kingdom of God, so biblical principles should take priority over personal preferences at the polls, just as they should in every area of life.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
