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## Only Christians Need Apply?

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## Only Christians Need Apply?

### Abstract

"Should Christians only vote for Christians? Is it ever appropriate, or even beneficial, for us to vote for a candidate who is not a Christian?"

Posting about what to value in a political candidate from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/only-christians-need-apply/>

### Keywords

In All Things, political candidates, faith, deception, values

### Disciplines

American Politics | Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# Only Christians Need Apply?

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 [inallthings.org/only-christians-need-apply/](https://allthings.org/only-christians-need-apply/)

Jeff Taylor

Should Christians only vote for Christians? Is it ever appropriate, or even beneficial, for us to vote for a candidate who is not a Christian? In the United States, smart politicians know the answers are “Yes” and “No” for many devout believers. That’s why such candidates play up their faith—real or not.

The Christian faith of a politician is something I consider when voting, but it is only one factor and usually not the most important one. That’s true for me because: (1) professions of faith may not be real, (2) sincere Christians can be poor statespeople, and (3) non-Christians can be good statespeople.

Deception is an attendant of worldly power, just like lies, intrigue, self-interest, manipulation, false choices, and red herrings. This should not surprise us. What else would we expect from a world system under the sway of the father of lies? As Jesus sent his disciples out to preach and heal, He told them they should be “as innocent as doves and as wise as serpents” (Mt. 10:16). In other words, morally pure but politically savvy.

The temptation among politically engaged Christians is to be the exact opposite: worldly but naive, spiritually compromised yet politically gullible. This is the worst possible combination. We should try to be grounded in Scripture and in tune with the Spirit even as we have an accurate understanding of the political lay of the land.

Sad to say, the most naive voters in the United States are Christians. This naiveté is found across the political and theological spectrums. It tends to be true of Bible-believing Christians who are conservative Republicans, liberal Democrats, and respectable centrists.<sup>1</sup>

Both big parties take their most loyal voters—white Christians for the Republicans and black Christians for the Democrats—for granted because their votes can always be counted on, regardless of how little policy implementation they receive in return. The parties actively court and repay swing voters, not the loyal base. That is why, in some ways, it is strategically foolish for Christians to blindly follow one party. We guarantee that we get little in return when we give a blank check.

The Religious Right and the Religious Left tend to place their faith in faithless politicians who exploit our idealism, make promises they have no intention of keeping, and take Christian support for granted because they know true believers won’t vote for the other party—no matter how disappointed they become—because the other party has been successfully demonized. It is the boogeyman approach. Vote Republican or the Democrats will get you! And vice versa. It works well for the professional political class, but not so well for the rest of us.

In addition to pandering on issues, another element of this deceptive approach is well-publicized piety. It may be self-consciously phony or self-delusional, but either way, it is not good (Mt. 6:5-6, 7:21-23).

In American politics, almost every politician is a good Christian because they follow the manipulative maxim of Machiavelli: “A prince ought to... appear to him who sees and hears him altogether merciful, faithful, humane, upright, and religious. There is nothing more necessary to appear to have than this last quality [being religious], inasmuch as men judge generally more by the eye than by the hand.” The accent is on “appear.” This strategy is still used 500 years later because human nature has not changed.

Some politicians are genuinely spiritual and committed to the Kingdom of God. Given the narrowness of the gate to life and the width of the fall into sin, I suspect that most are not. We can see this in the primary season. In Iowa, GOP candidates especially like to share their personal faith. As soon as the caucuses are over, most lose their pious talk as they concentrate on more-secular New Hampshire. Then—presto!—it is back again in South Carolina. It

ought to provoke suspicion, but if it's done by *our* favorite candidate, we overlook it.

This brings us to my second reason for usually discounting the Christian faith of a politician. Even when it is sincere, that does not mean the person would make an outstanding occupant of the White House or member of Congress. If a plumber is a brother or sister in Christ, I say, "That's nice," but I still want him or her to be good at the job.

Big-picture philosophy in politics is important, and proficiency in politics is also important. Good intentions can take you only so far. I don't want power to be wielded by a smart, effective person who is evil. I also don't want a good person wielding power in an ignorant and harmful manner. Even when a person has genuine faith, there are degrees of spiritual maturity and wisdom among Christians. Not all are equally discerning and committed. It is not enough to be a "good person" or a "sincere Christian."

My third reason for not caring so much about the faith of a politician is that you do not have to be a Christian to be good at government. Non-Christians can be adept and beneficial as rulers. Virtuous pagans, and even those who are not so virtuous, may still share many of our values and may be used by God for his purposes.<sup>2</sup> Kings Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus come to mind from Scripture, and there are contemporary examples as well.

Just as some of my favorite writers are agnostics and atheists, I have sometimes voted for those who ignore or reject Christianity. Of course, I do so despite their theological blind spots, not because of them. While I was a graduate student in Missouri, I supported a Muslim for city council and voted for him for mayor. I respected his passion for justice and agreed with his opposition to taxpayer funding for Planned Parenthood. We eventually became friends.

In an ideal world, the candidates for whom we vote would all be bona fide Christians who are mature in scriptural understanding, are on intimate terms with the Father, have the mind of Christ, and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. They would also be experts in the craft of political power, with all of the wisdom, strength, liberty, morality, peace, and justice it should entail.

In the real world, I focus on candidates who are likely to further at least some of these political values. If they happen to be fellow Christians, that's icing on the cake.

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## Footnotes

1. It is also true for theological liberals, as progressive Chris Hedges notes regarding the National Council of Churches and the Unitarian Universalists in his insightful book *Death of the Liberal Class*. ↩
2. In his book about Abraham Kuyper, Richard Mouw summarizes Kuyper's view of common grace when he writes, "God mysteriously works in positive ways in sinful humankind. This is how we are to understand the works of beauty that might be produced by a promiscuous, blaspheming artist, or the acts of justice committed by a person who speaks disdainfully about religious allegiances." If you don't want to call this common grace, call it merciful providence or echoes from Eden. ↩