

Editorial: A Baptist voter guide for the 2020 election

July 2, 2019

One of our great freedoms is the ability to elect our governing officials. Whatever the shortcomings of the electoral system may be—gerrymandering, disinformation, mudslinging, voter fraud, etc.—we get to weigh the merits of candidates for office and cast a vote for who we want from among them.

Let's not be cavalier about this freedom. Let's take full responsibility for how we decide who should govern us.

How should Baptists vote?

Depending on what kind of Baptist you are, you likely will respond to the question about how Baptists should vote with one of two words. If you are conservative, your answer to how Baptists should vote very well may be, "Republican." If you are progressive, your answer very well may be, "Democrat."

These two words are stand-ins for a host of positions on the economy, a range of social issues, the size and authority of government, and the role of religion. But these shorthands do not represent a Baptist's stated core convictions, though they may represent a Baptist's practiced convictions.

How have some Baptists voted?

Ironically, Baptists—people of deep faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ and formed by certain historic religious principles—often seem to base their votes more on secular convictions than on religious ones.

As an example: In the case of choosing pastors, I have heard Baptist church members say they voted for a pastoral candidate—not me—on the basis of hearing one sermon. The implied statement is that a good pastor is a good public speaker, regardless of how many and what kind of faults a pastoral candidate may have.

The 2016 election offers another well-worn example of this irony. According to various measures, white evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election—81 percent according to [Pew Research](#)—despite stated convictions in opposition to things like sexual impropriety, about which then-candidate [Trump bragged](#).

In its tackiest formulation, critics have said that for these voters, many of whom are Baptists, a man who brags about forcing himself on women makes a better president than a woman who supports the right of women to choose abortion. Evangelicals tend to be conservative, and some critics say those conservative evangelicals saw Trump as a better bet for the economy than Clinton.

Obviously, many things informed voters' selections in the 2016 election, things such as those listed in the second paragraph above. In the upcoming 2020 presidential election, those who vote Republican will have a simple choice, while those who vote Democrat will need to do a bit more research. But what about Baptists? What beyond the standard research should inform our vote?

What principles ought to inform Baptists when voting?

If being Baptist is important enough to inform life decisions like what church we attend, then being Baptist ought to be important enough to inform life decisions like who we vote for in presidential elections. But how

does being Baptist shape how we vote?

There are so many different kinds of Baptists, it might seem ridiculous to try to outline what it is about being Baptist that matters for how we vote, but there are a set of principles common to all Baptists that we ought to keep at the front of our minds more often, including when we consider political candidates.

Whether a Baptist is conservative, progressive or somewhere in between, several historic principles reside at the core of who we are. These principles include the lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of the believer, soul freedom, religious liberty and the autonomy of the local church.

The lordship of Jesus Christ

Baptists have no other master than Jesus Christ and would do well to remember that in these materialistic, hedonistic, narcissistic, nihilistic, fatalistic, pluralistic and secularistic days. We are to bow before no other than Jesus Christ—no political party, no platform, no economic policy, no foreign policy, no social agenda, nothing but Jesus.

The authority of Scripture

[George W. Truett](#), in his famous address in Washington, D.C., described Scripture as “the unchangeable and only law of Christ’s reign, and ... whatever is not found in the law cannot be bound” on our conscience. He said, “This law is a sacred deposit, an inviolable trust, which Christ’s friends are commissioned to guard and perpetuate wherever it may lead and whatever may be the cost of such trusteeship.”

The priesthood of the believer

Christians do not need a human mediator between them and God. Every believer has [direct access to God](#) through Jesus Christ and is responsible

for and capable of engaging with Scripture and its commands.

Soul freedom

Baptists believe each person, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, has the competence to discern Jesus' will for their life. As a result, no human authority should dictate Jesus' will to a person (Acts 5:29).

Religious liberty

Baptists were born and raised in religious persecution. In the United States, Baptists like Roger Williams and [John Leland](#), who experienced religious persecution, played an indispensable role in securing the right for all people to worship freely. Still today, Baptists champion the free exercise of religion around the world.

The autonomy of the local church

Each Baptist church, under the lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is self-governing. Each local church, not any outside authority, makes its own decisions about structure, worship and affiliations.

Relating core Baptist principles to how we vote

Maybe it's too pious. Maybe it borders on pretentious. But when Baptists vote, they should vote as people under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit and called to embody the teaching and call of Christ in the world.

Baptists are a free people. We are free in Christ and thus free indeed. And our freedom is not a freedom *from* responsibility but is a freedom *of* responsibility to Jesus Christ and to his command to be representatives

of God's kingdom. When we vote, we ought to be concerned with which candidate is most likely to facilitate such freedom.

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