

Editorial: How do you choose a candidate?

October 24, 2018

How do you choose the candidates for whom you vote?

The following is a list of criteria I have seen or heard people use in making their decisions:

- Party
- Platform
- Name
- Incumbency
- Endorsement
- Strategy
- Looks
- Gender
- Race
- Nationality
- Ethnicity
- Issues
- Fear

I remember hearing some women a few years ago express appreciation for the appearance of Paul Ryan, and I've heard a few women recently make similar comments about Beto O'Rourke. It seems good looks are bipartisan, but are they qualifying?

I've known people to vote for the name they've seen or heard most often, names like Bush and Kennedy. With so many races, how are you supposed to know all the names? Name recognition is bipartisan, but is it qualifying?

If I took the time to examine each of the criteria individually and ask if each one is qualifying on its own, I feel reasonably certain we would say, “No, *that* criterion is not sufficient to qualify a candidate for my vote.”

Some criteria are more important than others—such as how a candidate plans to address important issues—but it seems unreasonable for a single criterion to hold enough weight to qualify a candidate for our vote.

Or does it?

The criterion for choosing a candidate

We shouldn’t feel too bad for choosing people by what we see. We’re only electing people to temporary office. The Hebrew prophet Samuel, on the other hand, was anointing a king.

After the utter disappointment of Saul’s disobedience, Samuel was tasked with anointing the next king of Israel. He was told to go to Jesse’s house, and when Samuel arrived, he saw Eliab, Jesse’s striking firstborn son.

Apparently, the tendency to choose the most socially attractive candidate is innate. Samuel, when he saw Eliab, thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD” (1 Samuel 16:6). What more did Samuel need to know but what he saw?

In response to Samuel’s unspoken thought—though his eyes and body language probably spoke volumes—“the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Samuel saw and passed over all but one of Jesse’s sons. When David, the youngest, was brought in, the LORD told Samuel, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one” (1 Samuel 16:12).

Though we are not anointing royalty, we are included in the process of selecting those who will govern us. How will we make such an important decision?

I wonder, will we let the Lord tell us who to vote for? Or will we tell the Lord what party, platform, strategy, ethnicity, gender or issues will carry out the Lord's will best?

If the Lord's going to do the telling, then we need to do some praying.

And when we pray about which candidates to choose, we should not approach the ballot like some people approach the Bible: "Lord, I'm going to close my eyes and open this Bible in my hand and point to a verse, and I believe you're going to speak to me through that verse."

No, we have the responsibility of being fully involved in that selection. We must be responsible to keep up with who is running for which seat and to study each person far in advance of the vote. As we study each candidate, we must pray over each one, asking God to make clear to us which person will carry out God's will best.

Choosing a candidate according to God's guidance means we have to be willing to trust God, even when God's candidate is "on the other side," even when God's response to our prayers violates human criteria.

I can hear it already: "If that's the case, we'd rather have Eliab for king." I know. I've been there, and I don't want to be there anymore. I'd rather learn from Samuel.

If Samuel was smart enough to heed God's gentle correction, I am hopeful we can be smart enough, too.

No single human criterion is sufficient to qualify a candidate, but one biblical criterion is: God's guidance.

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