

A Religious Test for President?¹

Presidential elections are a challenge. Invariably they force us to consider what qualities and values we deem important to be worthy of our support. Because it's rare for a Presidential candidate to have all the desired qualifications, we're forced to rely on a core set of standards to judge each candidate in making our decision. Before even thinking about electability, I try to assess four areas: the person's spiritual condition, their core principles, their character, and finally their experience.

In past elections, conservative candidates could turn out a significant portion of the evangelical vote. In response, liberals looked for candidates that were secularists, or claim some form of weak or Christ-less Christianity in order to ensure a Biblical worldview would not influence policy decisions. This election cycle, the unspoken litmus test of religion has become even more central to the debate. For example, Democrat candidates have increased their use of "religious" terminology to woo people of faith. If insincere (no matter what party affiliation), it'll be seen for what it is – hypocrisy. On the Republican side, one leading candidate is a Mormon while another is an ordained Baptist preacher. In this election environment, Biblical orthodoxy can definitely become a big issue. It gets even worse when founding principles and the Constitution are invoked. For the record, the relevant Constitutional text is found in Article VI: *"...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."* Our founding fathers were wise in restricting the government's role for several reasons. If a religious test of some kind were implemented, by necessity it would have to differentiate between competing Christian doctrines and practices (i.e. denominations). Secondly, it would be tantamount to declaring our nation a theocracy – which it isn't. Third, unregenerate (or non-Christian religion) candidates could lie about their beliefs, making a mockery of the entire test. And finally, if we can't easily judge the spiritual condition of someone's heart – why would we ever think government could?

Government is restricted, but what about the individual voter? Should we employ a faith test of some kind? If we do, is that discrimination, bigotry, or intolerance? I realize we're voting for a President and not a pastor – but I prefer to say we're electing a national (world) leader that represents the essence of what our country is built upon – Biblical truths. Whoever occupies this office represents our historically Christianized nation to the world and sets a personal example for everyone. If the President is a sexual predator it shames us all, if he's reckless with military force we're feared by our allies, if he claims a Christian faith contrary to true Biblical faith his personal example gives credibility to error that could have eternal consequences in people's lives.

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The fact that there's a spiritual and secular realm with eternal and temporal effects shouldn't trouble anyone except those wanting to remove all "faith" from public service. Ignoring this duality may be ignoring what's most significant to God. I believe we have the right and obligation to consider a person's faith in our voting decision. From the wellspring of a person's beliefs flow their core principles and resulting actions. If a person claims to be a Biblical Christian, but denies the true nature of Jesus Christ, or the ultimate nature of man, or the exclusivity of Biblical authority, what kind of faith do they have? The more a person aligns themselves with extremely liberal or unorthodox forms of Christianity – the farther they are from the truth that should be the light in their lives. Other, non-Christian religions are even more removed though they may embrace the same moral imperatives we cherish and work together to implement. Can a Biblical Christian make policy mistakes, of course they can. But I have more hope for them to be corrected by Biblical truth than those with a false view of the Christian truth.

I encourage everyone to earnestly study the different Christian beliefs of the candidates – be they Democrat or Republican. This is the bedrock that should affect and inform everything else. With that understanding, consider the candidate's core guiding principles and character when approaching the upcoming Presidential Primary in February. This Primary is an opportunity to vote for those that most closely represent our values and concerns, be they moral, social, defense, or fiscal. Though electability issues are critical for the fall General election, it's important for us to clearly inform whoever receives the final party nomination what our priorities are. The Presidency is a unique office in the world. Though not a spiritual post, it has strong spiritual implications for us all. To ignore this would be irresponsible.

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