

# Religion and Politics

## QUESTIONS ON ABORTION AND SANCTITY OF LIFE ISSUES

- ***How can Christians, with the beliefs we have, vote for a candidate who stands for abortion and other things that go against our faith?***
- ***How can Democrats/Republicans be Christian if they support abortion? Should Christian voters be held captive by the abortion issue?***
- ***If I see a lot of good in a candidate, with the exception of his or her position on abortion, is it wrong to vote for that candidate?***
- ***How can we as Christians vote for a candidate who has moral standings that are not compatible with our faith but may be overall better for the country? Can God not work through leaders who are not squarely in line with divine will?***
- ***Is abortion the central and deciding factor for a Christian's vote?***
- ***How do Christians weigh what should be the most important issues determining their vote--sanctity of life, care for the poor, world peace, clean water, aid for third world nations? How do we prioritize important issues?***
- ***How can you be opposed to abortion and for the death penalty?***
- ***Aren't the living as important as the unborn? Why do we let people die for lack of health care? Why should it not be the determining issue?***

The sanctity of human life is at the core of many political issues. Abortion is the most emotional of these issues but not the only issue concerned with the sanctity of life. War, capital punishment, health care, safe food, clean water, AIDS relief, genocide, ethnic cleansing, euthanasia--all are issues revolving around the sanctity of a human life and how that life is to be protected, nourished, and ended. Erase the basic worth and dignity of the human and everything is up for grabs. This is why our Catholic friends have drawn a moral line at abortion. Once you cross this line, it is easier to cross all the others.

Our own Christian story suggests that God comes to the rescue of those who cannot defend themselves. He hears our cries. I understand that a child may be born into a horrible situation and consigned to a life of hardship. I still prefer to give that child the chance to live. A candidate who believes this finds ease within my understanding of faith. At the same time, there are believing Christians who see this differently and believe that the most loving thing is to terminate the pregnancy for the sake of the mother and her well-being.

Add to this the reality that a presidential election affects the nomination of Supreme Court Justices, who ultimately determine the outcome of the Roe vs. Wade debate, and you have a powerful case for making abortion a key determinant in your

vote. However, we have had a long succession of pro-life presidents and it has not changed the practice of abortion in our country. Neither has any president found significant middle ground between the competing camps to reduce abortions. I would welcome a president who at least made a concerted effort to rally people toward a national commitment to adopt every unwanted child and to care for the mother of that child during her pregnancy. I would also support a wide window for adoption in the case of rape and incest.

Regarding the death penalty, I struggle with this issue. For me it comes down to the fact that I could not personally flip the switch or inject the needle. What I could not ethically do, I cannot wish upon another. However, I have close friends who disagree with me. I respect their viewpoint. I even find it odd that Republicans tend to be antiabortion, pro-capital punishment, and pro-gun. I own a gun and grew up hunting, but I've never believed people need semiautomatic weapons more powerful than the police for the sake of sport. Back to the death penalty, I prefer lifetime sentences in prisons of the Charles Colson model where inmates do productive work, make reparations to victims, and are mentored toward a different future.

Denial of access to health care may also be an important sanctity of life issue. Some would argue that health care is accessible to everyone, just not the Cadillac version. But is it? And lest we become narrow in our thinking, what about the third world countries where minimal treatment or medicine would save a life or spare one from a life of disease. How responsible are we for them? Is our vote just about what the government does for us? As Christians, we are called to care for the nameless neighbor in the ditch.

#### QUESTIONS ON WAR

- ***How does the call to turn the other cheek play into politics?***
- ***How do you justify war in the name of God?***
- ***If Obama is more for peace and McCain is more for life, which is the higher value?***
- ***Is there a difference between short-term peace in Iraq and long-term peace in the world? Can we get to one without the other?***
- ***Is Christianity pacifism? When should we pursue justice by means of war?***
- ***When both candidates are willing to go to war, how does a pacifist Christian vote? Or not vote?***
- ***What is biblically more correct in most circumstances--peace or war for a just cause?***

I'd like to be a pacifist. But I can't. I believe in the responsible use of power on behalf of the powerless. I believe there is such a thing as a just war. The problem with

this is that when you have the world's most powerful military force, the temptation is to resolve everything by force.

Having gone into Iraq, right or wrong, we now have the responsibility to give that people their best chance at a just society. We cannot do this for them, but we can seek to establish democratic rule. I also believe we have the right to ask Iraq to pay for half the cost of our help from their oil-rich reserves, while directing the other half to the rebuilding of the infrastructure of their country. This is a simple way for the Iraqi people to participate in the cost of their freedom. When other nations complain that we were in it for the oil all along, we invite them to join us in the rebuilding effort with half of their cost reimbursed by Iraqi oil.

Regarding the buildup to the war in Iraq, our response to 9-11 could have been better. Instead of asking all Americans to go on a shopping spree and jump-start our economy, I'd like to have seen a presidential challenge that said (1) we will bring those who did this to justice and (2) we will respond to the Muslim world with a wave of Peace Corps volunteers who will show the world we are peace-loving people who care for our global neighbors. This war can be won in the hearts and minds of good Muslims. We need to give them every chance to believe in a world of peace versus the world of Islamic terrorism.

I wish we would listen more carefully to Jimmy Carter.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE ECONOMY

- ***Do we, as Americans, vote more for our personal finances or for the economic well-being of the world?***
- ***How high on the list of priorities is the economy? They say it is the most important issue in an election. "It's the economy stupid." What does this reveal about our nation?***
- ***What is the difference in how the church and state view the importance of the economy?***
- ***Americans have the highest standard of living. How should we spend that money in a way that pleases God without upsetting the economic system?***
- ***Which is better? Giving the church power to help and serve the poor or giving government the power to do so? Who should we trust?***

Assuming you have a nation characterized by Judeo-Christian values, it is probably best to leave as much money as possible in the hands of the people, expecting them to care for the needy through charities and churches and synagogues. But we are a greedy nation. And I do not trust the government to empower the poor because the government cannot look them in the face and know their names and their stories. The government may be complicit in a lifestyle of irresponsibility. This is an old argument.

But if you think my indictment of the government is strong, hear this. The church in America has failed to care for the poor. If we did what God calls us to do for the

neighbor, the government would not have to deal with this. I admired the first President Bush for his “thousand points of light” effort. He was right. If God-fearing people everywhere did their part, poverty would be a fraction of what it is today. Biblical models of gleaning, offerings for the widow and orphan, welcome to the alien and stranger, debt relief in the year of Jubilee, and a third-year tithe for the poor are ancient practices that would have present-day consequences for the good.

But since the church doesn't, the government becomes a second-best effort at caring for the needy among us, and I support as practical and close-to-the-ground effort as government can manage.

I believe taxes should be graduated. Those who make more should pay more. And while we are at it, pay school teachers what we pay icons, stars, and sports idols--and give the stars teacher salaries. Then see who plays the sport for the love of the game or performs for the love of the art. Forgive me, I'm just venting now.

#### QUESTIONS ON POLITICAL CANDIDATES AND MORAL CHARACTER

- ***How important is it for a candidate to uphold moral values?***
- ***What role should personal character play?***
- ***What is most important to look for in a leader?***
- ***Do you believe a candidate's personal integrity should be considered when deciding who to vote for? Does ones private life matter in public service?***
- ***Which is more important--the candidate's policies and agenda or the candidate's character and temperament?***

Yes, moral character matters. But so does intelligence and experience. In the same way I would prefer a highly skilled, unethical heart surgeon over a wonderful Christian veterinarian who felt led of God to do my bypass surgery, I would prefer a wise, skilled person of governance over one who was an inexperienced novice without credentials to do the work. In the Old Testament, God was not limited to work through believers. Cyrus the Persian, Nebuchadnezzar, and several other kings became tools in the hand of God for good. An immoral person can do good without being good. But given the choice between near equals, I'll always prefer the person of character in government over the immoral candidate.

#### SAD QUESTIONS

Remembering the race of 2008 and the slanderous reports concerning then-candidate Obama, the following questions reflect the depth of cultural penetration of paranoia and prejudice. In his defense, John McCain also protested such suggestions about his opponent. I share these as a picture of what can be done to a person in politics.

- ***How can we support someone who so many believe is the Antichrist?***
- ***What do you think about Obama's so-called Muslim beliefs? It worries me as a Christian to hear this from him.***
- ***Is Obama the Antichrist?***
- ***Obama is from the East, he is charming, and by a minister in Illinois deemed the Messiah for our nation. These are characteristics laid out in the book of Revelation for the Antichrist. Is there any truth to this?***
- ***Why do so many people act like you can't be a Christian and vote for Obama?***
- ***Why do people at church judge me when I say I will vote for Obama?***
- ***Is it racist to not want a black president?***

-No, Obama is not the Antichrist. See my book *Answers for Chicken Little* for a thorough discussion on Antichrist.

-No, Obama is not a Muslim. He recites the same Christian creed I do and attends a Protestant church and reads the Bible and prays and professes a walk with God.

-Yes, you can be a Christian and vote for Obama.

-Yes, it is racist to oppose him for president based solely on the color of his skin.

-Christians voted for both candidates and I'm guessing no one's name was deleted from the Lamb's Book of Life based on his or her vote.

## OTHER QUESTIONS

### ***1. If you were forming a political party, what would your party platform be?***

Defend the sanctity of life. Use military power to protect the weak, defend the country, and secure justice. Invest more money in the Peace Corps and less in the military. Ban assault weapons, allow businesses to create sport shooting, and get guns off the streets. Put Chuck Colson and his friends in charge of the U.S. prison system. Mandate a minimum gas mileage on new cars to move us toward energy efficiency. Create a new health care system by rewarding businesses who demonstrate concern for the uninsured. Bring tort reform to health care and eliminate massive lawsuits. Get the best private sector minds together to plot a path out of debt. Spend less--much, much less. Cap the unreasonably high settlements that have made us a culture of get-rich-quick lawsuits. Graduate taxes--the more you earn, the higher percentage you pay.

Remove the ability of the rich to avoid paying taxes. Reduce the size of government. Tax environmentally unfriendly businesses, and reward those that enrich and preserve natural resources. Eliminate earmarks in the federal budget, and forbid legislators voting on any legislation that benefits their narrow constituency.

**2. *Do you think all good Christians are Republicans?***

Not a chance. The day a political party owns the church is the day the church is no longer prophetic. We surrender our identity as a people whose “kingdom is not of this world” when we crawl in bed with a political party. We can individually belong to a political party, but it is not our primary identity or source of wisdom and light.

**3. *Can a Christian be a liberal?***

That depends on what you mean by *liberal*. If you mean large spirited, generous, concerned with social justice, caring for creation, educating children in the inner city, taxing the wealthy to help the needy, looking after the rights of minorities, and seeking the peace of the nations--I see no problem. It's actually hard to be a Christian and be opposed to these things. But if you mean lax morality, profligate spending without discipline, court systems that favor the irresponsible over the working class, backroom deals that leave money in the pockets of the power brokers, giving in to crime, rewarding laziness--then it might be hard to follow Jesus and wrap your arms around that.