

Choosing the Right Republican Presidential Candidate

These days, because I'm an Evangelical minister, a missionary to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and chairman of the Committee on Church and Society for the Evangelical Church Alliance, the question I'm asked most is, "How do evangelicals pick the right candidate this time around?"

The implication is whether evangelicals are bound to pick only an evangelical candidate, even if that person can't win in the general election. My answer is simple: We should pick our candidates for president in the same way we pick our doctors—on their skills, experience, reputation and approach to our problems. When it comes to the lineup in Iowa, evangelicals should ask particular questions about the person seeking their vote:

- Does this person have the skills to address the problems our country is currently facing and will face when my children and grandchildren are my age?
- Does this person have a proven track record in solving these problems—and in what ways will this person solve them? Because our most urgent problems are economic, we must ask if this person has the extensive private sector experience necessary, as well as the meaningful executive level public sector experience, to get the job done.
- What is this person's professional reputation? More importantly, what is this person's personal reputation? Is this person known as a good, morally upright individual who has demonstrated—over a credible time—a commitment to the highest values of conduct and fidelity? As we've already seen, under the bright lights of day-in, day-out, 24-hour media scrutiny, personal issues can become an insurmountable

obstacle to victory.

- What kind of leader is this person? Is this person open to change for the better? Can this person effectively lead others toward better solutions? A willingness to change is good when it's change for the best. All of us hope and pray our elected officials will seek wisdom for a better direction in which to lead our country, for, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." (Prov. 11:14)

When it comes to picking a president, evangelical doctrine is not a litmus test of whether that person will serve well. George Bush (who was highly favored by evangelicals) was a United Methodist, and when in office he attended an Episcopal church; Bill Clinton (much disfavored by Evangelicals) was a Baptist. Ronald Reagan attended Hollywood Presbyterian Church (affiliated with the liberal Presbyterian Church USA), while Jimmy Carter, the first self-professed "born again" president, taught Sunday school in a Southern Baptist church.

History has not judged these presidents on their church affiliations, but on their record as leaders. This will be true for the next president.

It's not helpful to make a decision on a candidate's religious label, whether it's Newt Gingrich as a Roman Catholic (he left his Baptist roots in 2008), or Mitt Romney as a lifelong Mormon, the two leading contenders. The same applies to the other candidates.

Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matt. 7:16) This says nothing about the person's religious identity. Jesus made this clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan by holding up a Samaritan (considered an infidel by his fellow Jews) as the paragon of virtue over a priest and a Levite—two certified Jewish doctrinal authorities.

My prayer is that Christians in Iowa will make their choice for president based on the best overall—and one that is

electable. This may be the most important presidential race in our nation's history. The next president will leave a legacy far beyond four or eight years, because this president will likely choose Supreme Court justices who serve lifetime terms, deciding cases on the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family. In other words, the choices of this next president will affect the future of American civilization. The consequences are too grave to risk wasting a vote.

As Iowan Christians prayerfully vote in the caucuses, we should all pray that our choices will, in the end, be the best for our families, our communities, and our nation.

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