

## The Duty to Vote

By Pete Winn, [CitizenLink](#) associate editor

*Do Christians have a responsibility to vote? Why? [CitizenLink](#) spoke recently with Dr. David Barton, founder of [WallBuilders](#), an Aledo, Texas-based ministry dedicated to bringing America back to its first principles, and toward understanding our Christian heritage.*

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### **Q. Does a Christian have a duty to vote, more so than other citizens?**

A. A Christian has a duty to vote probably more than any other citizen because of the biblical principles that are out there relating to nations. The Scripture tells us, Proverbs 14:34, that "Righteousness exalts a nation." Well, righteousness comes from the national policies that are enacted, or, you could also say righteousness exalts a state or community and you determine righteousness on the basis of the public policies that are enacted — which means public leaders choose those public policies and enact them. That's when we go to Proverbs 29:2, which tells us "When the righteous rule, the people rejoice (and) when the wicked rule, the people groan."

In other words, ungodly, non-God-fearing people will not make righteous policies. You will not get, for example, God-fearing people to say it's OK to have abortion, it's OK to destroy the sanctity of marriage, it's OK to promote certain things in schools. ... So, what we find scripturally, is that God-fearing policies come from God-fearing people; and in America, the only way that God-fearing people can rule ... is to be elected. If, as people of faith, we want righteousness to be exalted, we have to elect leaders who will exalt righteousness, and that's the only way that God can bless the nation.

For those who have a perspective out of the Bible, it is more incumbent on them — as a duty — to be involved to choose leaders who will enact policies that God can bless in a community, state or nation; to choose leaders that will make decisions that God can honor. For those who have that biblical base, it's more incumbent on them to be involved, even than the average citizen who may vote solely on the basis of economics or prescription drugs or something else.

### **Q. And yet, we have so many Christians who don't utilize that scriptural basis for choosing from among candidates.**

A. We really have two problems within the Christian community on voting. One is not voting at all. We know that between 1992 and 1996, Christian voter turnout declined in America 17 percent. We know that between 1996 and 2000, it declined an additional 23 percent, so we've had a 40 percent drop in Christian voter turnout over the last four elections. That's why we are not able in this session through the Senate to pass a ban on partial-birth abortions, even though we finally have a president who will sign it and we have a House which has passed it. ... That is as much because of the attrition of Christians over the last four elections — we've lost several godly, God-fearing guys out of the Senate.... So, part of it is that we don't get Christians to the polls.

The other part is that, when Christians do go to the polls, they often don't analyze their vote on the basis of biblical perspective. For example, we know that for the last three elections, evangelicals who did vote — and, by the way, an "evangelical" in polling is defined as someone who goes to church once a week, they say the Bible is the basis of their life, they say they have a personal relationship with Christ — so, of those we call evangelicals, 45 percent said that economic issues are more important than moral issues, when it came to voting.

Even when Christians do vote, they often don't vote on the basis of what the Bible says is right and wrong. It's more on what their pocket says is right and wrong, and so that creates a problem of not being able to enact godly or righteous policy within a nation.

**Q. If I understand you correctly, there's never been a time when Christians needed more to turn out to the polls than now, but we're turning out in fewer and fewer numbers.**

A. We have had more opportunities to change the culture in the last two elections than we have had in the last 20 years. And yet, fewer evangelicals, fewer Christians, fewer people of faith are turning out at all — including Catholic voters, Protestant voters, across the board — people who embrace Judeo-Christian values, just are not turning out.

Part of that, quite frankly, is they do not know the issues that are out there. ... Most Evangelicals are not going to be drawn to the polls by the opportunity to do something to corporate America. That's just not going to draw them. But if you say, "Guys, here's ... issues that directly reflect your faith and your values, and would directly affect your society," they are going to vote for that. But they don't know that's out there, and so that has really been part of the reason why we've seen a declining turnout among people of faith, because they don't know the issues that face them from year to year.

**Q. Talk to us about the history of Christian involvement in elections. Has there always been an evangelical or Christian presence -- a Christian vote?**

A. There has always been a Christian vote. We would not have used the term "evangelical" in the early founding era. They were flat-out Christians.

You will find that a number of the Founding Fathers - who wrote the Constitution, who wrote the Declaration of Independence - specifically told us in no uncertain terms what Christians had to do, according to the Bible.

John Jay, our original chief justice, wrote in the Federalist Papers that "it is the duty of Christians to select and prefer Christians for their rulers." Noah Webster, who gave us Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution, quoted Exodus 18:21, that says — "God has told us to choose out from among ourselves leaders of 10s, 50s, hundreds and thousands" — which we call local (government) counties, states, (the federal government). He then quoted the second part of that verse, which says "... choose able men, such as fear God, men of truth hating covetousness."

So you'll find that throughout the early years of America, Founding Fathers like Benjamin Rush, Francis Hopkinson and William Paterson, and Dr. John Witherspoon - all signers of our first documents — quoted the Bible, showing how Christians should vote, and why they should vote. And you will find up to about the 1840s we had 100 percent Christian turnout in America, because we believed it was duty that we owed God, based on the Scriptures.

So, we have a long history of having had Christians involved, from a biblical basis, voting and choosing godly people for elections. It's really been more in the 1900s, and particularly in the last 30 years ... that we've seen a plummeting of involvement, and really, a giving away of their duty — and not just their right, to be involved in this process.

**Q. What's the legacy of the election of 2000? What should we have taken away, or learned from it?**

A. The legacy of 2000 involves several things. I don't think anyone will ever again (ask), "Does my vote count." We've seen that, for example, in New Mexico we had the entire state, at one point, divided by only four votes between the two presidential candidates. That's six electoral votes in the state of New Mexico decided by four people.

As Christians, however, we're going to have to get past the point where we ask, "Does my vote count?" and we're going to have to get to the point where we say, "What does God want me to do with my vote?"

And if that means voting even if I don't think a candidate can win, I have to answer to God for what I did with that vote. It's a trust, it's a talent, it's a stewardship that He gave me. If we get back to that perspective we don't have to recall the lessons of 2000. We vote because it's the right thing to do, because God will say, "I had a

candidate for you that would have been able to end partial-birth abortions, and you stayed home. Would you explain to me why you did that, when I gave you a vote?" When we get to that point, we can move beyond 2000.

In a presidential year, you are going to have between 53 and 57 percent of the people vote. In a non-presidential year like this one, you will have between 32 and 35 percent of people vote — which is 40 percent fewer people voting than in a presidential election. So, if a Christian votes this year, their vote actually has twice as much strength or impact than during a presidential year, because really, so few people vote. So, we can look back to 2000, and we can say votes do matter; it does matter who gets in office; both guys aren't always the same. You can't say both parties are the same. It really makes a difference which one is there. Hopefully, we can carry that forward and say, "Therefore, based on the lessons of 2000, I will vote this election. As a matter of fact, if I vote this election, my vote is even more important than in a presidential election."