

How Do I Decide Who I Vote For?

Three Key Tools to help with the Decision:

Policies – Character – Tactic



Policies

There are summaries of policies and downloads of full manifestos online. You will be motivated by different areas of policy than others you know. Education might be the most important thing to you, and defence not very big on your agenda. Or it might be the other way round. So compare what the parties say about the issues important to you, without neglecting other areas.

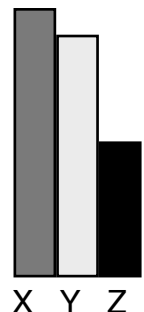
It is highly unlikely you will agree with everything a party says. You may well end up wanting things from one manifesto but wishing they had another party's policy on something else. You can get a quick feel for which parties agree with you using a web voting tool like <http://www.whoshouldyoutvotefor.com> (there are others available).

Character

Strictly speaking, in the UK we don't vote for a party but for a person. A number of local candidates will be standing in your constituency. I always like to check their character, particularly to see if they are a committed Christian. I like to choose someone who, even if I don't agree with them on some things, are likely to be making decisions prayerfully under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; people who I can trust to make wise choices. On occasions this has led me to vote for someone from a party that I had rejected on policy terms, because I felt I could trust them to be wise. You can get a full list of your local candidates from the BBC website (just type the name of your constituency in the search box at the top of the page). Christian Concern have produced an "email your candidates tool" at <http://www.election2015.org.uk/constituency/> (if you don't like any of their suggested questions you can delete them all at the last stage and write your own email).

Tactic

If you live in a constituency where party X is virtually guaranteed a win, but you support party Z you might consider voting for Y – which is the only one likely to defeat X, even though you don't want Y's policies any more than you want X's. You would do this to try to make sure X did not get the most seats in Parliament.



However, it is worth remembering that these days, as well as the number of seats gained, there is after the election a lot of analysis of the actual votes cast. So, if you really like Z's policies or the character of the candidate, you might prefer still to vote for Z because then the elected Government will be aware that *n* million voted for Z and therefore they cannot ignore that that viewpoint is quite strong "*We need to do things to win them over for next time.*"

But shouldn't we expect all God's people to have the same view about who to vote for?more on next side

What about Not Voting?

The 35% of the electorate who didn't vote last time were labelled as apathetic or 'not interested'. That doesn't describe you – you wouldn't be reading this if you were apathetic.

If you can't decide, it is far better to turn up and be counted as a voter and then spoil the ballot paper – effectively saying "I want something other than what is on offer".

Don't leave the paper blank. You could put a cross in all the boxes, or write 'none of these' on the paper or leave an encouraging message for the person doing the counting.

But turn up to post that paper in the box!

Christians and their votes

How can it be that two Christians who love and respect each other most of the time have such differing views about which party to support – even to the extent that they wonder about how the other person can be a Christian if they could possibly even consider voting for *that party*?

I think there are several things to remember:

- 1/ God is big, and there are many facets to His character. We each only see a small part
- 2/ Virtually all the UK political parties have roots stretching back into Christian activism or foundations
- 3/ We may be wrong!

1/ When you think of God, what are the main facets of His character in your mind? And how do you try to emulate these in your life? You will probably have used words like love, justice, truth in your first answer. But how those things work out will be different for each of us. That's why some Christians spend a lot of time focussed on helping the needy, whilst for others their heart is in bringing people to relationship with Jesus. Collectively, the Church does *both*. Individually, we are stretched too far when we try to take it all on. So when it comes to voting, the Church will be voting for all the issues it takes on board – and that will be done by different people pushing for different things with the crosses they place on the ballot papers.

2/ No political party is Christian, but they have roots back to founders who were aiming to address issues that Christians thought were important. *None of them* get it right biblically; 'God's Perfect Nation' was probably how He told Israel to order itself (before the human kings fouled it up). But that is a mix of 'socialism' (eg care for widows) and 'capitalism' (eg land inheritance) and a whole lot of other things. UK political parties each have their own streams, but none of them have the whole river. Where we are in the stream is reflected in our political thinking. The brother or sister at the other side of the river are not "wrong, Godless or stupid". They are in the same river.

Our vote in the General Election should not be based on 'Boat Race' allegiances, however. You can, if you like, always support Oxford in the Boat Race just because you always have for trivial reasons (I am Cambridge simply because my brother supported Oxford). But you shouldn't do that with political voting. You should think, pray and consider where to place your cross and also, perhaps, whether you should for a time even be a member of a party. But parties change – it is well reported that this year's Labour manifesto, for instance, is significantly different to their 2010 one. Many would say it is closer to Labour's historic roots, but that might mean some people (if they thought about it) would be more likely, and others less likely, to agree with it. Be ready to change from one stream to another!

3/ It is possible God does have a view in this election in which He would want one party to win, but that we are blinkered by upbringing, political dogma or other things so are not hearing that. So it is always good to approach decisions like this with humility and to be prepared to listen to those who are declaring different choices to the ones you make. Don't just argue with them "I can't believe a Christian would even consider voting for that party" – listen to their reasons. Reflect on them. If they can articulate why they are thinking as they do and give Biblical reasoning then maybe God has led them to that place.

I suspect that there may well be candidates God has called to stand for election, and that therefore He would want them voted in. In different constituencies, therefore, God might want people from different parties.

Whoever wins, locally or nationally, perhaps this time we should be better at praying for them through the parliament that follows.