**Truth Currents** **9-18-20**

Recently, on the campus of John Brown University, the school hosted a debate between commentator David French and author Eric Mataxas. The question of the debate was, “*Can a Christian Vote for Donald Trump?*”

As I read the reviews and the summary of the content of that debate after the fact, it dawned on me that in the course of this debate these two men were trying to answer the same question. One, **Yes**, a Christian can vote for Donald Trump. The other, **No**, a Christian cannot vote for Donald Trump. But what I realized in reading the text of the debate was that they were approaching the question from two completely different angles.

One of them was arguing on the basis of personality, individual. Is this particular individual worthy enough to receive my vote?

The opposing position was arguing from a completely different angle. He was arguing from the angle of platforms and policies. Does this candidate represent in his platform things that are consistent with my faith?

As I was reading it dawned on me that that’s exactly what’s happening in most conversations of presidential politics that take place between believers. Some of us are arguing on the basis of personalities and individuals while some of us are arguing on the basis of platforms and policies.

*Pastor, which presidential candidate should I vote for?* I’ve had dozens of conversations that either start of finish with that question. *What are we going to do? Who are we going to vote for? How do we decide?*

At first glance you’d think that would be a straight forward question with a fairly straight forward answer. But, as I’ve considered a response I’ve realized that the answer is not as simple as you expect. In fact, the dilemma of this particular presidential election cycle has created for many people what I would call a “***Crisis of Conscience***.” How do we decide between imperfect candidates holding imperfect positions in an imperfect world? How do we cast our vote for president?

In the current political climate, I’m dismayed when I hear a lot of Evangelical voters say, “*Well, I just don’t think I can vote at all. I think I’ll sit this one out.*”

Now I understand the frustration. I get that you feel that you sometimes don’t have any acceptable options. But my take on this is that salt is not useful if it’s sitting on the pantry shelf. Light doesn’t make an impact if it’s kept locked in a closet.

We have the privilege and the responsibility to be involved in the rough and tumble, the nitty gritty of governmental processes in a democratic republic where we have the ability the influence outcomes. And so, I think not participating is not an option for us. So, what do we do?

Well, I want to spend today and probably next week on Truth Currents helping you walk through the process of how to vote for president. Not who to vote for president but **how** to vote for president.

There’s some incredible insight that we find in one of the oldest books that we have access to, the book of Exodus. In the book of Exodus, we find the story of Israel recently emerging from four centuries of slavery in Egypt. They’ve had a supernatural release from slavery. They’ve had an Exodus event that involved crossing the Red Sea miraculously. This story is the signature act of God in the Old Testament. The leader was a man named Moses. But Moses was in the early days a solitary leader. As God begins to give Israel the laws and the regulations for the structure of a nation for civic duty and behavior, Moses receives some incredibly wise advice his father-in-law, a man named Jethro. That advice comes to us in **Exodus 18**. And this is what we’re told. (**17-18a**)

"What you're doing is not good," Moses' father-in-law said to him. “You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you.”

Moses couldn’t continue to lead a nation of two million people as the solitary leader of the group. Jethro said. (**18b-22**)

You can’t do it alone. Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating dishonest profit. Place *them* over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every major case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear *it* with you.

I want to talk about this structure that Jethro advises Moses to do. He says, I want you to be the representative who establishes for the people their understanding of the platform of God’s law, the basis upon which they’re supposed to operate. And then I want you to select capable men and put them in positions that are appropriate to their abilities.

Now, let’s just break these verses down real quickly and see what relevance it has to give to us about the process of deciding on presidential politics in 2020. First of all, Jethro said, “I want you to be the representative. Teach the people the basic way you’re going to operate.” In other words, you be responsible to communicate a platform for action among the people.

In our contemporary political model, political parties have platforms. A platform is a collection of crafted stances on a variety of serious topics of concern. And the platform defines the vision of the political party for the future. In other words, it describes the way in which a party desires to shape the nation. It paints a picture of what we might call the “*preferred future*.”

So, as an approach to voting, we need to begin with research of the political platforms of the different parties who offer presidential candidates. Now, there’s a caveat here. When you sit down to study platforms, you have to remember that you want an actual copy of the specific platform. If you only read reviews or summaries of other people, then you lock yourself into an evaluation of those platforms based on the perspective of the person that you’re reading through. What you need to do is find the material for yourself.

Now, in 2020 we have a little bit of an unusual situation. The Democratic platform, that you can find online, is 91 pages long. It’s a long document. It will take a while to work through it. But if you want to know how to vote for president, the process, then it’s necessary.

Now the Republicans don’t have a platform this year. That’s not hugely unusual in a year with an incumbent president. The Republicans have basically argued that the platform as outlined in 2016 is still the agenda for this sitting president. And that is what will continue in a second term.

So, you can take the 2016 Republican platform and take the 2020 Democratic platform. Read them both. Mark in both of those platforms. Highlight the things that you can approve or support. Then mark those things that you don’t approve or don’t support. Contrast both documents and see where you stand as far as your position matching that of the parties. Focus on foundational issues. Don’t get lost in the weeds of lesser important items.

Let me give you an example. If you’re a politician comfortable with killing a million babies a year, then frankly I don’t care what your position on trade with China is. I don’t much care on what your economic policies are or really much anything else that you think. There are for me some basic issues that are foundational to what I believe is critical for any nation to survive with the blessing of God. And so, I have certain basic questions. And if in your platform you don’t get the question of **life** right, there’s not much else left that matters to me.

If you would weigh your non-negotiable issues and measure them against the platforms of the primary parties offering presidential candidates, then your struggle with finding a candidate will begin with seeing how their vision of America lines up with your vision of America.

In this story, Jethro continues by saying this. You establish a platform. You let the people understand the statutes and the laws that are necessary for God to bless a nation. But then he says. You should select from all the people able men. Now the word “*select*” that is used in the original Hebrew, is not a word that just means casually make a choice. It’s a word used several places in scripture. It’s used in the book of Judges to describe the heroic men. It’s used of King David later as they describe his mighty men of valor.

With the study of the platform you need to begin the process of a prayerful discernment of those that are available as options for you to choose. When Jethro says, “*you should select from all the people*,” that word select doesn’t mean a casual choice. It means a careful discerning prayerful analysis of the options. Moses was to seek God’s guidance to know who he should choose to be in positions of leadership.

I call this “***voting by prayer***.” Now listen, I suspect that that doesn’t happen much in our generation, even among evangelicals. I think prayer for discernment is time consuming. I think that people don’t take the process of voting seriously enough to take it before God. But because voting is so serious, spending time in prayer before voting gains both direction and permission from God to vote in a particular way.

Believers are to select, to discern candidates after prayerfully accessing the options. That discernment is partly based on past performance. That is, Jethro says you are to select able men. The Hebrew word actually means capable men. It has to do with their track record, the opportunities that they’ve already had to lead in some capacity that shows that they have the ability to function in the role that they are seeking. In other words, it’s a word that directs us to find people, who by a recognizable track record of accomplishment, have proven that they are qualified to do the job. What have they done and are they capable of what they are asking me to allow them to do?

The bottom line is, not every politician is qualified or capable of being President of the United States.

We’ve become very cynical about election process. And honestly, a nation cannot long survive if they have no confidence in the consistency of leadership that we send to Washington.

There’s more to this and I want to share it with you. That’s why I’ve started early enough that we can have a run up to the election. I want to continue to talk to you about **how** you vote for President. But begin by saying, “*What’s the platform of each party offering a presidential candidate? How does that platform measure with my understanding of what God expects of a nation*.”

And secondly, “*What are the past performances and the civic virtues of the candidates that are before me? How can I take this before God in sufficient prayer time so that I can have a clear conscience as I go into the voting booth on November 3rd?*”

We’ll talk some more about this next week.

This is Truth Currents.