

Christian Ethics and Voting: Can A Christian Vote For A Non-Perfect Candidate or Proposition?

•Written by •

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Regarding Christian ethics, the Scriptures are clear that there are immutable moral principles, grounded in our eternal, immutable God, that govern all humanity, not only those who believe in Christ. This view is designated as Moral Objectivism or Moral Absolutism. So how should we use these principles for making moral decisions, especially on voting day with respect to imperfect candidates and issues? Can a Christian vote for a pro-abortion candidate? A pro-homosexual marriage candidate? The answer depends on which ethical theory is assumed.

Theories on Moral Absolutes come in three varieties: Unqualified Absolutism, Conflicting Absolutism, and Hierarchical Absolutism. Bible believing followers of Christ hold all three positions and all three camps are firm believers in moral absolutes. Some moral decisions are easy, such as, do not murder. The difficult questions come when one is faced with a true dilemma, such as the issue of whether it is permissible to lie to save a life. Here, you may research the story of Rahab the Harlot and her place in Hebrews 11. Or you may consider standard historical examples of people lying about whether they were hiding Jews from the Nazis.

So would you lie to save someone's life? The Unqualified Absolutist says, "no" because lying is always wrong and inexcusable. The Conflicting Absolutist and Hierarchical Absolutist would likely say "yes" with particular reasons given. Why? The Unqualified Absolutist does not weigh or balance absolutes. The reasoning: If it is wrong, it is wrong. And we are not permitted to sin or do what is wrong.

For brevity, I will give only the Hierarchical Absolutist reasoning by comparison. A Hierarchical Absolutist agrees there are objective or absolute moral truths, but the Hierarchical Absolutist views these truths in a hierarchy. Moral laws are all true and absolute, but some are more important or "weightier" than others. Jesus taught that there are "weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23). As such, when there are two competing moral absolutes, the Hierarchical Absolutist views the individual as exempt from the consequences of failing to follow the lower law in order to follow the weightier law. As such, the person who lies to save a life is not endorsing lying, he simply views himself as being exempt from the consequences of lying in this particular instance in order to follow the greater and weightier principle of saving an innocent human person.

Now most of you will never face these types of ultimate dilemmas, but some will. Most people face less weighty ethical conflicts every day. I can assure you it is better to think about ethical

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reasoning before the personal crisis hits home. For example, in bioethics, how do you decide when to pull the plug on a dying person in a hospital? How does one distinguish between the normal means of care and extraordinary care? Or how does a military commander make a decision about the near certain death of some of his troops to save other lives? These are hard, principled decisions that require weighing many ethical absolutes and coming to a decision.

So how do these principles apply to voting? If you are an Unqualified Absolutist, you have told yourself that you will never vote for a pro-abortion or pro-homosexual marriage candidate because you view this as a sin and an endorsement of evil. If you are a Hierarchical Absolutist, you may decide to vote for a pro-abortion, pro-homosexual marriage, or sinfully “flawed” candidate because you have decided that there is a greater moral principle involved in the decision and you would be reducing the evil and increasing the good in society because you voted for the “least worst option.”

For the record, I am a Hierarchical Absolutist, but I recognize that good Christians disagree on this issue.

Now get informed, vote biblically, and don’t violate your conscience when voting.

Soli Deo Gloria!