

Expedience vs Principle

The other day I was listening to a guy teaching about leadership; specifically, leadership in church settings.

He was asked, “Which is more important in church leadership ... Giftedness or Godliness?”

Thankfully, the fellow answered in Godly fashion with “Godliness”.

Now, let us for a moment assume that as a principle, and bring it into the world of American legislative politics.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to meet and speak with a GOP candidate, who was running for a representative seat in the U.S. Congress. He began to wax eloquent on the importance of the two-party system and its ability to field and endorse candidates who won't go into the election “fray” inexperienced in the machinery of government: the mechanics of the system. It was quite important to him that any candidate should be schooled/educated/experienced as such.

Trying not to alienate the fellow and bring the conversation to an end (I *can* shut down a room, you know!), I began to bring up such quaint notions as perhaps finding the best qualified person, or persons of character regardless of experience with the machinery of Congress.

Admittedly, what was in my mind was Jimmy Stewart as Mr. Smith ... going to Washington, bright-eyed, idealistic and unspoiled by the machine! I was told by this “endorsed” candidate that such an ideal was no way to win elections, but was sure to hand a victory to the opposing party.

That quaint notion of the best candidate, a person of excellent character was, at best, secondary to him. Understanding the machinery and achieving victory within the confines of that machinery were uppermost in his mind and I was to consider myself foolish to suggest otherwise.

I brought up George Washington's quote, the one from his farewell address about the dangers of the political party system, perhaps especially the two-party system.¹ My ideas were pooh-poohed as naive, ultimately leading to defeat in political races. And this was spoken to me by the endorsed, *Republican* candidate in CT! Yeah ... let's stick to doing what *they're* doing because they've had so much success, right?!

Why do I tell you all of this? Because the idea of Character First is fast becoming the *last* focus of political business. Whether or not the candidate is a principled individual is secondary at best. Such priorities exemplify unprincipled behavior – should we be surprised? Shame on us, not on the unprincipled candidate/office holder.

1 “However [political parties] may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people...” George Washington from his farewell address, September 17th, 1796

We ought to know better, but somehow victory *feels* much better than principle, and so we look for those we assume can win, principles being secondary, if considered at all.

We assume that people will be more likely to follow the winner, rather than the person who has stood on principles. That erroneous assumption is just that: erroneous.

At a recent Connecticut Republican event – which I attended as much out of curiosity as anything else – I was met by a couple of carpet baggers from New York. Both were there to “teach” Connecticut Republicans how to win elections. One of the fellows announced that he actually wanted to run for mayor in our city. An officer of the Republican Town Committee told him that if he wanted their support he should at least be registered as a Republican ... which he was not. An interesting conversation followed. This fellow as much as said that his choice of party would be one of expedience; he would choose whichever party would support him, embrace the “winning strategies” and tactics in which he was schooled and experienced, which he would bring to the mayoral election table, and by which he would win.

Yes, you read that right. Winning, regardless of party, principle, platform, etc., was all that mattered. And we were invited to jump on board and say *thank you*.

In a radio interview earlier this year, before the primaries were held, I actually heard one of the GOP candidates say that Republican Nutmeggers who find themselves leaning conservative, should support, endorse and get behind “*the most conservative candidate that can win.*”

What might that look like in reality? If conservative principle exists on a scale of 1-10, and the person with the 9.5 has less chance of winning (for whatever reason: gender, money, looks, personality) than the charming, wealthy, good looking, well-endowed person with a 2.6, then we should endorse the 2.6.

What brings conservatism to the dance is principles. To abandon them for the purpose of winning is to abandon them. To abandon them for the purpose of winning is to abandon them. Just once more ...

To abandon them for the purpose of winning is to abandon them.

And then we're somehow surprised at unprincipled behavior in our ranks. Shame on us.

Pastor