

**“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”**

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

## CRITERIA FOR VOTERS

**F**ranklin Roosevelt was accurate when he said that the real safeguard of democracy is education. He may have had in mind the education that results in voters’ ability to read, write, do math, and think critically. More than that, knowing U.S. history, citizens’ rights and duties, the U.S. Constitution, etc. goes a long way in creating educated voters. Additionally, those who vote in a democracy should be educated about candidates and issues so they can vote based on knowledge, not on indoctrination, manipulation, assumptions, or emotion.

But education doesn’t guarantee wisdom—think of someone with book knowledge or academic degrees but little common sense. And wisdom doesn’t guarantee action—consider Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived but who acted foolishly when it came to making alliances through marriage.

Of all the people in America who vote, we Christians ought to be among the most educated, and we definitely should be the wisest! After all, Wisdom tells us, “Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not” (Proverbs 8:33).

The book of Proverbs is wisdom literature. Surely it has a few principles that could guide us as we choose the candidates we will vote for.

## GUIDELINES FOR VOTING

1. *Gain knowledge.* “The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge” (18:15). Be educated about people, issues, implications and ramifications, history, and so forth.

**It is wise to be an educated voter.**

2. *Choose a person with a teachable spirit.* “The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating [‘chattering’] fool shall fall” (10:8). Solomon, who wrote Proverbs, also wrote Ecclesiastes, where he noted, “Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished” (Ecclesiastes 4:13).

**It is wise to vote for someone who is still willing to learn and to be admonished when he or she is wrong.**

3. *Choose a person with integrity.* “He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known” (Proverbs 10:9). Walking uprightly, or having integrity, means being faithful to a code of moral values; it is moral soundness; it is being undivided in loyalty and behavior.

**If you’re considering candidates who stand for the same or very similar positions, it is wise to consider each one’s integrity when you choose among them.**

4. *Choose a person whose words uplift rather than tear down.* “The

mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked” (10:11).

**It is wise to choose someone whose words refresh others.**

5. *Choose a candidate who doesn't mock his or her fellow humans.* “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished” (17:5). Does your candidate mock the poor—whether that’s people raised in poverty or the “poor” who were born with or sustained bodily injury or have mental disabilities? God created each one; to mock them is to insult God.

**It is wise to choose a candidate who respects all life because all life comes from God.**

6. *Choose a candidate who is open to advice.* “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. A fool’s wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame” (12:15, 16). A great leader remains logical, reasonable, and calm when his or her views are challenged, looks objectively at facts, and heeds wise and godly counsel.

**It is wise to choose a candidate who considers facts objectively.**

7. *Choose a candidate who fears the Lord.* “He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him” (14:2). Both Proverbs 4:24 and 8:8 use the word *froward* with the word *perverse*. *Froward* means “habitually disposed to disobedience and opposi-

tion,” while *perverse* means “corrupt.” Several other Bible translations add “deviousness” to the connotation of *perverse*. Proverbs is warning us against those who don’t fear God, or who despise Him, because they are characterized by disobedience and opposition to righteousness and because they are corrupt and deceitful.

**It is wise to choose a candidate who comes closest to fearing the Lord.**

8. *Choose a humble candidate.* “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them” (14:3). The first part of this verse has a few interpretations, but the gist of them is that a fool’s pride has roots in his heart that grow up to his mouth and shoot out (like a rod, or stick, growing on a tree). He may be disciplined for his pride and words (with the rod of discipline), or his proud words are a rod to injure others. In any case, the person is not humble, as evidenced by his words—which hurt others or cause others to disrespect and distrust this fool.

**It is wise to choose a candidate who doesn't speak out of pride.**

9. *Choose a candidate who seeks peace.* “He loveth transgression that loveth strife” (17:19). The context of this verse includes unwise financial obligations (v. 18) and perverse motives, bad morals, and deceptive words (v. 20)—all of which contribute to strife or quarreling (v. 19). If a candidate loves to quarrel and stir up strife, that person loves transgression, or sin.

**It is wise to choose a peacemaker instead of a “strife maker.”**

10. *Choose a candidate who doesn't listen to liars.* “If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked” (29:12). “If a ruler takes the advice of liars, then he encourages wickedness in the people around him. But if he instead rewards honesty then it will be encouraged and falsehood will be punished” (Sid S. Buzzell, “Proverbs,” *Old Testament, The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

**It is wise to choose a man or woman who chooses wise and truthful advisors.**

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I close with this command from Proverbs 14:7: “Go from the presence of a foolish man [or woman, and certainly don't vote for him or her!], when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.” ■

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*The following quotations give insight into democracy. Quoting them doesn't mean I condone the speaker's behavior, politics, worldview, or religion.*

“Bad officials are elected by good citizens who don't vote.”

—George Jean Nathan

“We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.” —Thomas Jefferson

“Always vote for principle, though you may vote alone.”

—John Quincy Adams

“Elections belong to the people. It's their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters.” —Abraham Lincoln

“Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he could do only a little.” —Edmund Burke

“Crime is contagious. If the government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for law; it invites every man to become a law unto himself; it invites anarchy.” —Louis Brandeis

