

America's War With Principles

Are Americans a principled people? If not, why not? And do we Christians now live by principle or pragmatism?

Fifty years ago our leaders, both in and out of the church, decided to replace principles with pragmatism ... whatever we think will work. Our schools began "values classification" which, in reality, was intended to replace enduring biblical principles with man's new purported "values." And now "We the People" and our children languish for lack of either genuine, virtuous values or anchoring principles for living and liberty.

Principles Are for Living

As a former lawyer for 2 decades and a pastor for almost 40 years, I have had both the pain and the pleasure of working in the lives of thousands of individuals and families. I have seen my clients or parishioners sometimes in their joys but usually in their sorrows. If there has been any common thread in their lives, it has been this – that a life or a family without vision is usually a life or a family without principles – and without principles, there is confusion, pain, heartache and destruction. This point is true for professing Christians and non-Christians alike. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "If principle is good for anything, it is worth living up to."

What Are Principles?

So, what are principles? How would I recognize a principle if I saw one? What are they for? How do they develop? What are the consequences of straying from principle? How can I become an example of principle in action? Our answers to these questions will guide us to restoring the American vision and our souls.

Principles Are Signposts

Can you imagine traveling for any considerable distance down a highway without having a signpost to give some assurance that you are headed in the right direction? Principles are life's signposts. They point the way, give direction, promote order, prevent confusion and provide a sense of purpose. Where the signposts of principle are absent or ignored, great frustration results.

How Can I Know a Principle When I See One?

A principle, like a road sign, normally will head you in a particular direction or give a specific life instruction. Principles can give general direction or precise direction. They can also be "good" or "bad." Occasionally, I have come across a road sign that gives incorrect or imprecise direction. You might have experienced the frustration of such "bad" road signs in your travels. They can lead to time-wasting detours and even prevent us from reaching our destination.

A "good" principle normally can be determined by how closely it matches the following standards:

- Is it true in almost every situation?
- Has it stood the test of time?
- Is it something that I would want my neighbor to practice?
- Is it consistent with the plan of our Founding Fathers?
- Is it consistent in all respects with the plan of the Creator of all men, as found in the Bible?

Failure of any questioned principle to meet these tests, especially the last one, should cause me to discard it for my life and that of my nation.

How Have We Strayed From Principle?

Unfortunately, many of us have mistaken pragmatism for principle. We have discarded the time-honored tests for principle upon which was established the greatest nation in history and in their place, we have substituted the tests of pragmatism: Is it expedient? Does it work for me? Does it work for me today? Which way is the “wind blowing” in my community, my school, my work, my church, my culture? What do the polls say?

But in following the wind, we have reaped the whirlwind as a nation. We have ignored the principles of the ages in favor of the expedients of the hour.

America Is In Crisis

We have sown the seeds of expediency individually, as families, as businesses, as churches, as communities and as a nation. Consequences inevitably followed our drift from principle to pragmatism during the last sixty years.

We are not getting better; education has not helped. We have no signposts or road signs, and we have lost direction. America is paying the “tuition” for an “education” in the consequences of defying principle and moral law. Perhaps you and your family are as well. Theories change but genuine principles and moral laws do not. “They are written on the tables of eternity.”

The Source of Moral Principle

The oldest dictionary in America was written by the true father of American education, Noah Webster. His words continue to speak to us today:

“The moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice,

crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible.”

Are You An Example of Principled Living?

Someone has said, “If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything.” Thomas Jefferson put it thus: “In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.”

So let me ask you: Are you a man or woman of principle? Are your “principles” rooted in your vacillating feelings of today, tomorrow or yesterday: or are they the ageless, timeless and unchangeable principles of your Creator?

Each of us must make a choice. Our choices are not without consequences. America is awaiting your courageous choice; so are your children and grandchildren.

You can hear Chuck’s podcast on this issue, America’s War on Principles. {eoa}

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