

Values and Principles

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A little over ten years ago, the job I had was working in research and development of a wood, gas and pellet stove manufacturer. After designing and doing the in-house testing of the stoves, they had to undergo certification testing with a certified test lab which was another of my responsibilities. I would go through all the testing that the test standard would require before setting a test date for the lab certification. Most of the time when the test lab technician came for testing, he would hit the highlights of the test but would never require a full series of tests and would accept the test data that we had generated to fill in the gaps of the tests that he hadn't performed. Each time, he would change the tests that he required us to run, just to make sure that the data that he was receiving from us was reliable.

Now the boss, in order to get a product certified sooner, took over on a project that I was working on which wasn't passing the temperature test, and voila! It passed without having to make any changes to the stove. So it was obvious to me that he had done something incorrectly in the test procedure to get the passing numbers. Sometime later, this model of stoves was experiencing some problems in the field and the boss wanted me to look at it. Well, not knowing what he had done to get it to pass certification tests, I refused and told him that since he had gotten it to pass certification that he ought to be the one to figure out the problem.

In another incident, he brought in a competitor's gas fireplace and wanted me to make something like it. Now after looking into it, I found that the competitor had a patent on the product. When I brought this to his attention, he informed me that other competitors were copying it so the competitor is not protecting his patent so it was alright. Well I promptly told him that this wasn't ethical to do and since it would be against my values and principles, he would have to find somebody else to do it. There was a pattern of unethical behavior starting to form so soon after that I found another job.

Exactly what do we mean when we use the term "my values and principles" or "our values and principles"? It seems fashionable for companies and churches to have mission statements that will present values and principles in a short paragraph. We hear politicians say that we need to return to family values or traditional values. What does that mean? What specifically are the values we are talking about? We hear about cultural values and principles. What's the different from one culture to another in their values? What is the difference between a value and a principle?

In this message, we are going to explore this and try to reach a better understanding. First let's look into the definition of a value and a principle.

Starting with principles, from Webster's 1828 Dictionary, this dictionary doesn't have a definition for principles because it simply is the plural of principle. Although newer

dictionaries do include a definition specific to principles. Principle is used as a noun. It is also used as a verb and an adjective. In the noun form, the Latin is principium and it means *beginning*. *In a general sense, the cause, source or origin of anything, that from a thing foresees as a principle of motion and the principles of action, element, primordial substance. Modern philosophers suppose matter to be one simple principle or solid extension diversified by its various shapes. In science, a truth admitted either without proof or considered as having been before proved by using the phrase "established principle."* *Ground or foundation: that which supports an assertion, an action or a series of actions of reasonings: On what principle can this be affirmed or denied? He justifies his proceedings on the principle of expedience or necessity or he reasons on sound principle.*

It's a general truth, a law comprehending many subordinate truths as principles of morality, of law and of government.

A tenant. That which is believed whether truth or not, but which serves as a rule of action or basis of a system as the principles of the stoics or the epicureans. So here a principle doesn't even have to be true.

A principle of human nature is a law of action in human beings, a constitutional propensity common to the human species. Thus it is a principle of human nature to resist injuries and to repel insults.

And when it's used as a verb: *men have been principled with opinion that they might not consult reason and things of religion.*

And principle as an adjective comes from the Latin principalis, *chief, highest in rank, character or respect as the principle officer of the government, the principle men of a city, town or state.* And it uses Acts 25:23 as an example.

Acts 25:23. *And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principle men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. (KJV)*

Chief, most important or considerable as the principle topics of debate. The principle arguments in a case. The principle points of law, principle beams of a building, the principle productions of a country. It uses Proverbs 4:7 as an example.

Proverbs 4:7. *Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. (KJV)*

The modern Merriam Webster Dictionary says *a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine or assumption, a rule or code of conduct, habitual devotion to right principles, a man of principles, the law or fact of nature underlying the working of an artificial device, a primary source or origin, an underlying faculty or endowment, such principles of*

human nature as greed and curiosity. This indicates that a principle can have a negative connotation such as greed and it certainly is a foundation of human nature.

In thebusinessdictionary.com on principles, it simply says *fundamental norms, rules or values that represent what is desirable and positive for a person, group, organization or community and help it in determining the rightfulness or wrongfulness of its actions. Principles are more basic than policies and objectives and are meant to govern both.*

We can ascertain from these definitions that a principle, as it relates to this topic, are a foundation and ideas, religion and laws that are built on. I think that it is easy in this culture to assume that the principles of God are the foundation on which all principles are based. But if one were to look at Islam and the principles that are in that religion, a religion in which Sharia laws are based on, we would find some of them in contradiction to God's principles and laws as well as the laws and principles of our country. And yet, by definition, they are principles espoused by Muslims.

But then again, we have the modern definition which is most likely the one being used by the self-help books, business and modern culture which basically states that principles are positive and representative of what is desirable.

Thebusinedictionary.com also includes as part of the definition for principles that fundamental norms, rules or values are synonymous with principles. So is values synonymous with principles?

Now let's review the 1828 Dictionary definition of value in which values is just the plural of the word value. It comes from the Latin word valor, from valeo, *to be worth*.

The first part of the definition is: *Worth; that property or those properties of a thing which render it useful or estimable; or the degree of that property or of such properties. The real value of a thing is its utility, its power or capacity of procuring or producing good. Hence the real or intrinsic value of iron, is far greater than that of gold. But there is, in many things, an estimated value depending on opinion or fashion, such as the value of precious stones. The value of land depends on its fertility, or on its vicinity to a market, or on both.*

The second part of the definition is: *Price; the rate of worth set upon a commodity, or the amount for which a thing is sold. We say, the value of a thing is what it will bring in market.*

The third part of the definition is: *Worth; applied to persons. Ye are all physicians of no value from Job 13:4 or Ye are of more value than many sparrows from Matthew 10:31.*

The fourth part of the definition is: *Importance; efficacy in producing effects; as considerations of no value.*

Then as a verb: *To estimate the worth of; to rate at a certain price; to apprise; as, to value lands or goods. To rate at a high price; to have in high esteem; as a valued poem or picture. A man is apt to value his own performances at too high a rate; he is even disposed to value himself for his humility. To esteem; to hold in respect and estimation; as, to value one for his works or virtues. To take account of. The mind doth value every moment. To reckon or estimate with respect to number or power. To consider with respect to importance. Neither of them valued their premises according to the rules of honor or integrity. To raise to estimation. Some value themselves to their country by jealousies to the crown. To be worth.*

As we can see in this definition, there is nothing that remotely describes the usage of the word values that we use today. Almost 200 years later the word has added to its meaning. In the modern world, yourdictionary.com, it states that *values are a person's or societies beliefs about good behavior and what things are important.* Now do we hear anything of that in that definition? And that was partly why I went through that whole definition was to make this point that it's a changing word.

An example of values are the accepted beliefs of a family about dating. The English Wikionary says *plural form of value, a collection of guiding principles, what one deems to be correct and desirable in life, especially regarding personal conduct.*

Collins Dictionary says *values are the moral principles and beliefs or excepted standards of a person or social group and gives examples of young immigrants who feel little sympathy for the values of their adopted country or the countries of South Asia also share many common values, the need for a system of moral values, and the Health Secretary called for a return to traditional family values.*

There is an article written by William Safire on August 12, 1984 titled "On Language; Principle vs. Value." He starts the article with a quote from Francis Bacon who lived four centuries ago. The quote is, "Words are the tokens current and accepted for conceits, as moneys are for values." Now in today's vernacular, the phrase would be "Words are token currency and accepted for ideas as moneys are for values. As Safire explains:

Since Bacon's time, two of those words have added to their meanings. Conceit , in the singular, now is most often taken to mean "unwarranted pride" rather than "idea." And the word values , in the plural, is no longer limited to material worth. The word values has become the all-embracing vogue term for "God and country," the work ethic, respect for family, coming to the dinner table with your hair slicked down and your mouth watering for apple pie with a slab of very American cheese.

Only a few years ago, principles were the big thing in politics; lately, that word has been shunted aside for values , usually modified as family values . The phrase traditional values is also used, by people who probably mean historical

values . What happened in American life that replaced principles with values ?
What's the difference between the two words?

At the beginning was the principle : The Latin principium meant "source, origin, beginning." That came to mean a primary truth that formed the basis for other beliefs and then to mean a rule for ethical conduct. The word, as well as the kind of conduct it signified, was put forward by theologians.

Not so with values . Rooted in the Latin word for "strength," the plural meant what Bacon used it to mean: material worth. It gradually came to acquire a meaning of intrinsic worth. And then, about 50 years ago, psychologists and sociologists glommed on to the word and made it their own, until politicians came along recently to adopt their meaning.

In this sociopolitical meaning, values are neither standards of intrinsic worth nor eternal verities. They are relative, not universal: Sociologists used the term to describe the behavior that is accepted by consensus. These values are emphasized within the society and become central to each member's social acceptance ...

Values can change but principles cannot. This comes from David Guralnik, editor of Webster's New World Dictionary, and he explains:

Principles being theological in nature are fixed, invariable, absolute and eternal. Values being in a sense scientific are non-theological and therefore subject to change and alteration as the demands and needs of society change.

So, basically, all this means is that we have a new meaning to a word because society needed something to express non-theological principles that in the mind of psychologists and sociologists was needed for societal changes.

We, as Christians, know that God is the same today as He was in the beginning as He says in Malachi 3:6:

Malachi 3:6. *For I am the LORD, I change not; ... (KJV)*

His law has never changed. His principles have never changed. Turn to Matthew 5.

Matthew 5:17. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

18) For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (KJV)

The law hasn't changed and here Christ points out that He didn't come to change it. We know that the law is the principles to live by – God's principles – and we can break it down further to one basic principle of God found in Matthew 22:

Matthew 22:34. *But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

35) *Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

36) *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

37) *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

38) *This is the first and great commandment.*

39) *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

40) *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (KJV)*

All the principles of the law hang on love, loving God with all your heart, soul and mind and loving your neighbor as yourself. So this is to say that the principles of God's love is the root of all the principles within His law – unalterable, universal, foundational and functional, and in every respect, a principle to live your life by.

When you look at all God's laws, all of the fruit of the spirit, you will see that they are all unchanging and founded in God's love. And when we live by them, we will eventually learn to love like God. There is nothing subjective about them. In other words, they can't be defined differently to fit a given circumstance.

In the story of my job in the introduction, I said that what the boss was wanting me to do was against my values and principles. So, what values? What principles? So, did I put it this way so that I didn't have to explain the principles of God's law that I would violate? The principles of honesty, integrity? Using someone else's patent design would be stealing. There is a law against that, you know. Just because I wouldn't be prosecuted for breaking the law doesn't give me the license to break it. I see that it goes against my principles, God's principles. Maybe the value is the value I placed upon the principles and not that it means something different in addition to the principles.

I am sure that as humans, we might place more value on some of God's principles over others because it is our focus at a given point in time. And then, as time changes, our focus changes. And another principle moves to the top of the list. So, would this be a valid definition for the modern values? Well, I don't have an answer to that question, but for me, value seems to be an undefined quantity. It's a cliché, a word that can be thrown in, that can be defined in a host of ways.

Look at the phrase "traditional values." If values change to meet social changes, what are the values that are traditional? Same with families. Whose family values? Politicians use it in their speeches, probably because it sounds thoughtful, and there is no way to pin them down on what it means because it means different things to different people.

In preparing this message, I looked at many lists of principles to live by and values one might have. Many of the lists interchange principles and values. In other words, some

principles appeared on someone's list of values and some of the values were on another's list of principles. Well if principles are unalterable, foundational, how can they be considered a value? And if a value can change, how can a value be on a list of principles? And, more importantly, who determines what gets to be a principle? By what I've read, it's the individual who decides; my values, my principles. So defining values would be as difficult as defining the personalities of every individual.

At one place that I worked, there was an individual that I had political discussions with. Okay, I argued with him. He was very liberal and I was very conservative. In one of our arguments, I made the point that everything needs to be black and white with no gray area. Well, his point was that there needed to be a lot of gray area for society to function properly because what is right and wrong is different with each individual. I bring this up because it seems that the whole discussion of value seems to be gray area, an area that an individual can always be right because it's their values that they are talking of and nobody can challenge it because they don't know the specifics of their values.

In closing brethren, we have seen that the words principle and principles have not changed over the last 200 years. And contrast that with the words value and values that have added meanings within the last 70 years, a meaning that seems to have taken on some of the meanings that principles has. We have seen that God's word and principles have never changed and will never change and the foundation of all God's principles are God's love. This should be the foundation of all the principles that we hold dear. And if we are inclined to use the new definition of the word values, God's love should be the foundation for all the values that we hold dear. Every value or principle should have an element of God's love.