

Principles and their Applications

The Holy Bible contains principles for Christian living. These principles are statements that express the mind of the Lord God, regarding various aspects of Christian experience. In some cases, the Word of God describes for us how to apply, or keep, these principles. It is important that we carry these principles in our heart even when the Holy Bible does not describe for us how they should be applied. As we walk in the Spirit, He daily shows us how to keep the principles in God's Word.

It is also important that we learn to distinguish between the principles themselves and their many applications. There are some common pitfalls regarding this need to distinguish between principles and their applications. With the help of the Holy Spirit, let's review some of these traps so we can be better prepared to avoid them.

First, we may emphasize a specific application of a biblical principle, but not the principle itself. The problem here is if we do not explain why we do what we do, it becomes more difficult for those who are following us to continue to follow. We should not assume that those who ask "why?" are only looking for a way to justify non-compliance. That may be true in some cases, but it is not true in all cases. Equally unwise, is to assume people know the underlying principle and so we need only focus on the practical application of it. We want to keep our practices clearly tied to the principles of God's Word.

Second, we may emphasize the principle but downplay its application. In other words, we may freely discuss a biblical principle but avoid discussing specific applications of that principle. Somehow, it is thought if we emphasize that a particular principle is required, or if we become specific on how it applies, then we are in danger of being legalistic. Does this thought stand to reason? God's principles are not meant to be "theory only"; they are to be lived out in our daily experiences.

Stated another way, when we divorce the principle from its applications, the keeping of the principle is no longer important. To avoid talking specifically about how to keep principles may lead us to where we do not view our decisions in the light of God's Word. Have you ever heard someone say, if Brother X can get away with that, then what's wrong if I do this? Why should I have to do that - look at what they are doing!

Third, we may limit how a principle applies. For example, we find a principle in 1 Peter 5:5, "all of you be clothed with humility". In chapter 3 of this same epistle, we do find specific applications of this principle of being clothed with humility. There the apostle instructs us to dress modestly. Question: does this teaching of dressing modestly apply only when we gather for worship? In other words, is this particular application of the principle only meant for Sundays? Surely, the precepts of God are given us for daily living; they should not be limited to a single day of the week.

There is yet another way we may inadvertently limit how a principle applies. We may appreciate a particular application of a principle. We may then rally around that application and make sure

that it is not transgressed. Yet if we are not careful, we may fail to keep other applications of the same principle.

For example, Jesus said, “Love your enemies” and he said, “Resist not evil”. As a standard application of these principles, we have a position to not carry weapons or enlist in combatant service. That is a correct application but is that the only application of those principles? What if we will not carry a weapon but we carry clenched fists in our pockets? What if we are not willing to shoot a gun but we are willing to argue? Are we keeping the principle or violating it? To be sure, there are different degrees of violating a principle, but they are still a violation. We need to measure ourselves against the teaching itself, not only one or two applications of the teaching.

As we walk close to the Lord, daily communing with Him, the Holy Spirit will guide us in those areas of life that the written Word does not expressly prohibit or endorse. He will help us to keep His precepts, both in our hearts and in our actions.