Principles and Character

<center>(This outline is based on Pastor Keith Hoover's sermon on Lack of Principle.)</center>

I. Principles
1. Principle *n.* - I. Origin, source; source of action. II. Fundamental truth, law, or motive force. 5. a. A fundamental truth or proposition, on which many others depend; <u>a primary truth comprehending, or forming the basis of, various subordinate truths</u>; <u>a general statement or tenet forming the (or a) ground of, or held to be essential to, a system of thought or belief; a fundamental assumption forming the basis of a chain of reasoning</u>. 7. a. A general law or rule adopted or professed as <u>a guide to action</u>; <u>a settled ground or basis of conduct or practice</u>; a fundamental motive or reason of action, *esp*. one consciously recognized and followed. (Often partly coinciding with sense 5.) b. Used *absol.* for *good*, *right*, or *moral principle*: <u>An inward or personal law of right action; personal devotion to right</u>; rectitude, uprightness, honourable character.
2. Principles are the foundation of the truth of God.
    A. Jesus Christ's doctrine is built on six foundational principles: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands (ordination), resurrection from the dead, eternal judgment (**Heb 5:12; Heb 6:1-2**).
    B. Consider these six principles briefly:
        i. <u>Repentance</u> is the first foundational principle of the gospel and is its first command to sinners (**Mat 3:2**).
        ii. <u>Faith</u> is the basis by which we know nearly every thing we know about God (**Heb 11:1-3**) and by which we have the assurance of eternal life (**Joh 5:24**), and without which it is impossible to please Him (**Heb 11:6**).
        iii. <u>Baptism</u> is the first act of obedience of a believer which adds him to Christ's local church (**Act 2:37-42**).
        iv. <u>Laying on of hands</u> is the process by which a man is ordained to be a minister of Christ (**1Ti 4:14**) who preaches the gospel and builds churches (**1Co 3:9-11**).
        v. <u>The resurrection from the dead</u> is the culmination of our salvation (**1Co 15:52**) and our hope (**Act 24:15**).
        vi. <u>Eternal judgment</u> is what awaits the wicked (**Mat 25:41**) and persuades men to depart from evil and believe and obey the truth (**2Co 5:10-11**).
    C. These principles of the doctrine of Christ span from the beginning of a Christian's conversion until the end of time.
        i. All of the rest of the doctrine of the Bible is encompassed by them and is based upon them.
        ii. If these six principles are not firmly established in the minds of Christians, they have no hope of growing spiritually and learning the meat of the word.
        iii. When this happens, a church's days are numbered.
    D. The Bible has many other principles which touch on every area of life, such as:
        i. Morality
        ii. Finance
        iii. Marriage
        iv. Children
        v. Government

      vi. Interfamily relationships

      vii. Ambition

      viii.   Priorities

      ix. Dress

      x. Music

      xi. Lifestyle

3. A man's principles are the foundation for his beliefs, conduct, and practices.

   A. God demands the keeping of scriptural principles.

      i.   Christ must have the preeminence in all things in our lives **(Col 1:17-19)**.

      ii. Jesus is both *Lord* and Christ **(Act 2:36)**.

   B. "Important principles may, and must, be inflexible." (Abraham Lincoln)

   C. In the same way that the doctrine of Christ is built on its first principles, so a man's philosophy and worldview are built on the principles that he holds.

      i.   The decisions a man makes in his life will be predicated upon the principles he holds.

      ii. If he doesn't have good principles, he will not make good decisions.

   D. If a man lacks principles, he lacks a foundation.

      i.   If his foundation is destroyed, he's in trouble **(Psa 11:3)**.

      ii. If he builds his life on weak, shaky principles, he will be destroyed when difficulty comes **(Mat 7:24-27)**.

   E. We live in a day when people essentially hold to the philosophy of Groucho Marx who once said, "Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others."

   F. "A person without principles is devoid of character: if he had character, he would feel he needs principles." (Nicolas Chamfort)

II. Character

   1. <u>Character</u> *n.* - 11. <u>The sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual</u> or a race, viewed as a homogeneous whole; the individuality impressed by nature and habit on man or nation; mental or <u>moral constitution</u>. 12. a. Moral qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed; distinct or distinguished character; character worth speaking of.

   2. <u>Integrity</u> *n.* - 1. The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety. 3. In moral sense. ga. Unimpaired moral state; freedom from moral corruption; innocence, sinlessness. b. Soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue, *esp.* in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, sincerity.

   3. Character is the inner moral strength which enables a man to stick to his principles.

     A. "Good character or integrity may be observed in the fortitude and tenacity with which we hold our principles." (Keith Hoover)

     B. "The Christian can be flexible in some things, but not in [his] principles." (Keith Hoover)

   4. A man of character will keep his word even when it hurts him to do so **(Psa 15:4)**.

   5. A man of character will not compromise his principles to save himself time, money, pain, inconvenience, or humiliation.

III. Four different types of men
 1. Good principles + good character = A good man
    A. Vertical focus and a humble spirit
    B. Daniel held to his principles which demonstrated his good character (**Dan 1:8; Dan 6:10**).
    C. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego held to their principles with good character (**Dan 3:15-18**).
    D. King Asa had good character and good principles with one faulty principle (**1Ki 15:11-14**).
 2. Good principles + bad character = A hypocritical man
    A. Horizontal instead of vertical focus; a critical spirit
    B. The Pharisees had good principles, such as prayer, giving alms, and tithing.
    C. But they had bad character because they did them for the wrong reason: to be seen of men (**Mat 23:5-7**).
    D. They also had bad character because they would burden others with their principles, but did not keep them themselves (**Mat 23:1-4**).
 3. Bad principles + "good" character = A dangerous man
    A. There is no such thing as a man of *truly good* character with bad principles.
       i. But there are men that stick tenaciously to their bad principles who appear to have "good" character.
       ii. They may be evil men, but they are evil men that are true to their principles, and therefore have character.
       iii. "I judge people by their own principles...not by my own." (Martin Luther King)
    B. Examples:
       i. Paul before his conversion.
       ii. Paul thought that he should have persecuted Christians, and he did it to the best of his ability (**Act 26:9-11**).
       iii. Devout Muslims hold their bad principles with strong conviction.
       iv. Jews, Muslims, and Catholics throughout history have killed Christians thinking they were doing God service (**Joh 16:2**).
    C. "The holding of bad principles with good character creates a stronghold of error and is inherently dangerous to both truth and humanity." (Keith Hoover)
    D. "Great ambition is the passion of a great character. Those endowed with it may perform very good or very bad acts. All depends on the principles which direct them." (Napoleon Bonaparte)
 4. Bad principles (or no principles) + bad character = A worthless, wicked man
    A. Fleshly focus, rebellious spirit
    B. There can be no character without principle.

IV. Today's churches and Christians lack principles and character.
 1. In the last few generations, churches have striven to increase their membership by adding new members through preaching and baptism (**Mat 28:19**).
    A. But they have not kept the second part of Jesus' commandment to "[teach] them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (**Mat 28:20**).

B. Instead, "churches focused on programs, results, and relativity to the lost at the expense of character, doctrine, and principle. These subtle changes had a disastrous effect on the **ethical** foundation of the churches." (Keith Hoover)

2. Two different ethics
    A. <u>Character based ethic</u>: People experience true success and enduring happiness as they learn and integrate sound principles into basic character.
    B. <u>Personality based ethic</u>: Success is a matter of personality, public image, attitudes and behaviors, skills and techniques, that facilitate interaction.

3. "Holding good principles with good character should be the goal of every Christian." (Keith Hoover) **(Deu 4:1)**

4. The trend in America today is to have One Principle and No Character.
    A. The don't care about sound doctrine, but only care about their own lusts **(2Ti 4:3-4)**.
    B. "The one principle of the unprincipled is that there can be no principles and anyone who claims principle is THE ENEMY!" (Keith Hoover)

V. The path to spiritual success for churches, families, and individuals

1. Read, meditate in, and live by the word of God **(Psa 119:97; Psa 119:75-77; Psa 119:104; Psa 119:111-112)**.
2. Hide God's word in your heart and welcome its reproofs **(Pro 6:20-23)**.
3. Make God and yourself this promise:
4. "By the power of the Holy Spirit, I will faithfully search for, apply, and live by the principles of the Bible. By the grace of God I will hold those principles with the character and integrity exemplified in its pages."