



# Principle vs. Practicality: Which is More Important?

By Mike Winther

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Every day, political decisions often involve deciding “if” or “how” government should intervene to regulate some activity. Rarely are these debates analyzed in moral or ideological ways. Instead, these decisions are most often analyzed in practical or pragmatic ways. We are told that you can’t be dogmatic and that practicality is more important than ideology. We are even told that “politics is the art of compromise”.

Our government, at all levels, spends billions of dollars every year holding public hearings on virtually every social problem known to man. Experts, scientists, movie stars, lobbyists and ordinary citizens are asked to testify in an effort to understand every aspect of a particular problem. In addition to public hearings and commissions, tens of billions of dollars are spent every year on scientific studies and sociological research. Again, the goal is to fully understand the problem and the effects of a variety of possible solutions.

Once the problem is fully understood, they argue, we can draft government policy to “fix” the problem and eliminate the risk of unexpected side-effects.

The fallacy that underlies this view is the assumption that man is capable of studying, analyzing and comprehending all of the effects of a proposed government policy. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is absolutely no way that human minds can fully understand all of the consequences, direct or indirect, of even the simplest, least obtrusive government policy.

Even if we grant the impossible (that humans are capable of fully understanding a problem and a solution), it is far from safe to assume that the motives of decision makers will always be pure enough to implement the perfect solution. This is why, when making government policy, we need to look first at God's wisdom as found in the Scriptures.

When we take a hind-sight look back at government policy-making, we find something very interesting. Those policies that achieved a true societal benefit without negative side-effects were policies that were easily justifiable in moral and ideological grounds. Those policies that failed to "fix" the problem or those policies that fixed one problem, but created an equal or greater problem, could not have been justified on moral and ideological grounds. These failed policies, almost without exception, violated God's commandments, and they typically violated the God-given rights of some or all of the citizens.

Just to make the point clear, let me explain it from what I believe to be God's perspective. Government policies that violate God's laws are doomed to failure. They will either not "fix" the problem as advertised, or they will create other potentially worse problems.

Without exception, every proposed government action must be tested to see if it violates God's laws or if it violates individual rights. If the proposed legislation passes both of these tests, then and only then should we invest time and money into studying the matter. If, on the other hand, the proposed legislation fails either of these tests, all consideration of the matter should cease immediately. This is what we call the "moral stop sign". Why should we spend billions of dollars holding hearings and studying policies that will fail? More importantly, why should the taxpayers pay these costs for something that is morally unjust?

## **Food For Thought:**

It is interesting to note that ideological considerations usually involve the "should decision". (Should the government do something?) Whereas practical decision making usually skips the "should" question and goes right to the "how decision". (How will we implement this policy?)

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GOOD IDEOLOGY