Missing: Principle

By Roy Minet (Rev. 01/23/16)

We are lost and floundering as a nation, a society, a civilization. Even if you can't put your finger on exactly what it is, you can feel it. People are deeply divided, pulling in many different directions. Conflicting claims are made regarding what is a human "right" and what is "fair" or "unfair." Most people are confused. They're not sure to whom they should listen.

One way the polls clearly reveal this is as an astounding lack of confidence in our institutions. For example, only about 13% approve of the job Congress is doing (Gallup), while more than two thirds think the country is heading in the wrong direction (Rasmussen). The number of people affiliated with the old parties is declining while those affiliated with other parties or independent have grown to be considerably larger than either the Ds or the Rs (Gallup). These are long-term trends, not momentary blips.

This election cycle, there finally is an exploding realization that *both* Democrats and Republicans are responsible for taking us in the wrong direction. In fact, they really aren't much different in terms of what actually happens once an election is over and they are in office.

The underlying problem is that we have lost sight of, or abandoned basic principles. It is impossible to coherently define "rights" without the solid principles upon which such definitions must rest. A statement that something is "fair" or "unfair" is totally meaningless without a framework of principle by which that judgment can be made. Without principle and logic, there is no way for "debates" over such issues to be anything more than meaningless shouting matches.

It would be a huge improvement if candidates for public office would spend most of their time explaining the fundamental principle(s) upon which they base their decision on *any* issue, then show how their principle(s) logically lead to their positions on current issues. Unfortunately, that is extremely rare to the point of non-existence. Instead, we get personal attacks, "sound bites" and a list of issue positions on which they all too often have "flip-flopped."

It would be a miraculous improvement if politicians stated their principles and then actually adhered to them after being elected.

One example of a very important fundamental principle is the "Non-aggression Principle" or "NAP." It states that the only justifiable use of force (or the credible threat of force) on an individual is as a response to a prior initiation of force or fraud by that individual. This is just a formalization of the old "live and let live" adage with which most people agree. You can't hit somebody unless they hit you first or stole your stuff. Self-defense is fine, but you can't *start* a fight or deal fraudulently with others.

It's also very important to recognize that government is nothing but the use of force. Every law is an authorization for the government to use force on people under some circumstance. Laws that deter and punish assault, robbery, contractual misrepresentation, murder, etc. are consistent with the NAP. They protect and secure our individual rights, which is the only legitimate function of a government. Unfortunately, there are many, many more laws that violate the NAP and, frequently, the US Constitution. These unnecessarily and improperly restrict freedom.

No individual, group or government may initiate the use of force against any other individual, group or government. Of course, there are gray areas where reasonable judgement must be applied, but close adherence to the NAP will land you on the correct side of substantially any issue. Minimizing aggression leads to a peaceful, prosperous, voluntary society that maximizes freedom.

These are the kinds of things candidates for public office should be discussing. Do they adhere to the NAP? Do they adhere to some other principle or principles? What are they? Tell us first about principle, then how you apply it to the issues. If we agree with you and believe you are sincere, *then* we will support you and vote for you.

Could it be that politicians don't have any principles? Or are things even worse: it doesn't matter whether or not politicians have principles because most voters wouldn't understand them if they did? As President Reagan observed, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."