

## **Bedrock Principles of Liberty**

### **PRINCIPLE TWO**

#### **The Declaration of Independence upholds the idea that absolute truths exist and are knowable.**

Emphasize the second principle: Absolute truths exist and are knowable.

Summarize or read this account of a rabbi's experience, or role play it with a participant.

#### **Written on People's Hearts**

The following story illustrates how an understanding of right and wrong is intuitive, and how a belief in God and in absolutes makes ordered liberty possible.

A Jewish rabbi bound on a plane for Israel soon discovered he was seated next to one of the leaders of Israel's socialist labor movement. After the plane became airborne, a student of the rabbi who was seated several rows behind him approached him and offered him his slippers. "Here are your slippers, sir," he said, "You'll feel more comfortable in them, since your feet swell terribly on the plane." A short time later the same young man came forward again and offered the rabbi several sandwiches. "Your wife fixed these for your lunch, sir. We know you'll like them much better than the food the airline will offer."

These were not isolated incidents, but a pattern; the student returned on numerous occasions to check on the rabbi, to offer him something to make his flight more pleasant, or to serve him in some other way. All of this made quite an impression on the socialist leader, who finally turned to his seatmate and said, "Wow! I'm so impressed with your son! I have four grown sons, and never in all my life have they offered to serve me as your son has waited on you. Why is he so attentive to you?"

"I have to be honest with you," said the rabbi. "This young man is not my son but my student. His service, as good as it is, is nothing compared to the assistance my own son would give me if he were here.

"The reason the members of the next generation, including members of our own families, treat us as they do is quite simple. All of them are living according to the ideas and principles we've taught them. You decided some time ago to tell them that you—and they—descended from apes, and this is what you taught them. They know intuitively this means that you are one generation closer to being a monkey than they are, so it's only natural that they would expect you to serve them. I, on the other hand, have taught my children and students that we have been created by God Himself. They understand this puts me one generation closer to the Source of Ultimate Truth, and they treat me in accord with this understanding. We reap what we sow."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, just as the socialist leader's belief in evolution does not prove God doesn't exist, neither does the rabbi's belief in divine creation prove that He does. Yet our story does emphasize some very important realities.

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- First, note carefully that the rabbi's seatmate noticed the service the rabbi was receiving as respectful treatment. Yet his worldview really didn't allow him to recognize this. Apart from God, there is no right and wrong, good or evil. As Josh McDowell has stated, logically applied, a relativistic worldview sees no difference between the wheat fields of Kansas and the ovens at Auschwitz. Yet people who claim to be atheists and relativists recognize right and wrong, and thus absolute truths, all the time! These *are* self-evident to them when it is convenient and when it serves their purposes. I am not saying they are being malicious in doing this. Everyone appeals to a set of standards when encountering unfair treatment.
- A belief in God is conducive to civil behavior, and ultimately to a civil society. It also sets the stage for us to see that true freedom can exist only in a society grounded in virtue. Without virtue, freedom unravels into chaos, which leads to bigger government and, finally, to tyranny.

Consider the positive virtues inherent in the rabbi's perspective. A belief in having been created by God helps a person to cultivate a variety of noble qualities in his or her life, including these.

- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Generosity                | 8. Respect for one's elders    |
| 2. Gratitude                 | 9. Respect for one's peers,    |
| 3. Selflessness              | grounded in the truth that all |
| 4. Humility                  | of human life is valuable      |
| 5. A sense of responsibility | because God creates it in His  |
| 6. A sense of accountability | image (something we will       |
| 7. Respect for others        | explore in a future study).    |

And to think—we got all this just from considering the implications of the rabbi's observations on the plane!

Yes, People *intuitively* know right from wrong, as we've already observed. And they know it thoroughly enough to be "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Hear carefully what Paul wrote in Romans 2:12-16 (NIV; note the added emphasis):

<sup>12</sup> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup> For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. <sup>14</sup> (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that **the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness**, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) <sup>16</sup> This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Note:

<sup>1</sup>Rabbi Daniel Lapin, *America's Real War: An Orthodox Rabbi Insists that Judeo-Christian Values Are Vital for Our Nation's Survival*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1999), 51-52.

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