

Five Principles of Moral Decision-Making

What God wants for us more than anything is ultimate happiness. And God knows that the only way to achieve ultimate happiness for all is if we live a life of obedience to the Ten Commandments infused with the spirit of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12). Learning to live the moral life and make good moral decisions involves no less than five important principles.

Principle One. We are made in God's image.

The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is the recognition that every person carries the dignity of being made in the image of God. Within each one of us lies a powerful surge toward good because we are made in God's image, and a darker pull toward sin because of the fall and Original Sin.

Principle Two. We exercise the practice of responsible freedom.

Freedom is simply the capacity to choose. The best way to grow in freedom is to perform good acts. The way to hinder our freedom is through bad acts

Principle Three. We understand what makes a moral act.

There are three factors that determine the morality of any human action:

1. The inherent good or evil of the act itself (objective).
2. The intention of the person doing the act (subjective).
3. The circumstances in which the act is performed.

All three elements must be good – the objective act, the subjective intention, and the circumstances – in order to have a morally good act.

Principle Four. We understand the reality of sin.

When we choose to do wrong instead of good, we sin. Sin always damages our relationship with our self, with others, and with God. We commit **mortal sin** when we freely and consciously choose to commit a serious offense against God. A **venial sin** is a less serious offense against God and neighbor. While it does not destroy our relationship with God it does damage it. In our consideration of sin we remember that God is all merciful, and God's mercy is greater than sin.

Principle Five. We continually form our conscience.

A good conscience requires lifelong formation in order to make judgments based on reason and the good that is willed by God.

Each one of us must form our conscience to objective moral standards. There are several tools that help us do so.

- The Word of God as embraced through study, prayer, and practice.
- Advice and example from others.
- Teachings of the Church.
- The Gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, wonder and awe.)

Using these tools we must regularly examine our conscience which will help us develop a morally sensitive conscience.