

Antioch School *Growing Disciples*

Christian Basics 6 Christian Values

Christian Values

Everyone did just as he pleased.” That sounds like a very modern comment on today’s permissive society, doesn’t it? And yet, those words were recorded of the Israelite people under the Judges (Judges 17.6; 21.25)! These words speak of that innate self-centredness which breeds frustration, tension, hatred, unhappiness – and all the other manifestations of our sinful rebellion against the Maker.

The writer observes that “there was no king in Israel at the time.” Of course, the experience of a variety of kings later on was very mixed. They were, as someone put it, “kings wise and otherwise” – mostly otherwise!

The Lord said through his prophet Jeremiah, “The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestry when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, they did not keep that covenant. The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. None of them will have to teach his fellow-countryman to know the Lord, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the Lord, have spoken” (31.31-34).

The prophet is referring to the same “law” here. It is not that the values have been changed, adjusted (as we might have done) to suit our own liking! But they have become inner principles and not just external standards.

David expressed something of this when he wrote, “How I love to do your will, my God!” (Psalm 40.8a). So often rules lead to reluctance on our part, and when we obey them we typically fulfil the minimum requirement!

When the people of Israel were at Mount Sinai, the Lord gave them ten basic rules (Exodus



20.1-17). As they were originally given, they presupposed the gracious activity of God (v.2). They formed the framework of their whole system of values. Jesus made it quite clear that these rules are of continuing importance for our lives and that their application extends to thought and motive as well as action (Matthew 5.17-48). And when he summed them up in the law of love (Matthew 22.38-40; drawn from Deuteronomy 6.5 and Leviticus 19.18), he was not detracting from them but insisting on the restored relationships which they are meant to protect and express.

Undivided Loyalty

❶ “Worship no god but me” (Exodus 20.3). Of course, they had recently come out of Egypt where, as in most of the ancient world, many gods were worshipped. They were heading for the land of Canaan where the locals would be pressing them to sacrifice to local deities who, they thought, controlled weather, seasons, fertility...

To worship other gods was to misunderstand both nature and revelation (Romans 1.20-25). It was to forget the immense compassion and redeeming love of the Lord (Exodus 20.2). It was to separate themselves from God’s promises within the covenant (Jeremiah 7.1-15).

Jesus calls us to undivided loyalty – “No one can be a slave of two masters; he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (lit. mammon)” (Matthew 6.24). Mammon was not some recognised god of the ancient world. It is simply an Aramaic word meaning “wealth, gain.” It is worshipped still today! We talk of materialism and face the pressure to acquire more and more “things.” We live, of course, in a material world, but are called to view possessions always in the light of our primary relationship with God (Matthew 6.33). This is one of the reasons why giving is such an important spiritual activity (Matthew 19.16-24; Luke 19.1-10).

There are, of course, other “isms” waiting to slip in just as surely as the Canaanite “baals” were a lure to the Israelites. Mention was made last week of the inroads of Hinduism in the form of yoga and transcendental meditation. Tai chi is another relaxation method which has a clear basis in Eastern religion.

We can add to that the significant interest in various forms of the occult that are abroad today, such as spiritism, astrology and witchcraft. The Word of God in the Old Testament was very clear that involvement in such things was forbidden for the Lord’s people (Deuteronomy 18.11). In the New Testament, Paul specifically lists “worship of idols and witchcraft” among “what the human nature does”, with the strong warning, “those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of God” (Galatians 5.19-21).

No Idols

❷ “Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals...” (Exodus 20.4-6).

This is not a prohibition of sculpture or other forms of art. Indeed, such had their approved place within the tabernacle and Temple. Rather, it denounces worship of objects representing some false god (see Romans 1.22-23) and also any attempt to represent the Lord by such images. It has been suggested that the golden calves set up at Bethel and Dan by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12.25ff) were thought to represent the Lord himself! While the immediate context of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman wasn’t idol worship, we note the force of his words, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4.24 NIV).

We need to reflect on the forms of idol worship that afflict our highly scientific world. Perhaps our very science and technology become or produce our idols.

John wrote his first letter to make it quite clear that Jesus the Son of God is the key to eternal life. He ends with this

instruction, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5.21 NIV). The emulation of Jesus merely as a great Man, a great Teacher and a great Example comes into this category. He is all of these, but to worship him as merely that is idolatry. True worship must acknowledge who he is and why he came.

Using the Lord’s Name

③ “Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the Lord your God will punish anyone who misuses my name” (Exodus 20.7).

Names, in Bible times, were much more closely identified with the person and character they represented than is the case today. The name of God spoke very definitely of his presence, power and character.

So people are not to refer to God profanely (in swearing) – to use God’s name and mean nothing by it is a serious offence. But so is hypocrisy – using God’s name to infer a relationship that isn’t real – and presumption – the claim to do things in the name of God without his authority and blessing (note Matthew 7.21-23).

But God has revealed himself – revelation and redemption – and we must “call on the name of the Lord to be saved” (Acts 2.21 NIV). “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (4.12 NIV). “Calling on the name” is going to involve the two-fold turn of repentance and faith.

Jeremiah affirms, “You are among us, O Lord, and we bear your name; do not forsake us!” (Jer.14.9b NIV; note also 2 Chronicles 7.14). Those who have “called on the name” now “bear the name” – they have been “born again” into God’s family (John 3.1-16) and are part of Christ’s Body. That is why we can approach him as “Abba (like our Daddy)! Father” (Romans 8.15, and in the model prayer, Matthew 6.9-13).

That is why we now pray “in Jesus’ name” (John 14.13-14). It is the approach of the redeemed. It is the coming of the children to their Father. It is the Body seeking to know and follow the will of the Head.

Keeping God’s Rest-Day

④ “Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy” (Exodus 20.8).

The Hebrew word “sabbath” simply means “rest.” The Bible does not subscribe to the modern idea that work is evil. It does, however, teach that it is more arduous and tedious because of the choice to disobey the will of God. This rule provided rest from work and the opportunity for worship.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ time interpreted the rule in a very rigid way. But Jesus insisted that “The Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the Sabbath” (Mark 2.27). So Jesus did good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12.10ff; Luke 13.10ff; John 5.10ff; 7.23; 9.16).

From the earliest Christian times, Christians have assembled for worship of their risen Lord on the first day of the week. And the “Christian Sabbath” needs to be used to commemorate the new creation in Christ. But we are inclined to be weak in our “sabbath-keeping”, and, in consequence, pay a toll in stress and health problems. In the midst of all the self- and society-imposed pressures, God says, “Take a break! Keep this as a special day for me! You will be renewed and refreshed as well!” It seems we have delivered ourselves from the cramped observance of the past,

but need to ask seriously, “Lord, what do you expect of us – for your glory and our good?”

For reflection,

before we continue with the last six...

At what points do we face the pressure to divide our loyalty? Do we really regard God as “God”? Is Jesus Christ truly “Lord” for us?

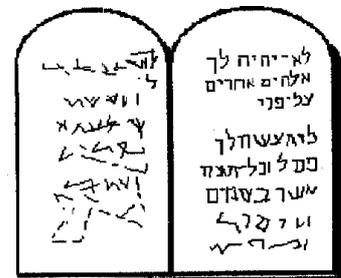
“We need to reflect on the forms of idol worship that afflict our highly scientific world...” What is the idol worship of today?

- What are the points at which we are most prone to break the third commandment? What is the positive use of “the Name”?
- Is the Sabbath commandment still relevant to us as Christians? What positive contribution can it make to our lives?

Respect for Parents

⑤ “Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you” (Exodus 20.12).

The first four rules have to do with our relationship with God. The remaining six are about our human relationships. It is no accident that respect for parents is placed first among these. The family represents the first and



basic unit of human society. Parents are not only to pass on and mature the physical lives of their children – in a real sense, they are meant to be the representatives of God and of society to their children. So the home is the basic school for all of life (note Deuteronomy 6.6-9). Honouring our parents is basic to our respect for human life itself.

In some ancient societies, the helpless aged were thrust out of the dwellings of their children to be eaten by beasts or die of exposure. Respect for parents and old age seems to have been customary among the peoples from which Israel sprang. This respect is here put out of the area of changeable and optional social traditions into the area of God’s clear requirement for his people. One writer has commented, “The restoration of parental authority is a much needed corrective for the rampant increase of juvenile delinquency in the twentieth century. The revival of filial respect for aged parents would do much to solve the financial and emotional needs of the ever-increasing older generation.”

Paul calls this “the first commandment that has a promise added” (Ephesians 6.2,3). It is important for our lives individually and as a society.

The Sanctity of Human Life

⑥ “Do not commit murder” (Exodus 20.13).

Murder is a universally recognised wrong. It is an outrageous sin against the sanctity of human life – for “man was made like God” (Genesis 9.6). Not only was the deliberate act of murder condemned, but every act that endangers human life, whether arising from carelessness (Deuteronomy 22.8) or malice (Leviticus 19.14), or from hatred, anger or revenge (19.17,18).

The command against murder was not taken as a prohibition of either capital punishment or war. The civil authorities have responsibilities to punish evildoers (Romans 13.1-7) and also to protect citizens from aggression from without. But, however just or necessary such provisions may seem to be, they are never “good” in themselves and can easily become an expression of human sinfulness.

It is ironic and tragic that an age that claims enlightenment in such matters should find acceptable the promotion of abortion (the deliberate termination of foetal life) and euthanasia (or so-called mercy-killing). A great deal is said about “quality of life”, but very little about the sanctity of human life at whatever stage. It is not for us to decide that a new life is not convenient or that an old life has passed its usefulness. In protecting life, we are to commit ourselves to positive love and care.

Jesus extended this rule to include anger and insult (Matthew 5.21-24). These are also an offence to God, even though they are beyond the jurisdiction of human courts. We are called to take the initiative in positive reconciliation (vv.25-26, 38-42).

The Sanctity of Marriage

⑦ “Do not commit adultery” (Exodus 20.14).

In the creation narrative we find these words, “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one” (Genesis 2.24). These words affirm that the marriage relationship is part of God’s good purpose within creation. It is the strongest and most indissoluble of human relationships – stronger even than that of parent and child.

Jesus (and Paul too) quoted these words and added, “So they are no longer two, but one. Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together” (Matthew 19.5,6).

Our age has tended to see sex as an end in itself, without any reference to a loving, committed relationship and outside the context of responsibility for people and for children. Pre-marital sex and adultery tend to be, not only tolerated, but expected. Young people thus diminish the possibility of a life-long relationship based on trust and commitment.

Jesus extended the meaning of this rule to include adulterous thoughts (Matthew 5.27-30). Pornography is harmful, not therapeutic.

The New Testament (as well as the Old) sees homosexual acts as unnatural and sinful and under the judgment of God (Romans 1.26,27). A great deal has been said and written in recent times to persuade us that people are born homosexual and should be allowed to practise their alternative sexual orientation. In fact it is an acquired perversion for which, however, as with all our sin, the grace of God is available in both forgiveness and deliverance.

The Stewardship of Possessions

⑧ “Do not steal” (Exodus 20.15).

This rule presupposes the right to own property. It expressly forbids any act which would defraud another person and obtain his possessions dishonestly.

One writer has put it this way, “The true intent of the Eighth Commandment... is to guarantee to man the privilege of responsible stewardship in the possession and use of material values... to provide the guarantee that the stewardship privilege granted by God shall not be annulled by man... Stealing is interference with the stewardship of another by appropriating or removing from his control any part of that which God has entrusted to him.”

The concept of stewardship was clearly taught by Jesus (Luke 16.19-31; Matthew 25.31-46). Too easily we become possessed by our possessions and obsessed with an acquisitive spirit. The failure of generosity has put great pressure on the disadvantaged within our society. Sometimes those who are “better off” have more means of dishonesty at their disposal.

Part of our stewardship is our responsibility of society through our taxes and our responsibility to bring our tithes and offerings to God (note Matthew 22.15-22; Malachi 3.8-10; Romans 13.1-7).

The Sacredness of Truth

⑨ “Do not accuse anyone falsely” (Exodus 20.16).

The Hebrews weighed their words much more carefully than we do. Think of Isaac’s grief when he realised that he had been tricked into giving the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau (Genesis 27). Integrity and truth are the nature of God and he expects the same of his people.

This rule prohibits lying in general, but deals with a particularly serious form of lying – false witness against one’s neighbour. The law provided that the offender was to receive the punishment that his false testimony would have brought on the accused (Deuteronomy 19.18-20).

There are, of course, the informal, casual comments of ordinary conversation that destroy the reputation, happiness, freedom and life of others. Here the rumour and half-truth are so damaging. Little wonder that Jesus insisted that we are to “love our enemies” (Matthew 5.43-45) and that we are not the judges (7.1,2). We ourselves are accountable to God, and shouldn’t pass on stories, even though we think them to be true (note 1 Corinthians 13.6).

Selfish Desire

⑩ “Do not desire another man’s house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns” (Exodus 20.17).

This selfish desire motivates wrong thought and action in relation to our neighbour. Much of what Jesus said about the law in Matthew 5 is related to this rule as he exposed our underlying attitudes and feelings.

This selfish desire is described as idolatry (Colossians 3.5). It is the concentration of the whole being on something other than God. It sets up a completely false value-system.

Present-day advertising techniques play on this selfish desire. It is so much a part of our acquisitive, materialistic society. As we live in this world and use its benefits, we are to place the highest value on the spiritual, regarding possessions, not as our goal, but as a means of living and fulfilling God’s will (note Matthew 6.33).

For reflection...

- We live in days when authority in general is questioned and when attitudes towards parents have drastically changed in particular. What should be the relationship between parents and children in a Christian family?
- How absolute is the rule “Do not commit murder”? What about capital punishment and war? What about abortion and euthanasia? What about anger?
- The Bible affirms marriage as the strongest and most indissoluble of human relationships. What does this imply about sex outside marriage. How can we make all marriages stronger? What about the person who is a victim of domestic violence?

In what ways are we tempted to violate the stewardship entrusted to others? What if we think it should justly be ours anyway? What does it mean to be a faithful steward of our possessions?

Under oath, we can be committed to tell “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” How committed are we to telling the truth the rest of the time?

The Ten Commandments begin with the importance of worshipping only the Lord and end with a warning against selfish desire. To what extent is our selfish desire in the background of all these commandments? How do we get from the negatives (of having to be stopped from doing the wrong thing) to the positive qualities that ought to characterise our lives all the time?

Understanding Buddhism



This religion was founded by Gotama who lived from about 566 to 486 BC. in north eastern India.

He was born a prince and his father was determined to keep him from life’s painful experiences. So he was brought up in sheltered surroundings.

However, the female attendants began to tell him about the delightful groves near the city, so the young prince decided to make a journey outside the palace. In spite of the king’s runners, Gotama saw three sights – a diseased man, an old man and a corpse. “Verily this world has fallen upon trouble – one is born, and grows old, and dies, and falls from one state, and springs up in another. And from this suffering, moreover, no one knows of any way of escape, even from decay and death. O, when shall a way of escape from this suffering be made known – from decay and death?”

Later he saw a religious beggar and decided to set out on a homeless life. According to the story, he returned to the palace, reflecting on what he had seen, then left without bidding anyone farewell. He was seeking freedom from the wheel of rebirth and, since desire causes both suffering and rebirth, his renunciation of his status as a prince and as husband and father (he was married at the time) was necessary if he was to achieve enlightenment.

After several fruitless attempts, he finally reached enlightenment under a Bo-tree, becoming “the Buddha” (the enlightened one). Aware that he was now living his last existence on earth, he determined not to enter Nirvana directly, but to proclaim the *dharma* (law) that he had discovered. His first disciples were five beggars and his preaching continued for the next forty years. He founded monasteries for both men and women.

Buddhist teaching rests on four “excellent truths”: all existence involves suffering; suffering is caused by desire; suffering can be ended if desire can be conquered; and there is an eightfold path to the conquering of desire.

The path consists of right views, intentions, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. To this is added an elaborate monastic discipline.

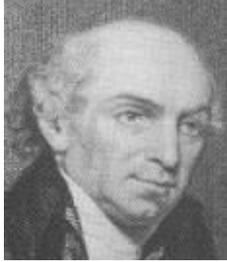
The Classical Buddhist scriptures (*Tripitaka*, the three baskets) are written in Pali, a dialect of Sanskrit.

The great historical division among Buddhists is between the conservative or *Theravada* (way of elders) school and the comprehensive or *Mahayana* (great vehicle) school. Theravada – also called *Hinayana* (little vehicle) because its opponents maintained that it offered salvation only to monks – is strongest in the South (Ceylon, etc.), Mahayana in the North (formerly Tibet and China, now mainly Japan). Theravada is atheistic in principle; Mahayana has sometimes tended to reckon the Buddha as a saviour-god.

Buddhism acknowledges the reality of neither God nor the soul; all is constant flux, and personality is an illusion. The doctrine of rebirth is assumed. Buddhism in its various forms (Zen, etc.) has seemed attractive to quite a number of people in the West.

William Carey 1761-1834

William Carey was the son of an English weaver. He had limited formal schooling and was apprenticed to a shoemaker. His interests were broader than perfecting a skilled craft. He began studying the New Testament and Greek during his apprenticeship. In 1785 he began full-time ministry at the Baptist church in Moulton.



Carey had personal interests in travel and geography - was intrigued with accounts of exploration and read with fascination the volumes of Captain Cook's Voyages. He became deeply concerned about the many peoples who had not heard of Christ. In a Baptist

ministerial meeting at Northampton in 1786, he raised the issue of the Great Commission and its application for modern times. The reaction was immediate and harsh. The very suggestion that these ministers were in some way responsible to "teach all nations" was ridiculed as the fantasy of an enthusiast. They believed that God would use supernatural means to evangelise the unreached tribes and nations. So Carey was publicly rebuked.

In the months that followed he worked on an eighty-seven-page treatise with the (shortened!) title *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. This was published in 1792. Opening with a concise Scriptural defense of missions, he proceeded to cite mission work throughout church history from the earliest apostles to the Moravians and John Wesley. He then went on to present statistical tables surveying the countries of the world - their populations, land size, and religions - and to answer the arguments against the practicality of foreign missions. In the final chapter, he outlined a strategy for missions and dealt with such issues as sprayer support, denominational cooperation, finances, and the quality of recruits.

The *Enquiry*, though significant in missionary literature, was not widely read or circulated when first printed. What gave the work credibility was Carey's personal demonstration of his concern for missions, his example as a volunteer for the inaugural operation of the Baptist Missionary Society, formed some months after the publication of the *Enquiry*. In a sermon from Isaiah, Carey had challenged his fellow pastors of the local Baptist Association to broaden their horizons of ministry, to "expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." It was a moving sermon, but most of the pastors lacked vision. It was the commitment of Andrew Fuller to the cause that led to the official organisation of the new mission society.

Carey, with a physician, John Thomas, became the first missionary under the society, setting sail with his wife and young family for India in 1793. The early years in India, living in a malaria-infested marsh outside Calcutta, were very trying. Housing was inadequate, as was the food supply and health care. After seven years of struggling to establish a ministry, Carey was unable to claim even one Indian convert. He had, however, acquired a remarkable grasp of the language, had translated large portions of the New Testament into

Bengali, had planted a tiny non-Indian church and had made the name of Christ known throughout much of Northern Bengal.

In 1800 he moved his base to Serampore, a Danish colony out of reach of the troublesome East India Company. By 1803 there were twenty-five converts. Still, the work was slow. After a quarter of a century the number of baptised converts did not exceed seven hundred.

The centrality of the Scripture to world evangelism was powerfully demonstrated throughout Carey's long missionary career. With the help of Indian teachers he made six translations of the entire Bible and translated the New Testament and portions of Scripture into nearly thirty additional languages. Another priority was the necessity of establishing an indigenous church. Carey has been called the "father of modern missions," not just because of his own personal involvement, but because of the role he played in turning the tide of Protestant thought in favour of foreign missions.

Next Week: Christian Lifestyle

- Psalm 1
- Matthew 5.13-16
- Matthew 5.17-20
- Matthew 5.21-48
- Matthew 6.1-18
- Matthew 6.19-34
- Matthew 7.1-27

