

Antioch School *Growing Disciples*

Christian Basics 7 Christian Lifestyle

Christian Lifestyle

It has been important for us to clarify our values as Christians. We live in a world where so many set their own values because they have no belief in anything or anyone outside themselves. This is our environment and the prevailing values of those about us can easily seep into our thinking and living. We need to refuse to be carried along in the stream and choose to translate the eternal standards into our life today.

But, in affirming that there are absolute values, we must keep in mind the reason for revelation. Essentially, God has revealed, not just rules, but himself. Eternal life (which is what the Christian life is all about) is knowing God through redemption (John 17.3).

As a driver, there are many rules that I must know and keep. I am required to drive on the left. That's the rule in our country – in many other countries it's different! It is not just that an over-officious policeman might get at me for driving on the wrong side. The rule is there, not to spoil my enjoyment of driving, but for my own sake and the sake of other drivers. Take the "give way" rule as another example. There have

been some variations on this rule from state to state. This has been potentially serious, since it is important that everyone abide by the same rules. Why? Isn't that just being restrictive? Not at all! The rules enable everyone to have the enjoyment and/or necessity of driving.

Similarly with the rules of living. They are not arbitrary, as if to say, "Don't do this! You'll get it in the day of judgment if you fail to obey!" Rules are part of the key to living. Failure to keep rules will have an effect on our happiness in this life, not just when we come to the end!

The Quest for Happiness

Many people are looking for happiness in itself, without realising that happiness is the byproduct of other things and especially of our relationship to God.

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with some familiar sayings on happiness. They are usually called the

Most people think:

Happy are those who have high self-esteem – they have got it made!

Happy are those who gloss over their mistakes – they will have inner peace!

Happy are the domineering and assertive – they will get their own way!

Happy are those with strong personal ambition – they will achieve their goals!

Happy are the unforgiving – they will get ahead!

Happy are those who know the latest ideas – others will think highly of them!

Happy are those who eliminate all opposition – they will make their mark in the world!

Happy are those who fulfil the expectations of the present age – the world is at their feet!

Beatitudes – in the Latin Vulgate each of them opens "Beati..." They stand in contrast with many prevailing ideas!

What is the difference between the prevailing attitudes of our day and the radical teaching of Jesus? We notice that the former places heavy emphasis on self-fulfilment. By contrast Jesus constantly couples our happiness to God and how we relate to him.

We see this clearly in 6.24-34 where Jesus notes the futility (and worry) resulting from the search for happiness in food, drink and clothes – a very basic level of quest! "Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things" (v.33). Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions*, "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

Our view of happiness depends so much on control of our environment and circumstances. However, the consistent impression as we read the life of Jesus is that he was calm and serene no matter how unlikely or even hostile the circumstances. Of no fixed abode (Luke 9.58), he was calm in the storm-tossed boat (Mark 4.35-41) and before Pilate (Matthew 27.14). Even on the cross, he was concerned with others and not himself (John 19.25-27; Luke 23.39-43).

But Jesus said,

Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor – the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

Happy are those who mourn – God will comfort them!

Happy are those who are humble – they will receive what God has promised!

Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires – God will satisfy them fully!

Happy are those who are merciful to others – God will be merciful to them!

Happy are the pure in heart – they will see God!

Happy are those who work for peace – God will call them his children!

Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires – the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them! (Matthew 5.3-10)

So true happiness comes, not as we seek happiness, but as we seek the Kingdom, as we become attuned to the will of God, as our lives express his presence and purposes. So the eight characteristics that we call the Beatitudes relate to the Kingdom and to those who are part of the Kingdom.

The spiritually poor are those who know their need of God's forgiveness and grace. Jesus illustrated the principle in the story about the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18.9-14).

The Pharisee came with no apparent awareness of any need of God except to pat him on the shoulder. The tax collector came in full recognition of his sinfulness – with guilt and uncertainty and no claim to a place with God. He went home "in the right with God." This last point is important. Paul, late in his ministry, was still aware of himself as "the worst of sinners", but as the recipient of the "abundant grace and mercy" of God (1 Timothy 1.14-16). We cannot function properly with low self-esteem. The Kingdom of heaven belongs to the ones who have come empty-handed to God and live in the awareness that he has forgiven and accepted them.

Those who mourn are emotionally sensitive and feel pain over their own sins and the sins of society. The Lord said through his prophet Joel, "Repent sincerely and return to me with fasting and weeping and mourning. Let your broken heart show your sorrow; tearing your clothes

is not enough. Come back to the Lord your God. He is kind and full of mercy; he is patient and keeps his promise; he is always ready to forgive and not punish” (2.12-13). Jesus mourned over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19.41,42). His mourning for human sin took him to the cross. Because of his mourning, there is comfort for those who mourn.

The humble, not the domineering and assertive, “will receive what God has promised.” We don’t put a great deal of store on humility. We cannot see the strength of humility. Think of the humility of Jesus (Philippians 2.8). We have bleached all the colour out of our view of his character and see him too much as the “pale Galilean.” We think of him, not only calling people, “Come to me... and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11.28), but also saying, “How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites!” (23.13-39). Hear this incredible word from Paul, “No one, then, should boast about what men can do. Actually everything belongs to you...” (1 Corinthians 3.21).

Those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires are the same people mentioned in the previous three beatitudes. Their spiritual poverty, mourning and humility are not negative. Their desire is positive and active. But their motivation is not selfish ambition but “what God requires.” I am not suggesting that a Christian is a person without ambition. But what is the central motivation of our lives?

The merciful will receive God’s mercy. Jesus was concerned to emphasise this principle. After his teaching on prayer, he added, “If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done” (Matthew 6.14-15). Jesus’ story about the unforgiving servant forcefully makes the same point (18.21-35). Our own need for the mercy of God has implications for all of our attitudes to other people. This is not to diminish the responsibility that parents, school teachers, magistrates and others may have in the exercise of authority and discipline.

The pure in heart are those whose words and actions spring from inner wholeness (holiness). The Psalmist saw that the person who would go into the presence of God must have “clean hands and a pure heart” (24.4 NIV). There have been many people, past and present, who have wanted “clean hands” without a “pure heart”. A striking example of this is seen in the encounter of Jesus with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law in Matthew 15. Jesus made it clear that ceremonial cleansing cannot touch the heart and the life will continue to be polluted from within. The pure in heart will see God (note 1 John 1.5-2.2; 3.2,3).

Those who work for peace will be called the children of God. God desires a restoration of relationships – reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5.19-20). The Biblical view of peace (*shalom* in Hebrew) is always a positive quality of wholeness, well-being and prosperity. Peace is destroyed by injustice, oppression, cruelty, sin... Cessation of war does not correct these things. Peacemaking can be costly – think of what Jesus went through to establish our peace!

Those who are persecuted because they do what God requires have gained what is more important than anything else – the Kingdom of heaven. The result of doing what God requires may well be persecution. We are not to go around looking for it. Remember the words of the model prayer, “Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One” (6.13). Doing what God requires, living by consistent Christian values – this is most important for us, but may bring us into conflict with the prevailing values of our time. We forget that the Word – Jesus – “came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him” (John 1.11). In fact, they nailed him to a cross! The message about Christ crucified “is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1.23-24).

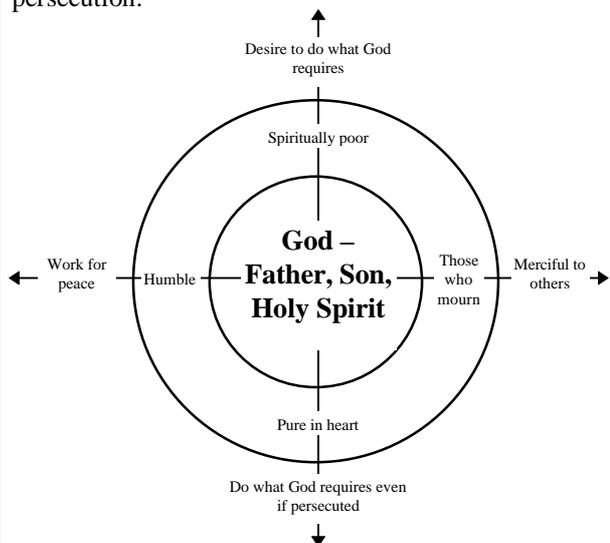
The Christian Lifestyle

Thinking about these eight statements of Jesus, always remember that they are Kingdom qualities. In reflecting on them, keep in mind that, if we are Christians, God himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – resides within us (John 14.23-26). Some of these qualities relate especially to our inner life, our life with God – our inner personhood, if you like. That is the part of us that God alone sees and knows. Other qualities relate to our actions, our association with others – our outer personhood. This is what other people see us to be.

We ought not to be too rigid about this division, but it is helpful to see these qualities in relation to one another.

Inner person | spiritually poor | mourn | humble | pure in heart
Outer person | desire to do | merciful | peacemaking | persecuted

Those who know they are spiritually poor but forgiven and accepted by God have an intense desire to do his will. Those who mourn over their own sins do not only receive God’s comfort themselves but become the merciful ones. Those who are humble become the peacemakers. The pure in heart, because of their commitment to doing God’s will, do what God requires, even if it means persecution.



In the time of Jesus there were people for whom religion was a big show. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting were three important religious duties and they did them all in a way that drew attention to themselves. Jesus called them “hypocrites” – the Greek word means “play

actors” (Matthew 6.2,5,16). Their inner personhood and their outer personhood just didn’t correspond.

It has not been possible here to deal with everything that needs to be part of our lifestyle – there are many aspects that will vary from person to person! What is important, however, is that the life of God by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and Spirit of God within us will transform us from within and flow out into every aspect of our lives. This will lead us to less dependence on possessions, a simpler kind of life, a greater desire to give, a greater care for people, and a whole collection of practical qualities. All because we are allowing the life of God within to permeate the rest of our life.

For reflection...

The Beatitudes focus our attention on a “Kingdom lifestyle” with happiness as a by-product. This is in sharp contrast with the prevailing attitudes of our day. To what extent is happiness itself the primary goal of our life?

What are the basic differences between what “most people think” and what “Jesus said”?

Reflect on the diagram at the end of the previous page. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is at the centre. The Beatitudes are grouped in terms of those that relate especially to our “inner personhood” – our inner life, our life with God – and to our “outer personhood” – our actions, our associations with others. Recognising that this is not meant to be a rigid division, how helpful do you find it?

- What is the relation between spiritual poverty and the desire to do what God requires?
- Think again about mourning and about the quality of mercy. How can the mourners also become the merciful ones?
- Why might the humble be fitting peacemakers?

- Sometimes “purity of heart” has been separated from action. But true purity of heart will always be committed to action. What does purity of heart mean for us? How would we react under persecution?
- The axes of our diagram are significant. The vertical axis related to the doing of God’s will; the horizontal to our relationship with others. Yet the centre is God himself. When asked about the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind,” to which he added, “Love your neighbour as you love yourself” (Matthew 22.37-40). Think again about the Beatitudes in the light of the Law of Love.

Understanding Seventh-Day Adventism

Seventh-Day Adventism is a religious denomination that grew from the work of William Miller (d.1849) who began to preach that the end of the world was at hand, that a fiery conflagration would usher in the new heaven and the new earth, and that the date for this would be sometime between 21st March 1843 and 21st March 1844. The deadline passed and another date was set: 22nd October 1844. A general apocalyptic fervour aided to the group, and it soon had between 50,000 and 100,000 adherents. The new date passed, and the early Millerite fervour was largely diminished. A few, however, continued to believe that the end was near.

Other adventists believed that the Second Coming had been hindered by their failure to maintain the O.T. law of keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath. The emphasis on Sabbath-keeping was also established by visions, especially those of Ellen G. White (d.1915), whose importance to the movement cannot be overstressed. In her account of one of her early visions, she writes of being carried in the Spirit into the Holy City and being shown by Jesus the stone tables of the law – “On one table were written four, and on the other six. The four on the first table shone brighter than the other six. But the fourth, the Sabbath commandment, shone above them all; for the Sabbath was set apart to be kept in honour of God’s holy name. The holy Sabbath looked glorious – a halo of glory was all around it” (*Early Writings*, pp.32-33).

There have been significant changes in doctrinal emphasis across the years, so that the Adventism of today consciously seeks to be accepted as a Christian denomination rather than a sect group. Walter Martin writes, “It is my conviction that one cannot be a true Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Christian Scientist, Unitarian, Spiritist, etc., and be a Christian in the Biblical sense of the term; but it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-Day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ despite certain heterodox concepts...” (*The*

Kingdom of the Cults, 1984, p.409). Martin acknowledges that not all would agree with this viewpoint.

The major problem is their view that the Kingdom and purposes of God focus on their church and ministry alone. When the Adventist message has been proclaimed throughout the world and their church has grown to its predetermined size, then the end of the age will come. At that time, so they teach, the righteous dead will be raised and together with the righteous living will be taken to heaven, where they will spend the Millennium. While believers enjoy heavenly bliss, Satan will be left on earth for 1000 years. At the end of this time, Christ will descend with his saints, destroy the wicked with fire, and create a new earth with the New Jerusalem as its centre.

Adventists insist on the proper care of the body, abstaining from foods forbidden in the Old Testament, such as pork, ham and shellfish; do not smoke or drink; and are involved in programmes to help those who wish to give up those habits. The church also opposes secret societies, card playing, gambling, the use of jewellery and cosmetics and “worldly entertainments.”

Martin Luther 1483-1546



Martin Luther was born on November 10th 1483 in Eisleben, Saxony. He received a traditional medieval early education. Some of his teachers were connected with the Brethren of the Common Life, a lay order concerned with education for devout Christian living. He studied at the University of Erfurt, receiving his B.A. in 1502 and M.A. in 1505.

Luther commenced legal studies, but soon abandoned them to take up the monastic life. In the monastery of the Augustinian hermits in Erfurt, he devoted himself to study, prayer and penance. In his search for God he wearied his priest with his confessions and punished himself with prolonged periods of prayer, fasting, sleepless nights, and flagellation.

His wise and godly superior, Staupitz, directed him away from excessive introspection towards the study of the Bible in the original Hebrew and Greek.

Luther was ordained a priest in 1507, taught at the universities of Wittenberg and Erfurt (1508-1511), and in 1512 received his doctoral degree. In receiving his degree and becoming a professor, he took a traditional vow faithfully to teach and defend the Scripture.

Returning as a professor to Wittenberg in 1512, he began his lectures on the Bible – Psalms (1513-1515),

Romans (1515-1516), Galatians (1517), Hebrews (1517-1518). These books were basic in shaping the thought of the future Reformer.

He was not only a scholar but a pastor, with regular preaching duties and pastoral care.

In 1517 he became concerned about the abuses in the sale of indulgences. Technically, indulgences were a payment, as part of the act of penance, to remove or reduce the other requirements so that a person could be forgiven. Since the later fifteenth century, pope had authorised indulgences for souls in purgatory as well as for the living. As pastor and theologian Luther objected,

and in response wrote his “95 Theses,” which he nailed to the church door in Wittenberg. (This was a traditional way of inviting the academic community to discuss an issue.) This led to numerous debates which helped to clarify his views on religious authority. In the Leipzig Disputation in July 1519 with John Eck, he publicly recognised that the Bible alone, not popes or councils, was invariably true and reliable.

These events expressed his internal development. In his 1545 preface to his Latin writings, Luther recalled his dramatic conversion. He had long been troubled spiritually with the righteousness of God. In spite of all the sacramental grace offered by the medieval church, he still knew he fell short of God’s standard.

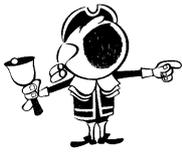
One day he was wrestling with the problem in terms of Romans 1.17. How could the revelation of God’s righteousness be good news? Suddenly he saw that the gospel is the good news that, in Christ, God gives the righteousness demanded in the law. God imputes, or reckons, the perfect righteousness of Christ to sinners who receive it by faith. This insight is the essence of Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith. Faith, or trust in the promises of Christ, alone justifies, because faith alone receives and rests in Christ’s imputed righteousness.

In January 1521 Luther was excommunicated and in April appeared before Charles V at the imperial diet meeting at Wörms. He refused to recant, saying that “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.”

Throughout his life, Luther exerted a moderating influence on possible extremes in the Reformation. He died at Eisleben on February 15th 1546.



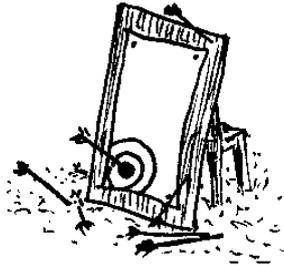
1483 Born Eisleben	1525 Married Katharine
1507 Ordained as priest	1529 Marburg Colloquy
1508-11 Taught Wittenberg and Erfurt universities	1530 Augsburg Confession
1512 Awarded doctorate	1534 Publication of complete German Bible
1517 Posted “95 Theses”	1546 Died Eisleben
1519 Leipzig disputation	
1521 Diet of Wörms	



Extra!!! Getting Rid of that Discrepancy

Try as he would, the little boy was having trouble. He couldn't get his arrow to hit the bull's eye on the target he had set up in the back yard. Sometimes he went right over the target, but most often he was too short. Occasionally, he landed on the target - down in the bottom corner.

It was very frustrating. Having made his own bow and arrows, he wanted to prove to himself and to his family what a good shot he was. He stopped and thought for a good while. At last he came up with a new idea. He put a piece of blank paper on the target and kept shooting until his arrow hit it. Then he carefully drew his bull's eye and circles around the arrow.



Excitedly, he called his mother. "Look, Mum! I got a bull's eye!"

Not very satisfactory, even for a boy! Deep inside, when you do something like that, you still know that you haven't made it! You're not fooling anyone really!

And as Christians, we become seriously discouraged about what our lives are and what they are meant to be. If we have never felt that, perhaps we have been drawing our own target around our achievements!

Paul makes the excited assertion that "When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 1.17). Then we look at ourselves and become painfully aware that there still seems to be too much of the old and not enough of the new!

We need to realise that the devil (the name Satan means "opponent") is not just the tempter, but the accuser. Whereas the Holy Spirit brings to mind the work of Christ, the devil is constantly out to bring discouragement by reminding us of our sins, our failings, our weakness... He emphasises the old that remains, gloats over it, underlines the discrepancy between what we are and what we should be... We recognise the truth in the accusation that fills our mind and can easily sink into a state of spiritual depression.

He is, of course, also the liar and father of lies. Whenever he uses the truth, it is only the half-truth, the truth without reference to God and what God has done.

Looking back to 2 Corinthians 5 we can be quite overwhelmed about our lives - and fail to see what God has done! Listen to what Paul is saying - Christ "died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake" (v.15). Because Christ has died for all, Paul cannot regard anyone "by human standards" (v.16). Why? Because, "when anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being"! God "through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends" (v.18). The new has come!

So here are some important affirmations to go over consciously when you feel the discouragement of the

accuser. God loves me. You can affirm that absolutely. Christ died for my sins. Is the accuser saying that I'm not a very good Christian, that I am a miserable sinner? I cannot glory in my sins, but I will glory in the cross of Christ who died for sinners like me! I believe in Jesus. I am a new person in him - God has made me his friend.

"All this is done by God," Paul says in v.18a. I am simply affirming what God has done. I am not making myself out to be perfect or suggesting that God just had to accept me because I am so good! Indeed, it is not the excellence or strength of my faith in him, but simply that I allow him to hold me.

At the end of Romans 7, Paul gives a graphic description of his own spiritual struggle. Bible students have long questioned whether this experience was before or after he became a Christian. He expresses a deep sense of defeat - "I don't do the good I want to do, instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do... What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?" (vv.19,24). He is quick to affirm his thanks "to God who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (v.25a). He knows that "there is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus" (8.1).

He then goes on to speak of two principles which we can choose to follow - human nature or the Spirit (vv.5-11). Turn from the accuser to God. Allow the Spirit's assurance to well up within you - "Father! my Father!" (vv.15-16). You have made me your child and I choose to allow your Spirit control in my life.

In his first letter John makes it clear that the purpose of God is that there be no sin in our lives. "God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him. If, then, we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in the darkness, we are lying both in our words and in our actions. But if we live in the light - just as he is in the light - then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin" (1.5b-7). Adam and Eve ran away to hide from God, and that is our instinctive reaction. Our reaction should be, I choose to live in your light! Purify me from my sin!

John then goes on to acknowledge that all of us have sin in our lives - "But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing" (v.9). I confess my sin to you, Father. Purify me from my sin!

Note that the accuser endeavours at all times to separate us from God, to make us forget what Christ has done, to draw us away from the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit. John emphasises the "fellowship" we need - fellowship with one another and with God. That is the context in which the discrepancy in our lives will be removed.

Next Week: Christian Lifestyle

- Matthew 24.1-14
- Matthew 24.15-28
- Matthew 24.29-35
- Matthew 24.36-51
- Acts 1.6-11
- 2 Peter 3.1-16
- 1 Thessalonians 3.13-5.11