



Worshipping Excellence
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PREFACE

Mera Bharat Mahaan

THE GREAT INDIAN PHYSICO

God in India

Worship—Building a relationship with God?

Pursuing Excellence is not to be a Quest for Superiority

Pursuing Excellence should not be limited by the Nature of the Task

Pursuing Excellence Is a Matter of Choosing the Best

Pursuing Excellence Is a Matter of a Whole-Hearted Endeavour

The Role of Attitude in the Pursuit of Excellence

HOW CAN I DO IT?

Conclusion

PREFACE

'Be Indian buy Indian' remember this maxim? A lot of water has flown under the bridge since Independence; the so - called **"Pillars of Democracy"** of the yesteryears are today are regarded as those filled with the **'Papers by Bureaucracy'**. The mantra in today's government is 'disinvestment'. It has become highly fashionable to talk of re-orientation, attitude revitalisation and training. The Mantra today is "India on the Move!". It is also true that India generates the fastest millionaires in the world today, every thing is looking great and bright.

Has this enthusiasm, permeated across the strata of population? Does rural India have hope? Let us also make a small commitment in doing our little bit to give rural India hope.

India Inc. perhaps has a vision statement, and a mission statement too, the question is how many of us have really committed ourselves to its Value Statement.

Dr. A.P. J. Abdul Kalam has made invaluable contributions in defining the Vision and Value statements of our Mother Land, but for reasons best known to India Inc these have largely been ignored and consigned in the mountain's of files maintained by the government

The stark truth is, the government alone cannot make India regain its past Glory.

Hence my appeal is, realise that the onus is on us to move the Country forward---all of us can and only we can.

Let us make a concerted effort in imbuing excellence in all our activities and thus help create a new generation of citizens who “ Worship Excellence”,the only way to regain its past glory.

Mera Bharat Mahaan

Like every Indian I firmly believed that no other Country could boast of citizens more patriotic than those in India. The truth was revealed when I happened to visit another Country for a four-week training. I was initially surprised to see every factory or company (all are private enterprise there mind you!) having their Country's flag flying high on their premises. It was more surprising to see some earmarked employee coming early in the morning every day at the appointed hour, to hoist the flag and pay respects to it! Can we imagine such an open demonstration of Patriotism in any private or government enterprise here in our Country? Well take the government establishments, there are a section of people who claim Overtime allowance if they are asked to come for saluting the National flag on the two days!! That is as far as the concept of Mera Bharat Mahaan is concerned .

Can we afford to remain mute spectators to this decay of National Pride in EVERY DAY LIFE? Must we rise as one nation only at times of crises? Do we need calamities and wars to keep our Country United?

What perhaps is missing is the Spirit in the pursuit of Excellence.

THE GREAT INDIAN PHYSICO

I studied in an Anglo Indian school for the major part of my school days, I still remember what my Tamil Teacher told me.. His explanation of an average Indian's physiology was " For most of us, what the White Man says is gospel truth, the sight of a Black man scares the wits out of us, the Arabs because of their handsome looks make us jealous,". " When will we really be proud that we are unbeatable Indians?"

Friends, nearly thirty years have passed since he made this statement I still find that we have not been able to rediscover our past glory.

I find today that the average Indian is caught between his spiritual wisdom and material obsessions. Religion and GOD still dominates the core Indian's mind. The thirst for knowledge, wealth and happiness also looms large in the foreground. Lack of education, superstition all add to the confusion.

We can make a SWOT analysis, of our Nation and prove in a Seminar with the help of a Power Point Presentation (conducted in a Five Star Hotel!) that Poverty is on the bane, to add spice the economists will also say the Country's economy is booming, experts will also point out that our scientific endeavour is reaching the highest levels of excellence, now the question we must ask ourselves today is – 'Whether all these fellow citizens responsible for this success of the country achieved all this alone? Whether the Vision of India Inc has reached the grassroots? Do the majority believe about better times ahead?

Have you ever thought why Africa with all its poverty & corruption is able to produce more humans who pursue excellence than in India?

What is it that we lack? Well people say we lack the 'Killing Instinct' – is it true?

Now does not killing mean termination of life or matter? Do our core value systems accept such a theory? Is it wrong to earn wealth? Do we give up easily? If so, why? Do we care for quality? Do we care for discipline? Do we really believe that we can change this Country? Do we commit our selves to excellence? Let us try to answer these questions by going into some the fundamental beliefs and values we hold. The idea here is to examine whether we as responsible citizens have given back to our Nation the Best of our efforts.

God in India

It would be hypocritical to say that Religion is a non-issue in our country. The number of Swamis, church workers, mullahs and Imams are perhaps the highest in our Country. Many say that religion is one of the prime causes of failure in achieving excellence, since there is over dependence on God, a confused understanding of the word Detachment etc. Unfortunately the truth lies elsewhere. Our prime reason for failure to achieve is the lack of commitment to excellence.

GOD . Perhaps there is no other word that has created stronger emotions and influenced people. Let us try to demystify this word.. Take your self back by a few thousand years.. You see the stars, the moon, the sun, rainy days bringing lightening followed by thunder. The quest for inquiry is limited to a very few and the majority are governed by Instincts. As a child wonders about the moon and stars you too would be wondering who they are? This inquiry then translated in various explanations, leading to astrology etc.

What would you have done if caught alone in a deep forest on a rainy day? Do the same thing what you would do if you were caught all alone in a stormy night, seek shelter and hope for better times. All men are not physically equal, as you know the prime worth of the ancient man was judged only by his physical strength hence , the sense of fear and respect of brute physical strength slowly got drilled into the human's mind. The foundations of Worship were thus based on fear. Naturally Mother Nature's fury was the biggest of them all, so began the worship of Mother Nature in all her manifestations. Can you really fault our ancestors for this?

Since men were not physically equal, the concepts of rulers and subjects gradually developed, we have studied in history instances where the Kings were worshipped as GOD. Now these leaders were the founder fathers of Management, they knew that God's anger meant fearful destruction and every human was scared of this God's anger, so in order to ensure order in the society, we had many Gods. The people

did not destroy many things named as Gods for the fear of incurring their wrath, look at it this way we must really praise our ancient leaders for their forethought in conservation of Nature. Then comes religion and the way of life, a few religions ask you to seek the God within you while others ask you to seek the kingdom of heaven externally. Here I would like to mention about the wisdom of the ancient Tamils, do you know that the tamil word for God is “ Kadavul ”the ‘Ka’ pronounced as in Kabul, ‘da’ as in dart and ‘vul’ as in Wolf . It simply means one who is outside you and also within you, I am not aware of a more beautiful explanation of God than this. If you have read books on religion they tell you about the universal presence of the Almighty, let me tell you one thing for sure, the concept of God is one of the most noblest and is also the most difficult to understand. All rationalists say man created God, but I only ask so what, the concept is beautiful, its goals are noble, its purpose is to peacefully co-exist so why not seek God. As the scientific quests developed, the GOD was condemned and thus began the destruction of Nature.

The question is, do we blame God or man. Many dismiss those seeking God as Lazy incompetent people, my answer to those sceptics is “ well those seeking god are only those who dare to conquer and control their Minds”. All of us appreciate, wonder and applaude physical achievements but then why not extend the same courtesy for those who are willing to attempt it on a mental plane? Science has proved that two fundamental emotions are prime drivers for all humans, the Sexual energy and the sense of fear, must we not bow respectfully to such people who have conquered these senses, which are the most difficult of all senses?. One may put forth an argument that cutting off the relevant hormones supply can suppress the sexual energy , may be so, then what about fear, one may say he is fearless, have you really experienced fear? I have enough of real account experiences of War, ask any who soldier was in the thick of battle you will then understand what fear means, if even this does not convince you then let me ask you another question , Would like to marry your daughter off to a person who says be likes

to blast the brains of the enemy? Well by any standards such a person is not accepted in the society hence the sense of fear is a very strong factor responsible for many of our actions. Terrorists carrying out suicide attacks are known to consume drugs for suppressing fear. What is really gained by conquering these senses? fair enough, then what is also gained by running a 100meter dash sub 10 seconds?.What is gained then by trying to climb Mt. Everest?. What is gained at attempting some things that seem impossible for most? Since you know the answer I don't want to go further. Let us be brave and honest to accept one fact, that as humans we consciously or subs consciously need a guide or a guru – teacher or Mentor, call what you may and we also love showing respect to such persons whom we consider worthy. The fact, human beings need a god has been proved by the fact that Buddhism containing the teachings of Buddha degraded to levels where humans now finally have started worshipping him as God. Now do you hold God or Buddha responsible for it? Let us accept the brute truth humans need

God whether God needs humans or not. Let's not waste time further in trying to analyse about the existence of God, he is there very much in front of you and in you!

I therefore make my appeal to all of you to not to confuse GOD as coming in your way of striving for excellence. Nothing prevents us from leading a noble life and committing ourselves to those noble virtues attributed to God whom, we will try to realise through the path of Worshipping excellence.

Worship—Building a relationship with God?

The dictionary definition of worship suggests that worship is an old English word. Worship is better read as “Worth - Ship”, and therefore the worship of God should be giving God the “worth” that he deserves!

This has become an umbrella word to cover the aspects of our relationship with God. Whether this is right or wrong is only what we make our relationship with God! Is praise not

part of worship? Is not thanksgiving part of worship? Is not prayer part of worship? Is not faith part of worship? It is not pursuit of excellence a part of worship?

Let's start at the beginning; what is He worth to me? At this point, one needs to look at the value systems. There is a need to understand where my place is, as a person in "the great order of things". If I have no self-worth then it is unlikely that God will be worth anything to me. Consider - if I see myself as so lowly that I am or feel useless, not good for anything - am I worth saving?

If God is who He says He is, then I should have a problem with that - He made me the way I am (excluding sin and all the baggage that I have allowed to get added with what He created).

There is no point in looking at developing "worship" if there is nothing obtained that cannot be gained elsewhere.

Praising the Almighty is a very conscious thing. It is not automatic, it isn't optional, it isn't something done on a whim.

Normally it is related to consciously putting one's whole being into worship of God, so as to help oneself. Listing the things that God does for him is one of the most common reasons why worship/praise of the Almighty is accounted for, be it for a happy life on earth or lot of wealth or it could be even realisation of 'Brahma' or the ultimate truth. Is then worship coming down to relationship? Does my relationship with God determine everything? If all I see is a righteous, holy, and judgmental God, we miss the loving and gracious God.

So when I worship God, can I say that I hit the very heart of God? Is my worship ceiling limited or is it heaven bound?

Long distance relationships rarely work, are always dissatisfying and always second best. Is my worship accompanied by healing or by signs and wonders, dreams and visions, or prophecy and so forth? If not, then my worship may not be based on a real relationship.

Now again if God only talks to me through the Scriptures then is that a relationship like a pen pal?

You may be saying 'Hello' what has Relationship with God got to do with this book on worshipping excellence? Well friend let me tell you unless we absorb /understand and realise the entire meaning of the two words – Worship & excellence then we would have missed a point!

So again I repeat what worship means to you and to me may not be the same, mentioning the word could bring spontaneous thoughts on GOD, Nature's Beauty, Your Work, or 'Guru' , Mentor etc, once you have decided what this word relates you with, then the next step is to examine that relationship through self analysis.

Looking into one's self means again making a "curry in your mind" with thoughts borne out of, your parentage, environment, philosophy, religion, which have influenced your upbringing.

Worship to a large percentage of humans means something relating to the divine or in other words, building up a rapport with the 'Supreme Being' using the methods handed over to

you. As humans we must not criticise this very personal relationship a fellow human being tries to establish with GOD. Misusing GOD for attainment of personal wealth by some, deserves condemnation, but only after you have cleared yourself after all dirt!

Religion plays a very important part in defining these relationships let us now look at Hinduism:-

A fine summary of what Worship or 'Bhakti' means is given below :- (Extracts from Swami Vivekananda's speeches/ lectures)

“ There are four general types of men- the rational, the emotional, the mystical and the worker. For each of these we must provide suitable forms if worship. There comes the rational man, who says 'I care not for this form of worship. Give me the philosophical, the rational- that I can appreciate' so for the rational man is the rational philosophic worship. There comes the worker. He says ' I care not for the worship

of the philosopher, give me work to do for my fellow men' so for him is provided work as the path of worship.

Every man must develop according to his own nature. As every science has its methods, so has every religion. The goal and the methods employed for reaching the ultimate – re-union with God could be different but the final result is the same.

The methods employed for reaching this goal are called 'Yoga'. In English 'Yoke' means 'to join' here it means to join with God, well the question would be where? In heaven or in earth or realise the God within!!

So for all practical purposes lets take God to mean--- Truth, Mother Nature, Your Mentor, The urge for discovering one's self, intellectual honesty, lack of greed, empathy, Love for ones Mother land, Commitment to quality & pursuit of excellence.

Let us now try to understand 'Excellence' in its full form

Definition of Excellence(NOUN):

1. The state, quality, or condition of excelling; superiority.
2. Something in which one excels.
3. Possessing good qualities in high degree

Spiritual maturity is a quest for character for which there will be little progress without the pursuit of excellence. Without pursuing excellence, life will remain bland, lukewarm at best .The quest for excellence fuels our fire and keeps us from just drifting downstream gathering debris. The pursuit of excellence must be motivated by the right values, priorities, and motives. If we go astray here, the pursuit of excellence can quickly become a mark of immaturity and just another result of man's obsession with his own significance.

Pursuing Excellence is not to be a Quest for Superiority

In the first definition in *The American Heritage Dictionary*, **excellence** is defined as “The state, quality, or condition of excelling; superiority. The word *excel* is defined as, “to do or be better than; surpass; to show superiority, surpass others.” Then under the word *excel*, the following terms are listed and explained as synonyms for excel.

The words *excel*, *surpass*, *exceed*, *transcend*, *outdo*, *outstrip* all suggest the concept of going beyond a limit or standard or in other words – competition and being better than others form the foundations. However we must think of the pursuit of excellence from a different standpoint is that what is meant? Those who approach or look at life from the viewpoint of the world typically think in terms of competition, of outstripping others, but such is usually done for one’s own glory or significance or for the praise and applause of men.

So then, what the *pursuit of excellence* refers to is, pursuing and doing the best we can with the gifts and abilities God gives, giving our best to the glory of God. But ideally, it is done without the spirit of competition or seeking to excel simply to be better than others. Excellence includes doing common, everyday things, but in very uncommon ways regardless of whether people are watching. Lets look at these examples that demonstrate Excellence in every day life activities: -

- Respecting traffic signals even if there are no cops around.
- Not blasting your horn in a crowded street when there are slow moving vehicles in front of you.
- Making punctuality a way of life.
- Keeping your table and your room update (including the Desktop of your computer!).
- Getting up everyday at a fixed time irrespective of the Day of week. Etc. etc.
- Getting up with a smile on your face.

- Wishing your colleagues with a smile every day.
- Keeping your self-updated with what is happening around you.
- Spending specific time every day on exercising your body and mind.
- Walking upright and maintaining eye contact during speaking.

If you have already committed your self to Truth ,in daily life activities then you have already experienced GOD!!

Pursuing Excellence should not be limited by the Nature of the Task

The emphasis is that, we are to do whatever we do, in the best way we can do, whether it is viewed as important by society or very menial and insignificant, whether one is the president of a large company or one who cleans the offices at night, all is to be done to the glory of God. Regardless what we do, it deserves our

best for in the long run, a society that scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water!

Pursuing Excellence Is a Matter of Choosing the Best

The pursuit of excellence is never a matter of simply choosing between what is good or bad, but of choosing what is best or superior because it will better enable us to accomplish what God has designed us to be and do .One needs to be able “to approve the things that are excellent” or choose what is best. The term “approve” or “choose” carries two ideas: First, it means, “to put to the test, examine,” and then as a result of the examination or testing, “to approve, make the right choice.” This means the pursuit of excellence must include the elimination of some things even though they may be good and legitimate. Lets understand this with the help of an example: -

A wealthy businessman with varied interests happened to visit a district where there were plenty of sugar mill co-operatives, this was sustaining the entire economy of the District, his immediate inclination was to start a big sugar factory in this District and capture the market, there was nothing illegal in this process, after having ruminated over the idea he decided not to start a factory there, since he felt he would be destroying the existence of the cooperatives, this is a demonstration of Excellence in choosing the best.

Pursuing Excellence Is a Matter of a Whole-Hearted Endeavour

Pursuing excellence is a matter of the heart, of the inner person and proceeds from a inner faith/relationship with God. The term *heart* speaks of the inner person and the spiritual life as the seat and centre of all that proceeds from a person's life. The primary step thus in the pursuit of Excellence will be the path of trying to

Discover one's own self. Like the physical pump, the spiritual heart is central and vital to who we are and how we live.

What we do in word and deed is first of all a product of what we are on the inside from the standpoint of what we truly believe and how we think. “

Because of the central place and importance of the heart in all we do, which naturally includes the pursuit of excellence, it would be well to think a moment about some issues concerning the heart, the heart is not a safe haven. It needs guarding or protection from invasion by the world system around us and from the sinful nature that dwells within us. The heart needs special care because the heart, which includes the mind, the emotions, and will, is the place where we deposit the knowledge, it is the place of our values, priorities and where vital choices are made. Thus, it becomes the wellspring, the source of whatever affects our life and character

The quest for character requires that certain things be kept *in* the heart as well as kept *from* the heart. An unguarded heart spells disaster. A well-guarded heart means survival. If you hope to survive the jungle, overcoming each treacherous attack, you'll have to guard your heart.

Indeed, the heart needs guarding. We need to place a sentinel over the heart because it is the storehouse for the treasures that lead to the formation of good character. But these treasures can be stolen by the variegated deceptions and temptations, lust, patterns of destruction like power, prestige, pleasure, possessions, fortune and fame. This guard is your GOD!

In keeping with the idea of excelling, the pursuit of excellence naturally works against a half-hearted, drift along or go-with-the-flow kind of mentality. Pursuing excellence is a matter of giving the whole heart. But this does not mean there is no place for leisure or rest and relaxation.

A certain amount of rest and relaxation is essential to our physical, emotional, and mental well-being. It is not only okay to relax, but it is essential as long as it is kept in the scheme of its purpose and not used as an excuse for laziness and irresponsibility. The goal is to enhance our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being . Strangely, however, in our workaholic society many people, get their sense of identity and significance from work and a busy schedule. They often give their all, but for selfish reasons—the pursuit of position, praise, or significance. Some would view such behaviour as a sign of pursuing excellence when in reality, it can become a hindrance because of the debilitating impact on one’s physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Strangely, the one thing we need is often the last thing we consider. We’ve been programmed to think that fatigue is next to godliness. That the more exhausted we are (and look!), the more committed we are to spiritual things. Haven’t you heard about persons’ who say they are planning to start their social work

activities after retirement? I have heard about a person who planned to start the process of self-inquiry after retirement, but unfortunately could not do so since he became blind with diabetic retinopathy. We have become a generation of people who worship our work... who work at our play... and who play at our worship.

The pursuit of excellence will mean hard work and diligence which may take on various forms—research, study, time, sweat, planning, brainstorming for ideas, etc. It may well mean swimming against the stream and sometimes navigating the rocky and swift rapids of life. It will often be exhausting and bring us up against that which is really beyond us. Thus, in keeping with our own shortcomings and weaknesses, the pursuit of excellence in the execution of our daily routine or special projects that must be pursued by God's strength.

The Role of Attitude in the Pursuit of Excellence

How does one develop the pursuit of excellence? What are some of the things involved by way of the means for pursuing our best?

From the standpoint of that which affects the way we work, there is probably nothing more important than one's attitude! Our choice of attitude impacts every decision we make on a day-to-day, moment-by-moment basis. Our attitude can either fire our hopes and the pursuit of the things that are important or it can extinguish our hopes and pursuits.

There are many books written on the importance of attitude but let's understand what is excellence in attitude through this real life story:-

SEEN GOD

This incident happened years ago but I cannot forget it. I was travelling long distance in a sleeper class compartment of a train. Twice or thrice in the night I got up to go to the bathroom. Every time I noticed a really old man leaning against the door in the passage. When I saw him again later at the same place, I asked him why he was standing there. He replied, 'This door had been making a rattling noise. I observed that if I held it or leaned against it, the noise stopped. I thought that if I forego my sleep, all others in the compartment can get good rest.' This old man had stood right there almost the whole night. His reply brings tears to my eyes even now. If you ask me whether I have seen God, I would say yes – I have seen God in this man.

-Sent by Sri Raama Raghavan, Mukya Sevak, Anandashram Satsang Samiti, Chennai

Hence for attaining excellence in attitude one must commit to the following slogan:-

*Do as much good as you can, to as many as you can, in as many ways as you can.
And as long as you can. – Dada Vaswani*

HOW CAN I DO IT?

- Build up self confidence
- Spread Excellence around you
- Develop unconditional love for your Mother Land.
- Attempt sincerely at making Truth an important part of your lifestyle.
- Demonstrate to your friends' colleagues, what excellence means in every day activities.
- Do not neglect even the smallest or silliest of tasks.
- Lend a helping hand to the nearest NGO or social group trying to uplift the downtrodden.
- Show anger when your core values are threatened!

You will be surprised to the effects:-

- Your zone of influence starts expanding.
- You start seeing beauty in all living things.

- You would reach levels of empathy where you would go all out to clear the cobwebs in your house without killing the spiders!
- You would start loving all things in nature.
- You would start appreciating & respecting the sense of individuality and love for personal freedom in every human being.
- You would also develop the ability to wholeheartedly wish your fellow beings good times.
- See how the Law of Nature “What you sow you reap” works.
- You become totally committed to quality
- You have an involuntary urge for punctuality and respect for the laws of the land.

Don't you think it is worth attempting worshipping excellence through your GOD if the effects are as tangible as listed above?

Finally one must remember that excellence also means remaining like a lotus leaf untouched by the dirty water surrounding it when situations are beyond your control.

Conclusion

I have in these few pages made an effort to open up the spirit of inquiry within you. The focus of the inquiry must be directed towards the development of one's mental strength and achieve fame for our Motherland. What ever we do, & what ever we produce, every one must think that we are doing it for Mother India and it is her reputation that is at stake. In the passing again let me sign off with another true life example:- I was deputed to an European country for testing some product, one of the test was to check the ability of the product to withstand pressure without leakage, I told the technician to fill the air and asked for a sealant to seal the inlet, the technician was totally surprised and was confused as to why I

wanted to seal the inlet, I told him that I wanted to do so for ensuring that no tampering is done in the inlet and thus falsify the test. This reply of mine surprised the technician.. , he told me with a straight face that he could not even dream of doing it since his company's name and his country's name was at stake! Can we achieve such levels of commitment?. The truth is that it is possible all we need to do is to start demonstrating excellence ourselves and encourage others to do so.

Let us all join to ensure that the Majority of the members in our Country commit themselves to: -

- Ethics, as a basic principle.
- Integrity.
- Responsibility.
- Respect to the laws & rules.
- Respect to the rights of other citizens.
- Empathy.
- Work loving and commitment to quality.
- Strive for saving & investment.
- Will of super action.
- Punctuality.

This will only happen if you start the process of demonstrating Excellence!

I have annexed some commentaries from Christianity, Islam and the Bhagavad-Gita downloaded from the Internet, please do not hold me responsible for any errors in interpretations. You may read them also if you wish, and fire your thoughts towards the path of self-discovery.

For those who are motivated to read more about the Greatness of One's Mother land, I would suggest the reading of " MY INDIA THE INDIA ETERNAL" by Swami Vivekananda published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, the ISBN Number of the book is 81-85843-51-1

Salutations to Mother Nature my Greatest Teacher.

JAI HIND!

CONCEPT OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

Many people including some Muslims misunderstand the concept of worship in Islam. Worship is commonly taken to mean performing ritualistic acts such as prayers, fasting, charity, etc. this limited understanding of worship is only one part of the meaning of worship in Islam. That is why the traditional definition of worship in Islam is a comprehensive definition that includes almost everything in any individual's activities. The definition goes something like this: "Worship is an inclusive term for all that God loves of external and internal sayings and actions of a person". In other words, worship is everything one says or does for the pleasure of Allah. This, of course, includes rituals as well as beliefs, social activities, and personal contributions to the welfare of one's fellow human-beings.

Islam looks at the individual as a whole. He is required to submit himself completely to Allah, as the Qur'an instructed the prophet Muhammad to do: "Say (O Muhammad) my prayer, my sacrifice,

my life and my death belong to Allah; He has no partner and I am ordered to be among those who submit, i.e.; Muslims". The natural result of this submission is that all one's activities should conform to the instructions of the one whom the person is submitting to. Islam being a way of life requires that its followers model their life according to its teachings in every aspect, religious or otherwise. This might sound strange to some people who think of religion as a personal relation between the individual and God, having no impact on one's activities outside rituals.

As a matter of fact Islam does not think much of mere rituals when they are performed mechanically and have no influence on one's inner life. The Qur'an addresses the believers and their neighbours from among the people of the Book who were arguing with them about the change of the direction of Qibla in the following verse:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last

Day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives his beloved money to the relatives and the orphans and the needy and for the ransoming of the captives and who observes prayer and pays the poor-due; and those who fulfil their promises when they have made one, and the patient in poverty and affliction and the steadfast in time of war; it is those who have proved truthful and it is those who are the God-fearing (2:177)

Decent work is considered in Islam a type of worship. The prophet said: "Whoever finds himself at the nightfall tired of his work, God will forgive his sins". Seeking knowledge is one of the highest types of worship. The Prophet told his companions that "seeking knowledge is a (religious) duty on every Muslim". In another saying he said: "Seeking knowledge for one hour is better than praying for seventy years". Social courtesy and co-operation are part of worship when done for the sake of Allah as the prophet told us: "Receiving your friend with a smile is a type of charity, helping a person to load his animal is a charity and putting some water in you neighbour's bucket is a charity".

It is worth noting that even performing one's duties is considered a sort of worship. The Prophet told us that whatever one spends for his family is a type of charity; he will be rewarded for it if he acquires it through legal means. Kindness to the members of one's family is an act of worship as when one puts a piece of food in his spouse's mouth as the prophet informed us. Not only this but even the acts we enjoy doing very much, when they are performed according to the instructions of the prophet, they are considered as acts of worship.

It is clear, from the previous discussion that the concept of worship in Islam is a comprehensive concept that includes all the positive activities of the individual. This of course is an agreement with the all inclusive nature of Islam as a way of life. It regulates the human life on all levels: the individual, the social, the economic, the political and the spiritual. That is why Islam provides guidance to the smallest details of one's life on all these levels. Thus following these details is following Islamic instructions in that specific area. It is a very encouraging element

when one realises that all his activities are considered by God as acts of worship. This should lead the individual to seek Allah's pleasure in his actions and always try to do them in the best possible manner whether his superiors watch him or he is alone.

CONCEPT OF WORSHIP IN HINDUISM

Hinduism classifies the type of worship according to the qualities exhibited by person:-

Yajante sattvika devan yaksaraksamsi rajasah

Pretan bhutaganams ca'nye yajante tamasa janah

The sattvic or pure men worship the Gods; the rajasic or the passionate, the Yakshas and the Rakshasas; the others, the tamasic people or the dark folk, worship the ghosts and the hosts of Bhutas or the nature-spirits.

Explanation: Sattvic men worship Devas: Every man in life brings his entire devotion to offer at one altar or the other, and seeks a fulfilment from the benefits that accrue from his invocations.

In the scriptural language this called worship. This need not indicate only the ritualistic worship of some God or deity. The

term 'worship' here can also embrace a wider implication. Every one of us is a worshiper at some altar chosen by us; even atheists are worshippers...perhaps they devote themselves at the altar of sense-objects of wealth or of power. In this ampler meaning, Men of sattvic temperament, because of their serene composure and tranquil disposition, seek their fulfilment at an altar of divinity indicating the higher impulses and the nobler qualities of their being. Naturally, they seek and come to adore it.

Yakshas and Rakshasas by the Rajasic : Men of passionate nature (rajas) are those who have extreme ambition and are constantly restless in their self-chosen fields of activity. They are said to be worshipping and propitiating demigods (Yakshas) and (Rakshasas). The idea here is that the choice of the altar will depend upon the silent demands of the heart of the devotee. One will never go to a bookstall to purchase some dress. So too, the active and the passionate type of men can feel an admiration for and can appreciate only an equally active and passionate (rajasic) demigod or deity.

All men of action ambitious of success and achievement would necessarily seek the friendship of only brothers of rich men and men of power and strength. Now turn wherever you will and you can find the truth of this principle amply illustrated.

The tamasic men (worship) the Pretas and Bhutas: The dead spirits and such other low and vicious powers are invoked by the men of 'inactivity' (tamas) for the satisfaction of some of their low urges for vicious sense-gratifications. Men of low moral caliber and false education, generally, would try to fulfil their pernicious ambitions with the help of the wretched vengeful scum of the society (pretas, Bhutas) who, thought physically alive, are dead to all the sweetness and goodness in life. These hired goondas, generally chosen from professional jail-birds, are the fit powers to be invoked in order that low and criminal ambitions of the tamasic can be fulfilled.

The help gained from good friends, the protection invoked from the rich and the powerful, and the enormous strength gathered from the low thoughtless men of criminal intentions – are the different types of ‘altars’ at which men of serenity (sattwic), of ambition (rajasic), of heedlessness (tamasic), generally, seek their individual satisfactions. From the nature of a man’s field of activity we can, to a large extent, understand to what type he belongs.

Asastra-vihitam ghoram tapayante ye tapo janah

Dambhahamkara-samyuktah kama-ragabalan-vitah

Chapter 17 V

Those men who practice by terrific austerities not enjoyed by the scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and attachment:

Explanation: Over enthusiasm can produce only a physical exhaustion and an inward fatigue. No spiritual enfoldment can be expected from unintelligent expenditure of energy in wrong channels merely because it is undertaken in the name of religion.

The majority of seekers misapply their energies and they come to suffer.

Physical restraints and self-denials are, no doubt, sometimes prescribed to some sturdy physical structures for some limited period. At the same time, it is not proper or correct to believe that any kind of self-denial would constitute an austerity, and that, by following it, creative enfoldment of the inner personality structure could be successfully brought about. The austerities must be scientific and, therefore, not against the injunctions laid down in the sacred books that discuss this subject.

Karsayantah sarirastham bhutagraman acetash

Mam caivantah tan viddhy asuraniscayan

Chapter 17 VI

Senselessly torturing all the elements in the body and Me also, who dwells within the body, know thou these to be of demoniac resolves.

***satatam kirtayanto mam yatantas ca drdhavratah
namasyantas ca mam bhaktya nityayukta upasate***

Chapter 9 XIV

**Always glorifying Me, striving, firm in vows, prostrating
before Me and always steadfast, they worship Me with
devotion.**

Explanation: Here the other two main paths of self-integration and self-development are hinted at, viz, (b) single-pointed devotion, and (c) selfless activity undertaken in the true Yajna-spirit. "Glorifying Me always"-The grossest type of glorification is done by the general noisy crowd singing the Lord's glories with the accompaniment of equally noisy and crude instruments. But the implication of *Kirtan* is much more sacred. Indeed, to adore an ideal with reverence and devotion, and to sing His glories at all times continuously, is the silent act of a mind that has fully opened up to appreciate the ideal that one has learnt to glorify. The silent adoration of society by the social-workers, or the

steady flow of love that beams out from a man of Knowledge for the entire kingdom of the living, constitute a greater and more potent type of *Kirtan*, than the type indulged in by the noisy crowds that assemble from their different fields of dubious activities, for a short period each day, only to return to the same dens of vices, after the *Bhajan*.

"Striving with firm resolve"- These are simple logical facts that are generally overlooked by the seekers and they come to dig the graves for their own successes in spiritual practices. The generality of the folks believe that some specific routine acts of devotional flavour, if pursued physically for a short period of time on particular days of the week, is all their part of the game. The rest is for their imaginary Gods to cook and bring in front of them dressed to taste. The absurd, superstitious idea has nothing to do with the Science of self-perfection, of which religion forms the technical part.

"Bowling down to Me in devotion"- One of the unconscious

blasphemies that even the faithful Hindu, in spite of himself, practices is the false-*Namaskars*. No other term has been so badly misunderstood in Hinduism as 'to bow' to the elders or to the Lord. As it is now practiced, it would look as if the seemingly devoted have a malicious intention of catching the feet of a moving Master only to make him fall headlong.

Prostration, though it be a physical act, implies the detachment and surrender of all the false identifications that the devotee may have with his own matter-envelopments. The significance of the symbolic has been totally forgotten and the empty act continued: surely, by sowing the chaff no crop can be harvested.

True devotion is unalloyed love. Love is measured in terms of the lover's identification with the beloved. Devotion to "*Me, the origin of beings and the Immutable*" is the way for the deluded-ego to identify itself with the Self. And this is brought to a successful culmination only by the process of detaching itself from its Not-Self Conditionings. This negative aspect of self-

withdrawal from the layers of the Not-Self is indicated by the "*Bowing down to Me*". The positive side of the Art of Self-Realization is pursued, when, with a steady single-pointed mind, the seeker comes to meditate till, ultimately, he re-discovers for himself his own total identification with the Self. This positive aspect is indicated by the phrase: "*in devotion*".

The withdrawal of ourselves from our misconceived identities and the final re-discovery of our infinite potentialities, through our constant devotion to the Self, can be achieved only by those among us who "are stead fast and worship Me".

The path of Knowledge knows on flower-throwing, *chandan*-sprinkling or Laddu-showing methods of ritualistic worship. To keep in the mind an alert and vigilant flow of thoughts in our adoration for the nature of the Self as the Substratum of the entire Universe and the essence in all beings is the truest of worships that can open up the buds of our egocentric lives into the blossoms of Godmen, wafting their fragrance of perfection around.

What is Christian Worship?

Worship: At the Heart of Our Relationship with God

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins as follows:

1. What is the chief end [i.e. goal] of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

This reflects a common Christian perspective that all of Christian life is focused on God and on our fellowship with him and other people. Our care for others is in this context. That doesn't mean that others are only side-issues: loving others means that we genuinely care about them. However Christian experience is that our relationships with other people must be put into the context of a relationship with God, or those relationships will start to become unbalanced.

For many Christians, worship is at the heart of our relationship with God, both as individuals and a community. In worship we

focus on God: on hearing a message based on the Bible, on prayer, and on the sacraments. Of course individual Christians can do many of these things in private. However in worship we ground our life as a community in a corporate experience of God.

The Content of Christian Worship

It is not possible to give a complete description of Christian worship. Congregations worship in quite different ways. Worship services vary from formal services with wonderful classical music and well-planned liturgical actions, to a small group gathering around a table and using an impromptu service with rock music.

Worship tends to have two major centers: the Word and the Sacraments. The Protestant tradition tends to emphasize the proclamation of the Word. This includes readings from the Bible, and a sermon, which will normally help the congregation understand the reading and apply it to them. Historically, the sermon was a major means of conducting adult Christian education, and of spurring both individuals and congregations to make necessary changes. Protestant worshippers had a surprising appetite for sermons: three-hour sermons were not uncommon. (This appetite does not seem to have survived into the 20th Century.)

Of course Catholic worship also includes readings from the Bible and some exposition. This is normally referred to as a "homily", rather than a sermon. However the center of worship in the Catholic church, as well as other "liturgical" churches, is the sacrament of Communion, which will be discussed below. For them it is normally celebrated at every regular service. The elaboration and formality tends to be greater than it is in Protestant churches. Protestants normally celebrate communion either 4 times a year or once a month.

In addition to the Word and sacraments, services of all groups include prayers and singing. One analysis of the prayers classifies them according to the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Another variant is ACTIS, with the I standing for Intercession.

Services often begin with a combination of prayer, responsive readings and music which simply celebrate being in God's presence. This is adoration.

Fairly early in the service there is normally a prayer of confession. In confession we express both our individual faults and those of the community. We ask God to help us to amend them, and receive assurance (normally in words taken from the Bible) of God's willingness to do so.

Thanksgiving acknowledges God's goodness to us.

Thanksgiving is important in the Christian life. As we thank God

for things, we put those things into the context of our relationship with God.

In Supplication we ask God for what we need. In worship, this supplication normally includes the needs of the congregation, nation, and world. Intercession is a specific kind of request, directed towards the needs of others. Intercession is particularly important to Christian life, because it is one of the key elements in the pattern of "exchange" that I referred to in a previous article. Through intercession we bear each other's burdens, and join the other members of the community in putting their requests before God.

The Sacraments

The one aspect of worship which is most specific to Christianity is the sacraments. This is also the element that is the most dangerous to describe in a document such as this, which is intended to describe Christianity in general. That's because the definition of sacrament is somewhat different among different groups. However a good general definition is that a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer). The sacraments each involve a specific symbolic action (the "sign") that make visible God's action for us. For Protestant theologians, this must

be connected with a specific promise of God, as recorded in Scripture.

It's probably best to think of a range of actions that can be described as sacraments. At the center we have Baptism and Communion, which are practiced by all Christian groups (although some call them "ordinances" rather than "sacraments"). These are actions that were specifically commanded by Jesus.

Next, there is a group of additional ceremonies that are regarded as sacraments by the Catholic and Orthodox tradition. Initially, there wasn't an exact list of these. One medieval writer identified 30. However in the Catholic tradition, a standard list of seven was identified in the 12th Century. That list includes Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Marriage. While Protestants generally consider only Baptism and Communion to be formal sacraments, there is some flexibility. Luther was willing to accept Penance, if properly understood. Calvin considered the laying on of hands in ordination to have a sacramental quality.

Finally, note that many other activities have at least some sacramental character: for Christians, the whole world, and our own activities, should all serve to make visible God's activity with us. As an example, Calvin identified the rainbow as having a

certain sacramental quality: it is a visible sign of a promise of God.

Baptism

Baptism marks a person's entry into the Christian community. It involves water: depending upon the group, it may be anything from a symbolic sprinkling to complete immersion. The water symbolizes being cleansed from sin. More specifically, it symbolizes dying with Christ and being raised with him. This symbolism is clearest when immersion is used: being lowered into the water reminds us of Christ's death, and being raised from the water, of his resurrection. This understanding is used even among those who don't literally immerse the candidates.

Communion

Communion is a symbolic meal, involving bread and wine. It commemorates Jesus' last meal, which he ate with his followers the night before he was killed. This meal seems to have been a Jewish Passover Seder, in which bread and wine are key elements. Jesus gave them a new significance, as symbols of his body and blood, which he was about to sacrifice in his death. Jesus commanded his followers to remember his death for them by eating bread and drinking wine in his name. He promised that

he would be present with them as they did so, in a very direct way.

Different Christian groups understand Christ's presence in communion differently. When he instituted communion, Jesus said of the bread "This is my body". While some Protestants understand this as purely metaphorical, most Christians believe that Jesus is in some way present in communion. Many Christian traditions believe that in some sense the bread and wine used in communion become Jesus' body and blood. This is referred to as Christ's "Real Presence". Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, and Reformed all hold some variant of this concept.

For Catholics this involves an actual metaphysical change in the bread and wine. While the physical properties of bread and wine remain, the metaphysical identity is changed to Christ's body and blood. Lutherans and Reformed do not accept this metaphysical change. For Reformed theology, Christ's body remains physically in heaven. In communion we truly eat his body and drink his blood, but this is a spiritual matter mediated by the Holy Spirit. Lutherans believe that there is an actual identification of bread and wine with Christ's body and blood. Other Protestants take a more metaphorical approach.

In the Catholic tradition, the consecrated elements are treated with the same respect that Jesus would be if he were physically present. That is because they are actually Jesus' body and

blood, so Jesus really is physically present. For that reason, it is perfectly appropriate to worship the consecrated elements. Most Protestants regard this with something between disbelief and horror.

How do Christians Act?

Part I. Law

Law and Grace

There are two different emphases in the way God deals with us, which are in some ways in tension with each other. They are often referred to as "law" and "grace". I have already spoken of grace in other sections, particularly in the discussion of the Gospel. In this section I look at law.

Christianity has inherited from Judaism a set of laws that Christians believe were given by God to govern Israel. The exact

role of these laws in Christianity has been a matter of some debate. The laws were given to Israel as part of an agreement ("covenant") between God and the Jewish people. As such, they were not regarded by Jews as being directly applicable to non-Jews. Jewish rabbis developed a smaller set of rules that they believed applied to all human beings.

For the first few years, Christianity was a subset of Judaism. However as non-Jews started becoming interesting in Christianity, it was necessary to decide what rules applied to them. The decision was that only a few of the rules applied directly. The set was similar to those that the rabbis regarded as applying to non-Jews.

However the term "law" (particularly in Protestant theology) reflects not just these specific rules, but all of the ways in which God demands obedience of us, and all of the standards that he has given us. In Reformed theology, the preaching of God's Word must always hold together both law and gospel. Law without Gospel becomes moralism: the concept that if we just try hard enough we can save ourselves. Gospel without law tends to present forgiveness without repentance, and therefore without genuine transformation.

The distinction between Law and Gospel is important, particularly in Protestant theology. The Gospel describes what God does to forgive us and make us his own, independent of

anything we have done. Thus our status as God's children does not depend upon our carrying out the requirements of the Law. However Christians are expected to respond to God with obedience. While disobedience may not end our status as God's children, it will subject us to his discipline. Furthermore, for many (though not all) Christian traditions, serious or habitual disobedience may reflect a more definitive rejection of God's grace, which can result in a loss of our status as God's children. These issues are explored in the sections on [the Gospel](#) and [Predestination](#).

The Ten Commandments: Summary of the Moral Law

When looking at the laws given to the Jews, Christian writers often try to distinguish between the "moral" law and the "ceremonial" law. Christians do not normally follow dietary laws, such as those prohibiting pork, nor laws establishing specific Jewish holidays. These are considered to be specific to God's covenant with the Jews. In addition, a portion of the Jewish law can be regarded as the civil law of the Jewish state. It cannot necessarily be applied to the modern situation without change. However Christians generally believe that the moral content of the Jewish law is based on God's character and the basic

spiritual or moral principles on which the universe was founded. This still applies to Christians.

It is worth noting that the classification of the Jewish law into moral, ceremonial and civil is somewhat artificial. Laws are not labelled this way when they appear in the Old Testament. However some such distinction seems inevitable for Christians, whether it is stated in these terms or not. Almost all Christians agree that many of the provisions of Jewish law do not apply to Christians. Yet Jesus' teachings and other provisions of the New Testament do contain principles that Christians are obligated to follow. These principles have significant similarities to the moral principles embodied in the Jewish law. Thus we can regard the term "moral law" as referring, not so much to a clearly labelled subset of the Old Testament law, as to a continuity between the moral principles taught in the New Testament and those underlying the laws of the Old Testament.

This moral law is often summarized in the "Ten Commandments", which the Bible says were given by God to Moses. They are, in somewhat abbreviated form:

- You shall have no other Gods.
- You shall not worship (or use in worship) images of anything in heaven or on earth.
- You shall not misuse God's name.

- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not kill.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet (i.e. envy, particularly with an eye to taking) your neighbor's house, wife, or anything else.

There are actually two different ways to divide the content into 10 commandments. This is the Protestant version.

There are controversies over the interpretations of two of the commandments. Protestants believe that the second commandment prohibits any use of statues or pictures in any context that would suggest worship, veneration, or giving any kind of honor to them. Catholics and Orthodox take a narrow view of what is prohibited, and make wide use of images in worship.

The term "Sabbath" refers to Saturday. This day was set apart among Jews for worship. Generally Christians regard that particular choice of day as part of the "ceremonial law", which does not apply to Christians. Thus Christians are free to worship on any day. However most still regard it as important to worship regularly. Christians commonly worship on Sunday, in commemoration of Jesus' resurrection. In Christian contexts, Sunday is referred to as "the Lord's Day".

A very small number of Christians do not take this interpretation. They believe that Christians are also required to worship on Saturday. Be aware that this group is more visible in Internet discussions than they are in the Christian community as a whole.

The Spirit of the Law

Based on certain statements in the New Testament, a few Christians deny that any of the Old Testament law (and in some cases, any law at all) is binding on Christians. For them, Jesus' teachings and Paul's letters suggest that God is primarily concerned about our intent, and the quality of our relationships. Jesus said that the entire law was based on two principles: loving God and loving others. Some believe that as long as we do this, we are not bound by any specific legal code. Rather, we are called to a free, non-legal approach to following Christ.

Ideally, a Christian who is following Christ perfectly should not need a legal code. His heart should be so filled with love, and his mind should be so in tune with God that he would do the right thing naturally. This is always the Christian ideal. However because we remain imperfect in this life, most Christians would say that law has a role to play, even if it isn't precisely the same as it was for the Jews. 20th Century experience has convinced most Christians that some objective standards are needed to guide behavior. It is too easy to be led into dangerous actions by short-term considerations and emotions.

I'm going to use the Lutheran tradition as an example of the role that Christians see for the Law, because Lutherans have tended to be among the most wary of law. For Lutheran tradition, "the believer without any coercion and with a willing spirit, in so far as he is reborn, does what no threat of the law could ever have wrung from him." Thus for the Lutheran tradition, Christians obey God freely, and not as a result of legal compulsion. However law still has a role to play. Lutheran (as well as Reformed) tradition identifies three uses of the law: (1) as an external discipline, necessary to restrain those who are not saved (and in some cases those who are saved, because of their remaining temptation to sin), (2) as a standard that convicts us of sin, and makes us realize our need of God's grace, and (3) as a standard for those who are saved, to help them in living in accordance with God's will. It is the third use that is most controversial.

Ideally Christians act freely, from love. However in doing so, they need objective standards. Thus the law applies to them, but as standards accepted in response to God's grace, and not as legal constraint.

In accordance with this approach, Christians interpret the ten commandments very broadly. Based on Jesus' teachings, they look for the intent behind the commandments, and the attitudes that they suggest. As an example, the prohibition against killing is seen as reflecting a requirement to respect our neighbor's life and safety. It prohibits anything that would harm someone around us. It requires us to help those that are in danger or otherwise at risk.

Similarly, the prohibition against stealing is seen as reflecting a requirement for fair dealing. It prohibits any kind of "sharp practice", and requires us to respect our neighbor's property, and help protect it.

The prohibition of false witness originally referred to lying in court. However Christians extend it to include any statements that would damage another person, and any actions that tend to compromise the truth, such as gossip. Under normal circumstances, Christians are required to tell the truth, even when it would get them in trouble.

This document quotes the 10 commandments, because they form a brief summary that is widely accepted and used. However

these are by no means the only standards used by Christians. Jesus' teachings include both general standards and examples of how people should behave in specific situations. There are further details given in other sections of the New Testament. While these are not always expressed formally as laws, they are included in the broad category of "law," i.e. as part of what God demands of us.

Sexual Ethics

One of the most visible characteristics of Christian ethics is its treatment of sexual relationships. This is reflected in the commandment against adultery. However there are additional influences, including Jesus' teachings, and early Christian practice.

Generally Christians restrict sexual intercourse to married couples. Sex is seen as something intended by God to be part of marriage. For many Christians marriage is a sacrament. The sexual relationship is symbolic of God's relationship with the Christian community. Its misuse is a serious matter. This means that intercourse before marriage is prohibited, as well as sexual patterns other than marriage between one man and one woman.

Jesus prohibited divorce, although it is possible that he allowed for some exceptions. Christians vary in how literally they take

this prohibition. All regard divorce as a serious matter, but some believe that there are situations where it is the lesser evil.

Current Controversies

The description I have given so far applies to what I will call "traditional Christian ethics". A number of Christian writers have advocated relaxing certain of these ethics, particularly in the sexual area. A few churches have formally accepted these proposals. Others have not, but do not enforce the rules strictly.

There has always been flexibility in their application. These rules are intended to protect human life and relationships. However recent experience makes most Christians believe that it is dangerous to go very far in relaxing them. This is a matter in which there is a good deal of ongoing discussion.

One particular area of controversy at the moment is homosexuality. This is a violation of the rule restricting sex to marriage, with marriage defined as involving one man and one woman. There are specific prohibitions against homosexual practice, both in the Jewish laws and in early Christian teachings included in the Bible. However some Christians are prepared to argue that these teachings do not apply to the sexual relationships that modern Christian homosexuals wish to establish. This argument has so far not persuaded very many

Christians. However there is also fairly widespread sympathy for the problems of homosexuals. This is an unsolved issue

How do Christians Act?

Part II. Showing Love

Love: the Foundation for all Relationships

There is a certain anti-legal strain in Christian thought. Jesus accepted the validity of the Jewish laws. However he encouraged people to emphasize the intent behind the law, and to focus on their motivations. He summarized the law as love for God and for our neighbor. Thus much of Christian practice is focused on finding ways to show love for our fellows.

At its best, Christianity has been characterized by helping people. This ranges from the personal to the institutional. At the personal level, Christians should help others. This includes direct help for friends, and participation in more organized activities such as soup kitchens and help for the homeless. At the

institutional level, Christians have been active in creating hospitals, schools, and other institutions to help people.

What is Christian love?

The term "love" in English covers many things, including erotic love, love between parent and child, brotherly love, etc. Christian love can be modeled on love between parent and child and brotherly love.

We are told to love everyone, particularly enemies. It's useful to start by looking at what this does NOT mean. It does not mean that we will like everyone. Love is not primarily an emotion, although it often involves the emotions, and is supported by them. It is primarily a commitment to care about someone.

Jesus' teachings are largely a description of what love means. However the briefest description is from one of Paul's letters:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love is based on our status as fellow children of God. This means that there is at least potentially a close spiritual bond

between all of us. It is a reflection of the fact that God loves us, and is an expression of Christ's love active in us.

It is also based on honesty and justice. While Christians are eager to forgive, Christian parents are called on to exercise discipline, and Christian churches to first counsel with and then if necessary exclude those who are openly immoral. These requirements call for a balance that it is often hard to achieve.

Forgiveness

One of the strongest themes in Jesus' teaching is forgiveness. He certainly intends us to forgive each other as individuals. But he was often speaking of the community. In his community there were a number of people who were looked down upon. These included tax collectors, who were regarded as collaborators with the Romans, and prostitutes, whose sin is obvious, but apparently also many ordinary people who didn't have the time and resources to carry out all of the commandments that some considered essential. Jesus spent much of his time with these people, reassuring them of God's love. However the people who are shown as responding to him are also shown as repenting of their sins. A tax collector who followed him vowed to return anything he had fraudulently taken fourfold.

Jesus seems to have accomplished what most of us find nearly impossible: He seems to have accepted everyone on their own terms, but also inspired people to change their lives for the better, without appearing to be judgemental in the process. Christians try to capture this with concepts such as "hate the sin but love the sinner", and "tough love". A more traditional description is to say that Christianity must balance Law and Gospel. I'm afraid that these attempts are not always successful.

Christians are called on to forgive enemies, both Christian and non-Christian. This forgiveness is intended to benefit both parties. In many cases it may win over the other person, and restore (or establish) a relationship with them. However even when it does not, forgiveness is important. Bitterness and resentment are two of the more destructive emotions.

A number of Christians believe that this requirement prohibits all war. Christians should be able to come up with better ways to deal with conflict. Most Christians agree with this in principle, but feel that there are times when they don't know any other way to defend innocent lives against attack. At any rate, peacemaking is a priority among Christians. A number of groups are now starting to encourage members to study conflict resolution and peacemaking techniques explicitly. The "peace churches" such as the Mennonites and Quakers have been among the leaders in developing or documenting these techniques.

Deeds and Rules

All Christians acknowledge that Christian ethics should be founded on love. However there have been a number of debates about the best way to do this. One of the best-known disagreements in this Century is over "situation ethics". A number of people argued that Christians should not become tied up in rules. Instead, they should act in any given situation as love would dictate. A number of examples were given of difficult situations in which traditional ethical rules would produce the wrong decisions. A more recent version of this approach was a document on sexual ethics produced for (but rejected by) the Presbyterian Church (USA). It suggested relaxing most of the traditional sexual rules, in favor of a standard that they called "justice love", which seems to have been a somewhat revamped situation ethics.

This approach has not been well received. There are two reasons. The first is grounded in basic Christian realism about human psychology. Difficult ethical decisions, particularly in sexual matters, tend to occur at times when people are not in a position to make carefully considered choices. It is far too easy for situation ethics to become license to be motivated only by immediate feelings.

There is also a realization that love can be shown in structures as well as in individual decisions. The commitment between husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend establish the contexts in which we work. They allow us to share confidences, and bare our selves. Decisions can't be made from moment to moment in isolation.

However if this is to happen, rules must be used properly. Rules are intended to protect people, not to make life miserable.

[The title of this section, and some aspects of the discussion, are based on Paul Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics*.]