



staying on track

Five Week Lent Study

Archdeacon Bill Ray

Do we really
serve God?

Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The Ten Commandments or the Decalogue: are they old hat or are they just as relevant today as when they were given to Moses on Mount Sinai?

When it comes to staying on track, the Commandments greatly assist us. They are not just a list of negatives, as some would say, they are God's way of establishing and maintaining our relationship with our Creator. They are not freedom restrictors, as some argue, but Commandments that enliven and equip us as to stay on track with God. While they were given by God to Moses and Israel quite some time ago they are still relevant to us in 2006.

I wonder at times whether the Ten Commandments are seen as unimportant because of the way the Church has taught them. I recall being in a R.E. class at school and the teacher, a minister from one of the churches in the town, was teaching us about commandment seven, "You shall not commit adultery." He had a bowl of distilled water and we talked about the properties of distilled water, and

then he poured some Indian ink into the distilled water. He said, "That is adultery". This was before the Family Law Act of 1961 and people went to court for divorce. As a kid, I could not believe that people went to court for pouring Indian ink into distilled water! Also I thought what a waste of both distilled water and ink. Perhaps Ronald Goldman was right when he wrote his book, "Readiness for Religion" (Seabury 1965) that not every biblical account is suitable for every child of every age. I am glad that I have had teachers since, who have helped me to explore the Ten Commandments in a new, energizing and creative way.

The Commandments commence by stating that we are to be on track with God and God alone. "I am the Lord your God" and "You shall not make for yourself an idol ... bow down to them or worship them." (Exodus 20:2-5). It is so easy to "jump" tracks and find ourselves on the idolatry track worshipping other items, such as cars, a piece of furniture or a particular object of fascination, but it is God whom we serve. It is interesting that God

acknowledges that there are other gods out there, which are in conflict with God and compete for our attention.

God's name is important and also for Israelites, names are very important as discussed in Study Two.

When God created the world, he created the Sabbath Day as a day of rest. This is a very important principal of life and I am concerned that we have lost it at present. Back in the time of Moses it was a day to recuperate after six days hard work as a slave or owner. Today within society there is strong focus on consumerism and productivity making it very easy to "reduce" the Sabbath to another economic opportunity. (See Going Further on the web) In the press we often hear reports about people working longer and longer hours, while others have no work at all. Does this commandment need to be revisited in our day and age?

The other Commandments address the social relations within the human community concerning both people and property and are straight forward.

As a youngster, I was taught that the first three (and some scholars argue that first four) address our relationship with God and the remainder of the Commandments address our responsibility to our neighbour. I learnt that when it was God first, the rest take care of themselves. While it is simplistic, there is some truth to it.

The Ten Commandments state something of the nature of God and the way God wants our life to be lived if we are to be track with God. As Christians we are not called to just know about God, we are called to know God. It has been said that the longest journey some people make in their lives is about 33 cms. (or 13 inches on the imperial scale), the distance from the head to the heart. With head knowledge we know about, whereas with the heart we know intimately.

Our call as Christians is to know God in all facets of our life. It is so easy to think of life as separate tracks, our home life track, our work life track, our social life track and our Christian life track etc. But the Christian life is a single

track which journeys with and through the terrain of home life, employment, social life and so on. However there are times when we need to stop because of the red light and wait on God before we receive the green light. The same is true as we address a range of matters in the daily routine of life. One of the skills in living out our Christian faith is knowing that while we are on track we may need to stop and reassess challenges and issues in our life.

How we come to know God is shaped by how we approach the task of knowing. (See Going Further – in regard to the topic of Knowing and Knowledge) In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul was addressing the matter in the life of that Church. Some people followed Apollos, others Paul and so on, but Paul was stating that we are to follow Christ. We come to know God through knowing the crucified and resurrected Christ, our servant King. This knowledge and the commandments are the framework that keeps us on track in serving God and those around us.

Study Three - Sharing with Others



Welcome and Introductions

Do you have a favourite prayer? If yes, what is it and why is it your favourite?

Corrie ten Boon asked, "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?" Share your thoughts.

What has been a worship highlight for you recently?

From last week

Any questions that have arisen from our time together last week that you would like ask or insight that you would like to share.



Opening Prayer

Say together the Lenten Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made,
and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts,
that we, worthily lamenting our sins,
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may obtain of you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Getting Started

People are invited to share their responses to one or more the following:

- Did you have to learn the Ten Commandments off by heart when you were young? If so what were your thoughts at the time? If not, do you think this practice would have helped you? Comment.
- Have children challenged you with their questions about the various biblical accounts? You may like to share a particular example and your response.
- Because human beings are all different there will never be a 100% agreement on any given topic. How do you cope with differing views or attitudes such as at a meeting?
- As we are mid way through Lent how are you travelling?



Read the Passages of Scripture

Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-25



Questions for Reflection

(Please make a selection)

1. In times past, the Ten Commandments were included in our liturgies more frequently than they are now. Do you think we have lost something by not saying them as often or do you think this has been a positive move? Explain your reasons for this opinion.
2. What place do you think the Ten Commandments should have in the life of the Church and of society?
3. There once was a view held by some that all biblical accounts were suitable for people of all ages. With research, this view no longer has widespread support. How do you think we should introduce the Bible to children and is there a place to make sure certain stories (e.g. David and Bathsheba – 2 Samuel 11) are not told until a certain age?
4. How would you explain the first commandment to a person wanting to know what it means?
5. More and more people are saying that they have less time for a wide range of reasons. Is there a place for Christians to re-visit the ‘sabbath day’ and the ‘sabbath rest’ principle again? By not attending to the Sabbath is there a danger of de-railing ourselves, and if so, so how can we maintain our focus on God and keep on track?
6. Share your insights in regard to the expression, “If you attend to God first, the rest will take care of itself”.
7. Which of the Commandments give you comfort and which of the Commandments challenge you and why? You are invited to share your insights, but please be sensitive to others in the group.
8. Paul was addressing the matter of division within the Church at Corinth. All churches, all denomination have divisions, because people come with differing ideas and thoughts. How does your church, your parish, your community of faith address division and disagreement?

9. Listening to the radio recently the speaker was saying that the ecumenical movement has lost its influence and the vision needs to be re-captured? Do you agree? Is there place for the ecumenical movement today?

10. It has been said that each church is preoccupied in trying to survive and we no longer have time to attend to ecumenical matters. However, others put forward the idea that we may have to re-visit ecumenism in order to survive as a church. Denominationalism is accused of not being a positive witness to the community. How would you reply to these statements and why?



Closing Prayer

Lord our God,
by your Holy Spirit
write your commandments upon our hearts
and grant us the wisdom and power of the cross,
so that, cleansed from greed and selfishness,
we may become a living temple of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Hospitality

Make sure the plans for next week are in place. See page 9.

Preparation for next week

Read Numbers 21:4-9 & Ephesians 2:1-10.

**NEXT
WEEK**

Questions to ponder

Reflect on how you prepare yourself for worship. Bishop Neville Chynoweth said that the Ten Commandments are an excellent tool in preparing ourselves for worship.

The Rector that prepared me for Confirmation, used to say that it was important to prepare yourself for worship. He said that there were three areas we should look at, who and what you will give thanks to God for, what you will confess and who or what you will pray for as you go forth in faith into the week ahead. I hope this is helpful for you.

Consider how you would describe your prayer life at the moment.

Are there areas that need to be addressed?