

**Wade Street 5.03.06 11am Living God's Way 11**

*(Exodus 20v17)*

You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

You go into a restaurant, sit down and pick up a menu. After ten minutes deliberation you eventually come to a decision and order your food. Your mouth is watering at the thought of what you've chosen. You can hardly wait for the meal to arrive. When your dinner arrives you look at the plate. It looks good. Then you look at the plate of the person sitting next to you. And immediately you think 'I wish I'd ordered that !! Theirs looks so much nicer.' In a split second your dinner has lost its appeal.

That's pretty much covetousness in a nutshell !!  
Wanting what others have.

A keeping up with the Jones es. With apologies to those of you who's name is Jones ! The evangelist J John put s it like this....We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't like !!

Tolstoy told the story of a King who said to a peasant, you can have as much of my land as you can walk around in one day. The peasant walked and walked the whole day without stopping, in an attempt to cover as much area as possible. He didn't eat or drink, but pushed himself endlessly on in the desire to acquire the land. At the end of the day, just as he was preparing to take ownership of the land, he collapsed, his body unable to cope with the strain he had placed on it, and died.

Interestingly, the Bible does not condemn having wealth or possessions. It is *attitude* towards these things that ends up causing problems and is what the Bible teaches about.

It is easier says Jesus, for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God

In the Hebrew, the word we have as covet means to desire. It's a neutral word. It's not the act of desiring in itself that's wrong – it's desiring other people's things. The examples given in Exodus 20 of things not to covet are basically the only property the semi- nomadic Israelites would have had. For 'house' read 'household', as opposed to three bed roomed semi detached ! And any animals such as donkeys and oxen represented the wealth the people would have had. So I suppose finding ten head of oxen tied up outside your neighbour's tent was similar to coming home from work and seeing a porsche parked on next door's drive.

The Hebrews visualized the soul as being full of vigorous desires which urged it to extend its influence over other persons and things.

So commandment number ten is God's warning against indulging these desires. And if we read on into the book of Joshua, in chapter seven we find out that the consequences are very severe.

Achan, from the tribe of Judah covets and then takes some of the Babylonian plunder, hiding it under his tent. When he is discovered, he and his family are taken to a valley and stoned to death.

Being discontent with our lot is obviously not a modern phenomenon.

But it is certainly fuelled quite spectacularly today by the media through advertising and marketing. We are constantly being bombarded with the message that more is better, that new is better, that happiness comes from purchasing a new sofa, notice the perfect woman lounging on it, or a new car, notice the perfect family sitting in it, or a new computer, notice the perfect business related to it. All the time feeding the idea that what we have now is not good enough. What we need to be fulfilled is what everybody else has, and of course everybody else has life sorted, don't they ?

I suppose the challenge for us this morning is not just to question whether we covet (because I suspect this is one commandment that we probably all break at times) but to think about whether we are really content with our lives, and to explore some ways that we could become more content.

Paul writes to Timothy, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that.'

So what are some ways to move away from discontent towards contentment ?

Well, one way to find contentment is to count our blessings rather than our cash ! If we are constantly thinking, when I get that pay rise I'll be happy, when I get that new job I'll be happy, when I get that- what ever it is you're striving for- I'll be happy, we will never be happy.

GK Chesterton said, there are two ways to get enough.

One is to accumulate more and more.

The other way is to desire less.

The book of Ecclesiastes says, 'whoever loves money never has money enough.

Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This is meaningless.

When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God'

If we were to make an inventory of all our possessions I suspect we would be amazed. Let's enjoy what we have rather than always thinking about what we don't have.

Another way of moving towards contentment is to recognise the limitations of wealth. I'm not suggesting some naive ideal that we can all renounce money. We simply cannot operate in our society without it. I can just imagine turning up to Waitrose and offering some plants from my garden in exchange for a trolley load of food in a manner similar to 'the good life'.

Whilst recognising that money is an essential part of our society, it is important to remember that wealth cannot deliver all that it promises.

As Mick Jagger so famously said 'I can't get no, satisfaction'

New possessions bring brief enjoyment, but then it isn't long before we're on to the next thing.

If ever we need convincing that wealth does not give us everything we want or need to be fulfilled, then a quick glance at celebrity life styles should help. Wealth does not buy stable marriages, happy children, confidence in our abilities etc. It can buy a new look, even a new body shape, but that doesn't automatically mean we feel any different, any happier inside.

On a similar theme, focussing on people rather than possessions can help us towards contentment.

My sister who is a teacher, was telling me recently about a little girl in her class who had become upset because her mother was working long hours, and the girl was always being looked after by other people. It became apparent that the mother wasn't working for necessities, she was working so hard because she thought that if her daughter did not have all the latest toys, fashions and exotic holidays she would be missing out and feel unhappy ! she thought she was doing the best thing for her daughter. But relationships often benefit more from spending time, rather than money.

Finding contentment may require us to shift our perspective and look beyond the here and now.

Paul says, fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

When Alexander the Great had conquered the known world he apparently gave instructions that in the event of his death, his hands should be left outside of the coffin, to show that he could carry nothing with him into the eternal life.

Anyone who has acted as the executor of a relative's will or cleared the house of a loved one following their death, will know that possessions fade into insignificance when we are faced with the stark realities of eternity.

And finally, true contentment comes ultimately through finding a satisfaction and security in Jesus Christ. Without faith and trust in him we will always be tempted to place our security in possessions, we will always look at others and want what they have.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Today's society says very much that our personal value is determined by our financial value. But God says, you are valuable and I love you. In fact I love you so much that I sent my son to die for you. What is there that could be more valuable than that ?

## **Living God's Way 11 The Grass is always greener**

(Exodus 20v17)

### **House group notes**

To covet is to desire something belonging to another. Desiring in itself is not the problem. Equally, having wealth or possessions is not a problem, but rather our attitude towards them.

Being discontented is obviously not a modern phenomenon, yet it seems to be fuelled today by the advertising we are bombarded with.

This is a commandment that we are probably all guilty of breaking.

The antidote to covetousness is contentment.

We can hopefully move towards being more contented if we count our blessings and enjoy what we have; recognise the limitations of wealth; value people above possessions; refocus towards the eternal and place our security in Jesus Christ.

### **For Discussion**

1. Why do you think God considers covetousness to be such a problem that it merits being included in the ten commandments ?
2. What is the modern day equivalent for you of an Israelite's ox or donkey (ie. that which you might be tempted to covet) ?
- 3 Is there anything in particular that helps you avoid discontentment ?
- 4.Does being wealthy make it difficult to follow Jesus ? Why ?