First Century Fellowship Ministry

A Biblical Church of God

The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

(Exodus 20:17 Deuteronomy 5:21)

Do Not Covet. Some of the language sounds so outdated. Maybe it does not pertain to us anymore. First off, remember one of the rules of Bible study, who is the passage directed to and what is the context? This, and all the commandments, were spoken and written about 3500 years ago to all twelve tribes of Israel during the time of the exodus from Egypt. They were written so they would be easily understood by the people of that time. References to things familiar to them were used for illustration. Do we have manservants and maidservants or oxen or donkeys? Probably not. But we do have husbands and wives, sons and daughters, cars and trucks and boats and houses and money and on and on. The Ten Commandments are living, active, timeless laws. They are just as relevant and invaluable today as when first given. We just have to look at them and reflect on the underlying message. In this case, do not focus on or improperly desire anything that is owned or possessed by someone else.

What is "covet", anyway? It is defined as the insatiable desire for worldly gain. To long after, crave, be infatuated by or have a carnal passion or lust for property or possessions of another, usually at their expense. If we seek or long for something

contrary to God's will, we covet. If that longing for turns to lust we are now making that object, whatever it is, an idol. Following through on this type of desire will lead to actions or behaviors addressed in other commandments.

We are very much a *get* society concerned with self. The apostle John links lust with pride and vanity. Accumulating possessions tends to make us feel superior to others. "I made it. Look at me and all my stuff." What we have done is fall into the trappings of the world and away from the teachings and example of Jesus. "Because everything that is in the world-the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eyes, and the pretentious pride of physical life-is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world and its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:16-17).

Remember, Jesus amplified the law to include the intent in our hearts, so beyond the letter of the law we are now judged on the intent of our heart. Isaiah prophesied of this, "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness sake; He *(Christ)* will magnify the Law and make it glorious." (Isaiah 42:21). And we saw this from Jesus Himself when He said, "You have heard that it was said to those in ancient times, 'You shall not commit murder; but however commits murder shall be subject to judgement.' But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgement. Now you have heard it said, 'Whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca", shall be subject to the judgement of the council.' But I say to you, whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna." (Matthew 5:21-22). The apostle John confirmed this when he wrote, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life dwelling within him." (1 John 3:15). Jesus also applied this spiritual standard to hating ones enemy, (Matthew 5:43-44) and to adultery, (Matthew 5:27-28). Actions follow thoughts. If you think it and obsess on it, action will generally follow. "For from within, out of the hearts of men, go forth evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts,

covetousness, wickedness, guile, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; All these evils go forth from within, and these defile a man." (Mark 7:21-23).

Covet. Not a word we use a lot these days. Probably a good thing for most of the world because today, it is the way of the world. Advertising is constantly telling us we need to have this product or that service implying that if we do not we are somehow out of step with the rest of the world. We need the newest car, the newest most high tech phone and computer. We need to keep up with everyone else to stay relevant. Does that mean if I own my own car, it's paid for but maybe more than a few years old, it will no longer work? I will no longer be "cool" because I'm not financed to the max to keep up with everyone else with the newest and latest version of everything deemed vital?

Our insatiable desire to compete and get ahead is fueled by this coveting, wanting more of everything. We are far more interested on what we can get rather than what we can give. Money, prestige, material things. We see that our neighbor has something we feel we should have so we set on a mission to "out do" him. We worship the created instead of the creator. We covet our neighbor's property and set on that mission to best him. When our greed, lust and self-indulgence is put above God, coveting becomes idolatry. "Don't you realize that to whom you yield yourselves as servants to obey, you are servants of the one you obey, whether it is of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." (Romans 6:16).

Coveting can only produce negative results if we let it go uncontrolled. Theft, lying, murder and falling away from God result. Even the elect fall prey to this. King David is a prime example. He saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, bathing and lusted after her. They committed adultery and she became pregnant. To cover his sin David sent for Uriah and tried to get him to sleep with Bathsheba so he would believe the child was his. Uriah

would not out of respect for his troops. David sent him back to battle with a note to Joab to put Uriah in harms way where he was killed. In his coveting of Bathsheba, David ended up breaking several more commandments. Sins of adultery, lying/false witness, murder and putting her before God making her an idol. As a result of their sins God took the life of the child. David ended up repenting. (2 Samuel 11:1-27).

Unfortunately, this type of activity has been prophesied in the last days, "Know this also, that in the last days perilous times shall come; For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, braggarts, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, despisers of those who are good. Betrayers, reckless, egotistical, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; Having an outward appearance of godliness, but denying the power of true godliness. But as for you, turn away from all these." (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

We usually end up financially over extended because of our desire for more *stuff.* It also leads to less time to spend with or focus on God. We are too busy working or *having fun* to make time for our Heavenly Father. If we did we would realize that all that stuff is just stuff. It does not have the power to make us truly happy. The newness and novelty wears off and we lose interest. Real peace and joy come from our personal relationship with our Creator God. It is not wrong to desire things but we cannot let them become obsessions which lead us away from God and into breaking His commandments. "If you love Me, keep the commandments-namely, My commandments." (John 14:15). Do you want to know Him and love Him? "The one who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:4).

How do we, those called into God's church, work to combat these urges? We must channel our desires in the right direction. We are told our primary objective should be to seek the Kingdom

of God and His Righteousness. "But as for you, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33). This has been a common theme in our study of the commandments. Our focus needs to be on our Creator God and all His righteousness. We have also learned, "But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust spoils, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:20-21). What are lasting treasures? A proper relationship with God, spiritual and biblical understanding, wisdom and knowledge of God's Word would be a few examples. Proper relationships, spiritual understanding, wisdom and knowledge would be a few examples.

Solomon asked God to grant him wisdom and knowledge so he could properly govern and judge God's people. "Now grant me wisdom and knowledge that I may go out and come in before this people. For who can judge this Your people that is so great?" (2 Chronicles 1:10). God granted it because this was in Solomon's heart.

"For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." (Proverbs 8:11).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever." (Psalms 111:10).

Jesus told His disciple's to, "Watch out, and keep yourselves from covetousness, for no one's life is in the abundance of the things that he possesses." (Luke 12:15).

We cannot defeat sin by ourselves. We need to ask God to help us and guide us. We can only overcome our sinful nature through God's gift of the Holy Spirit. "Therefore if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father Who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). We have also learned that when we repent and are baptized we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts

2:38). Jesus gives us the power of His love and guidance when we work to overcome our old ways.

The apostle Paul wrote that we must combat the lusts of the flesh by walking in the Spirit. "Now this I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these things are opposed to each other, so that you cannot do those things you wish to do." (Galatians 5:16-17).

The *stuff* we have does not define who we are. Because we have money, houses, fancy cars, beautiful clothes society calls us a success. Are we? Are we truly happy with all the stuff? Happiness does not come from or by owning all this stuff. Happiness is a state of mind. The example Jesus set for us was in love, joy and peace that is attained through serving and giving to others. He put service to God first and in so doing was able to overcome human weakness. By coveting or breaking any of the commandments we are separating ourselves from God. "If you love me, keep the commandments-namely, My commandments." (John 14:15).