

## ***A DIFFERENT DRUMMER***

Everyone has seen them. They are the misfits of our society. They were not blessed to be what we call "normal". They could not function in our society without a great deal of help. Often mocked by the cruel who are themselves so empty inside, they live in their own minds and in their own worlds. Worlds where jealousy does not enter, where happiness is found in the simple and the pretty. They delight easily, love easily, and forgive easily. Because they do not understand most of the advertising around them, they do not know enough to be discontent. They march to the beat of a different drummer and the world calls them handicapped. We call them blessed.

We like to have things summarized for us. It makes for quicker reading. Perhaps this is why seventeen verses of the commandments of God to the people of Israel are usually listed as ten short commandments. The one listed in Ex 20:17 is often quoted as "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors wife". It actually reads "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's". This is a significantly different commandment than what the abbreviated version leads us to believe.

It is also diametrically opposed to the goal of most advertising that we are subjected to on a daily basis. If you have not figured it out yet, the point of most marketing schemes is not to inform you that there is a product that will meet your needs, but rather to make you discontent with the product you already have. Marketing also strives to create a desire for things. We are shown image after image of what the world considers to be successful or beautiful people, enjoying the product we do not have (yet). The statement is usually implied, but is sometimes blatantly stated, "What is wrong with you that you do not have this product yet? Don't you want to also be successful or beautiful? Or cool? Or in fashion? Or chic? Or desirable?" You name it! If you can imagine a ploy to make people unhappy to the point of acquisition, it is written somewhere in a marketing manual.

Choosing to covet is a direct violation of the commandment of God. Choosing to follow the trends of fashion and culture is a choice to reject the values of God. Paul, an apostle of Christ, counted the possessions of the world as dung. God said not to covet what our neighbor has. Even if an advertisement instructs us to. We are told that godliness with contentment is great gain. The opposite then is also true. If we have godliness and allow others to steal our contentment, it is a great loss. Yet, we allow marketing to convince us that we are somehow worth less without some possession than we were before we saw or heard the commercial. Who exactly made them judges over our worth, temporal or eternal? Why, as possessors of the kingdom of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, do we permit it?

Frankly, most advertising is insulting in it's assumption of stupidity on the part of the consumer. Apparently, the operating slogan is "A fool and his money are soon parted." For example, how many parents who pay out hundreds of dollars for tennis shoes really believe for a moment that they will increase their kid's chances of jumping any higher, shooting any straighter, or becoming a highly paid professional like Michael Jordan? No, the real reason is that their kids don't want to be the only kids in their school without the shoes. They want what everyone else has. Back to the commandment. Now here is the interesting part. When everyone has brand "A" and no one is buying anything, brand "B" will be advertised. The idea, even though it obviously can not be true, is that everyone else already has them, kids without them are at a disadvantage, and they are definitely out of touch with the "in" crowd. So the parents head back to the stores like puppets on strings and they are parted from their money. True devotees to fashion are even more ludicrous.

Like the emperor with no clothes, their self worth hinges upon the approval of the con artists who take their money while assuring them that their taste is exquisite. Most people would not care to even be buried in what comes down the fashion show runways these days. It is even more foolish when we allow fads to invade the church of the living God.

God does not judge us by our outward appearance, even when it constantly changes. But He does look at the heart behind those changes. No strange clothing or hair style will make us in any way unique or special in the eyes of men or of God. Nor will conforming our appearance to match our surroundings make us any more acceptable in the eyes of men or God. We wonder sometimes how we will answer certain questions God might choose to ask. Was His provision of our needs as our God inadequate? Were we discontent with only being given eternal life? With all of the needs around us that we were to meet in His name, could we not find a better use for the riches He gave us? Did we not understand when we were told not to measure ourselves among ourselves? What part of "Thou shalt not covet" was too difficult to comprehend?

We choose, instead, to march to the beat of a different drummer. When our clothes are worn out or too tight, they will be replaced with whatever fits, is durable, and conveniently priced. Whatever haircut or fashion has worked for the last decade, is easy to maintain, and looks reasonably presentable still works fine. If the vehicle runs and does not require unreasonable maintenance, it is a great vehicle. If the computers still run the software needed for our business, they are big enough and fast enough. If the house is comfortable and not leaking, if the church building still houses the ministries it needs to, and the mower still cuts the grass, thank the Lord for His blessings. Even more importantly, if our friends have a new car, a new boat, and a small herd of horses, and they are happy, thank God that we are both content. Because we have discovered that wealth is a matter of contentment alone and no possessions will leave here with us.

We make that choice because we have noticed those who are truly happy. They often seem to be misfits in our society. Often mocked by the cruel who are themselves so empty inside, they live in and for a different world. A world where jealousy has no part, where happiness is found in the simple meeting of needs and the beauty of creation. They delight easily, love easily, and forgive easily. Because they simply do not understand the siren call of marketing to covet, they do not know they are wretched and poor and discontent. They march to the beat of a different drummer and the world calls them foolish. We call them blessed.

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Do you feel you would be more or less happy if you never heard or saw another advertisement again?
2. Have you ever stopped to consider some of the advantages of being what we call "simple minded?" Or being handicapped in terms of sight or hearing or speech? In terms of eternity, where a new and perfect body awaits us, is there really a disadvantage in this short phase of our existence in not to being able to see fashions, temptations, or the faults of those around us? What if we never heard lies or gossip or about the failures of those we love? What if we never had to apologize or undo damage from what we said without thinking?
3. What all does the commandment regarding coveting cover? What does it mean to covet?
4. Have you ever sat and carefully considered the assumptions that lie behind any particular advertisement or commercial? What is left unsaid, but implied? How did it make you

- feel? Did you feel as though the speaker was trying to help you or considered you a sucker?
5. What is the last thing you bought that you had no "need" for, but only a "want" because others had it and you thought it was cool? Because you felt left out? Do you think that purchase was good stewardship of God's blessings to you?
  6. What percentage of your clothes, or other possessions, do you discard because they are worn or no longer fit? How about those you discard because you are tired of them or they are not in fashion?
  7. Why do new fashions come out every season? Why are they so different from the previous seasons? Given the concept that there is nothing new under the sun, how long do you think it takes for styles and trends to resurface?
  8. When your friends seem blessed by God, are you happy for them or envious of them?
  9. Why did God say that godliness with contentedness is great gain?
  10. Who is wealthiest? Someone who has more money than he can spend and strives for more, or someone who has everything he needs and desires nothing else? Define wealth? How does God define wealth?
  11. What warnings are there in the scriptures concerning wealth and the acquisition of things? Why? What instructions were the disciples given regarding clothing and possessions? Why?
  12. How new, or cutting edge, or fashionable do the possessions that you own need to be to satisfy you? What happens that causes you to become dissatisfied with them?
  13. Do you know someone who you consider to be truly happy or content? How many new things do they own?