

Holy Habits 4-2-00

Simplicity

I heard several things this week that drew me to the topic I believe the Lord has for us this morning. The first was from a tape by Malcom Smith. He pointed out the tenth commandment was the one that Jesus often used to show people the full meaning of the other commands. Thou shalt not covet. It has to do with man's wandering desire. In regards to the command, thou shalt not commit adultery, Jesus pointed out the desire was adultery – That is the 10th commandment. The tenth commandment says our 'wanter must want the right things.' Thou shalt not kill, but wouldn't you like to kill that guy? You shouldn't lie but do you want to lie about something?

To covet is to desire what God has not given us. We are saying our Savior was wrong when He spoke on the Mountain and said, "don't worry about what you will eat. Look at the birds. They don't have jobs or barns but God feeds them. And don't worry about your clothes. Look at the flowers in the field. Even Solomon was not dressed that nice." Do we trust God will provide our needs or are we out trying to get our wants? Jesus followed all that up with, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Mt 6:33 See the contrast to coveting?

The other thing I heard on Christian Radio. One of the announcers said he analyzed what made him angry and 80% of the time it was about money or time. When the issue was money he said he had to confess he had a love of money. When it was about time he said he knew it was related to leisure time and therefore the love of pleasure. That hit me between the eyes. OW!

Jesus was not vague about money and its power over life. In fact in that same sermon on the mountain he said you either serve God or mammon (Aramaic for money) He warned that our lives do not consist of the abundance of our possessions. He said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. He told the rich young ruler to sell it all and give it away and he would have treasure in heaven and could come follow Him. He tells the parable of the man who built more barns only to die and leave it all behind. He warns us to lay up treasure in heaven and not on the earth. And look at Lk 6:30 Give to everyone that asks of you, and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. Ps 62:10 If riches increase set not your heart on them. Heb 13:5 Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have for He has said, I will never leave you or forsake you.

This culture is constantly telling us we will not be happy unless we have more. We just read in our Bible study that "godliness with contentment is great gain". But this culture sows discontent. Advertising is all about making you discontent.

But if we seek first the Kingdom of God, if we are content with Jesus, things no longer enslave us. Several times in Paul's letters he called greed – idolatry. It is saying that a thing will bring you satisfaction when the heart of man can only be truly satisfied with God. When we find that satisfaction in God and not the material world, when we seek the kingdom first and his righteousness, we find how little we really need. Richard E. Byrd recorded in his journal after months alone in the barren Arctic: "I am learning...that a man can live profoundly, without masses of things."

But our culture insists that is not true. Our heroes are poor kids that get rich. We call covetousness ambition. Hoarding we call prudence. Greed we call industry. As Christians we must recognize things for what they are and see how they enslave people.

On the other hand simplicity is not asceticism. Simplicity is exhibited in the life of the apostle when he said, he was content with little or much. Simplicity can welcome a land flowing with milk and honey but asceticism cannot. Simplicity enjoys the things God has given us to richly enjoy, but it does not demand more.

Simplicity cannot be defined in terms of absolutes or we fall into legalism. It is not the size of your house or the popularity of your car, but those may certainly be affected by simplicity. Simplicity is as Jesus defined it – seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. It is being content with Jesus. But let me venture to mention some of the things simplicity could be.

These are not rules to live by they are the convictions of the Holy Spirit in the lives of some Christians. Each is not for everyone. Simplicity is allowing God to set you free from the things of the world that would master you. That is why the rich young ruler was told to sell it all. Jesus does not demand you to sell all you have – but in the life of this young ruler, that was the Master that controlled him. He would not be free to follow Jesus unless that drastic step was taken to liberate Him.

Has something mastered you? It may be pleasure. As I mentioned earlier the love of pleasure can drive us to anger and rage. Let go of your plans for it and find pleasure in the simple things God puts in your path each day. It may be work – for many men work has mastered their lives and only careful intentional planning because of putting the Kingdom first can liberate them into the freedom of simplicity. It may be food or clothes – necessities but never to be our Master, for one is your Master, even Christ. It may be TV – many don't realize the

addiction they have to television – but don't make these rules for a godly life. They are for self-examination, not examination of others. Refuse to be a slave to anything but God.

Here are some suggestions for a simple life and a check of our motives. These come from Richard Foster.

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
2. Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
3. Develop a habit of giving things away – de-accumulate
4. Don't swallow advertising – ask yourself if what you have isn't sufficient. Most time saving devices don't save time or money.
5. Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
6. Develop a deeper appreciation for God's gift to you in creation
7. Don't buy on time unless it truly makes financial sense.
8. Shun whatever would distract you from your main goal.

I want to remind you these are not rules but suggestions. They are to help you examine if you are seeking the Kingdom of God first. Only you can know, with the help of the Holy Spirit, if something in your life is getting in the way with your relationship with God. That is what it's all about.

What are we after, what are we chasing? Do we have a real trust in the provision of God and hunger to know Him to in a greater way? Or are material things interfering with that goal?

An old Quaker hymn goes like this:

It's a gift to be simple, It's a gift to be free, It's a gift to come down where we ought to be. And when we see ourselves in a way that's right, we will live in a valley of love and delight!

When true simplicity is gained, To live and love we will not be ashamed, To turn and to turn will be our delight, Till by turning, turning We turn 'round right.

Inward reality results in an outward life-style. Is your life cluttered? Learn the discipline of simplicity and be free of the things that would master you – so you can be free to be mastered by the Master.