

How does the NT challenge Christians to follow this command?

- a. **First**, the NT writers frequently call Christians to contentment...**Heb. 13:5**
- Once again, the NT reasoning for calling us to contentment is God's goodness in deciding what we should have.
 - The writer says be content with what you have, because the Lord has said that He will always be with us.
 - How does this explain the need for contentment?
 - Because if the Lord is always with us, then we can safely assume He is fully aware of our circumstances and our needs.
 - And in light of that knowledge, He has made a certain provision available
 - That provision should not be challenged.
- a. **Secondly**, the Law of Christ commands us to recognize that the Lord **Controls our Possessions** and so seek the Lord for everything we desire.
- James addresses this problem in particular in his letter **James 4:1-8**
 - James points out that our desires cross the line and become sinful when they are driven by the lust of the flesh.
- d. Murder, envy, fights are all the result of a desire that is centered in the flesh.
- This is the opposite of desires of heart that arise out of the Spirit's leading.
 - If the Spirit is leading us to a desire, then the natural response should be to pray and ask the Lord to deliver the thing we desire.
 - By that prayer, we acknowledge that all good things come from the Lord, as James also teaches.
 - And we ask knowing that the Lord will grant it if it is the right thing for us.
 - These are the right motives that James says we must have to receive something from the Lord.
- e. By contrast, **wrong motives** are desires that originate in our flesh and lead to sinful thoughts and actions.
- We want something we can't have, so we kill for it.
 - Or we are envious of what another has, so we quarrel with them.
 - So the Christian's call under the Law of Christ isn't merely not to covet something we shouldn't have.
- f. It includes commands to ask the Lord for everything we want .
- It isn't merely a matter of guarding against wanting the wrong thing in the wrong way.
 - It has become a command to be content, to recognize that the Lord provides us with what He chooses, and to seek Him for anything else we want.
 - So we are called to live without undue interest in other's goods and without the distraction of lustful desires leading to greater sin.
 - Instead, ask the Lord for what you desire, with a motive to serve Him, knowing that everything in the world is at His disposal.
- g. Perhaps this is best summed up in Proverbs 30:7-9

Now that the Law have been delivered...

the narrative returns to describing the state of the people gathered around the mountain.

Verses 18-26

1. After that, Moses leaves the people and approaches the cloud, where he will receive the rest of the Law.
 - a. The thick cloud hid God's glory from the people.
 - But the Lord allowed Moses to see His glory in some form.
 - We'll learn more about this later in Ex 34.
 - b. Now we move forward in the Law to Moses.
 - The next laws God delivers relate to the altar of worship and the Jewish Bill of Rights, as it is known.

Verses 22-26

1. The Lord is about to prescribe instructions on how He should be worshipped corporately, but He prefaces these instructions with a warning in vs.22-23
 - a. As the nation endeavors to worship the Lord, they must be careful never to violate the second commandment by creating idols to represent God.
 - The Lord knew this would be a persistent temptation for Israel.
 - Whenever their minds turn to worshipping the Lord, Who is all Spirit, the tendency is to create something physical in His place.
 - Israel long struggled with this problem.
 - And men still struggle with it today.
 - b. When we engage in worship, men want "bells and smells" as the saying goes.
 - We exist in the physical world, so we try to bring God closer to us by creating a physical representation of God, which is a graven image and an idol.
 - There were pagan idols, there were Jewish idols, and we have American idols Today.
 - Today our graven images may be more sophisticated but they are equally corrupting
 - Ancient idols took the form of figurines of wood or stone.
 - c. Some still erect statues in church
 - But more often, our spiritual crutches come in the form of crosses, or altars, or even the buildings themselves.
 - Like figures made of wood, we assign man-made objects with greater spiritual significance than they deserve.
 - d. Confining the spiritual to the physical is a constant struggle for our flesh, and it is a sin.
 - But Jesus told us that the day had come when the Lord's followers would worship in Spirit and Truth.
 - He was referring to a true worship that happens completely divorced from physical relics or any other substitutes for the Spirit.
 - Today, we have no physical temple...the Lord dwells in us.
 - No assigned priests...we are all priests.
 - No altars...no more sacrifice is required.

- No basins, no incense, nothing physical required under the Law is required today for us to approach and worship.
- Neither should we endeavor to replace them with new physical relics.
 - Speaking of worshipping under the Law, the *Lord gives the instructions constructing* an altar in vs.24-26
- e. God instructed the Jews to build two different types of altars.
 - The Lord directs both the place and the style of altars which may be built for worship
 - *First...* God assigns the locations for every altar
 - Before the Law, the patriarchs would set up altars wherever they wished
 - Usually, they built altars on the occasion of God's revelation or great work in their life.
 - So formal worship was a response to God revealing Himself.
 - *Second...* worship was to become an institution of everyday life.
 - And therefore, the manner and place of worship is determined by the Lord.
 - There is a message embedded in this change.
 - The message is that men must approach the Lord on His terms, not ours.
 - The formality of the Law creates a structure in which our approach is regulated.
 - As Paul said, the Law kept men under custody until Christ came
 - The design of the altar is also intended to communicate how sinful men approach the Lord.
- g. First, altars could be earth or stone.
 - The altars would be a place of sacrifice.
 - A table where an animal or other offering place placed on top and burned
 - Altars are places of sacrifices.
 - They are not religious objects decorating houses of worship
 - They certainly shouldn't be a substitute for a table
 - Churches should never feature altars, since doing so implies a need for sacrifice
 - And Christ's sacrifice was sufficient for all time, so that no new sacrifice will ever be necessary nor acceptable to the Lord
- h. If a stone altar was to be built, the stone could not be cut or shaped by tools
 - Canaanite altars used in their pagan worship practices were typically elaborate and artfully constructed.
 - So this law had the effect of separating Israel from the surrounding people

There is a spiritual message in the altar...

1. The altar is a place where men address the sin that separates them from God
2. So our worship of God depends on having something appease God's wrath for our sin
3. Our sin separates us from God, so until something addresses the problem of our sin, worship isn't possible
4. That's the reason that worship took place at an altar
 - Atonement for sin was the means for entering into worship
 - And it was the means by which the Lord could entertain our worship

Now consider what it would mean if the altar designated for sacrifice was constructed by men using tools to work the stone into shape.

1. It would send a message that by our work, men participated in atoning our sin
2. The altar would stand as a testimony to man's work, with craftsmen reflecting in pride upon their handiwork
3. They could boast of how they contributed to make possible the atonement that permitted men to worship God
 - This was the problem Paul was talking about in Ephesian 2 when he wrote about God's manner of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-10

4. The Lord has done all the work of salvation, so the altar must reflect that spiritual truth
 - The stones were to be left as they were in nature, just as God formed them
 - Men can not participate in their own salvation
 - And the construction of the altar reflected that truth
 - Finally, the altar couldn't have stairs leading up to it, meaning the altar wasn't positioned in an exalted place
 - The reason for this prohibition, according to the Lord, was to prevent the priests' backsides to be exposed when they walked up stairs
 - Men wore robes and tunics, and like ladies' dresses today, if you walk high enough, you expose yourself
 - This was also different from the pagan priests of the day
 - Some cultures demanded that their priests or ministry leaders officiate entirely in the nude
 - I'm grateful the Lord changed that rule!
 - There is another picture formed in the way God forbids the priests' nakedness from being exposed at the altar
 - The ultimate purpose of sacrificial atonement is to cover the nakedness of man's sin
 - Remember, when Adam sinned, he discovered his physical nakedness
 - This new awareness was the awakening of a sinful conscience
 - The awareness Adam experienced was his jeopardy before God because of his sin
 - Adam's sin was exposed before God leaving Adam vulnerable to judgment
 - His conscience reflected this change in his spiritual nature
 - And it manifested itself as a fear of being naked, of physical exposure
 - God programmed our conscience to reflect our spiritual state
 - When we are innocent before God, we carry no sense of shame or vulnerability
 - When we are guilty, we feel the instinctive need to hide ourselves
 - So God commands the priests to hide their nakedness