



9 COUNTERFEIT HOPE

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not desire to get our neighbor's possessions by scheming, or by pretending to have a right to them, but always help him keep what is his.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbor's.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not tempt or coax away from our neighbor his wife or his workers, but encourage them to remain loyal.



Have you ever wished that you were someone else? Have you lain awake at night thinking about what it might be like if you were a little taller or shorter, a little stronger or faster, a little prettier or not quite so heavy—like someone else you know? Have you ever daydreamed about winning some special kind of honor? Or have you ever gone to sleep dreaming about what a difference it would make to have something special—a driver's license and a car, maybe a new stereo, some special clothes, a camera, a shortwave radio, or something else?

Dreams and daydreams are full of hope, something we can't live without. Hope is having something to look forward to, something to wait for tomorrow, the day after, and in the days to come. It is as necessary to us as life and breath, our homes, property, and names.

Having made the decision about us in Christ, God gives us all kinds of hope. God gives us hope for the new self and the new day coming, the final day when God will have the last word and bring in the kingdom. And in the meantime, God gives us hope in the promise to care for us each day, the promise to give us everything we could possibly need to live and serve and be useful.

The old self knows how important hope is, too. But since the sinner in us doesn't have a future of its own, it offers a counterfeit. The old self's false future is centered not on God's promise, but on yourself. In the place of hope, the old self offers coveting: setting your heart on someone or something that belongs to another person.

This false hope is often hidden in your daydreams and wishes. That may seem strange. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with wishing or dreaming. It can inspire you to work hard, to go places, and to accomplish things. Dreaming is good in a lot of ways.

You know by now, though, that the old self is the master of counterfeiting and disguise. It hides itself in what looks good to have its way. That's why God has given two commandments to go after something as innocent looking as wishing.

First of all, as long as the old Adam or Eve is filling you and your neighbor with wishes for things you think you need to



make your life complete, neither you nor your neighbors are safe. Secondly, the old self uses these counterfeit hopes to make a slave of you and finally to burn you out. Then there is no hope.

Fencing the wish

If you've watched the commercials on television instead of running to the refrigerator or somewhere else during the program breaks, you've already seen some good examples of how dangerous wishes can be.

Take car commercials, for example. No matter how fancy or expensive the cars may be, they can only do one thing: haul you from one place to another. Some are large, some small; some get better mileage, some worse; some are more reliable than others. But there isn't one of them that can make you any sexier, any more intelligent, any more beautiful or handsome than you already are.

You wouldn't know that from the commercials, though. Each year the car companies spend millions to convince you and your parents that buying a particular model will change your life—that it will make you more distinguished, elegant, beautiful, daring, or desirable.

That is how coveting works. The advertising is legal but underhanded, designed to make you think you have to have a certain car to be the person you want to be. The car companies covet your money and use the tricks of advertising to make you covet one of their cars.

Another example of coveting happens in friendships. There is no law that says friendships have to last forever. There is nothing illegal about a third person wanting to become a friend of one of your friends, either. But if that third person tries to come between you and your friend, using tricks and schemes to do it, there is something wrong, no matter how legal it is. Though the third person may not outwardly break any of the Commandments, the tricks the person uses can separate you from a close friend and leave you alone.

The purpose of these commandments, then, is to close up these kinds of legal loopholes. Women are not property as they were considered when the wording of the Ninth and Tenth



Commandments originated. Very few people have menservants and maidservants, and most people don't have cattle, either. But there are all kinds of tricks and schemes the old Adam or Eve can and does use to sneak through the other commandments, keeping all the appearances legal while working to deprive you of what is rightfully yours.

That's why coveting is so dangerous. When you want what belongs to your neighbors, they aren't safe. When they want what belongs to you, you aren't safe, either. Even if the desires don't turn to outright adultery, theft, or tricks, wanting something or someone who belongs to another person is the first step toward trying to take it away. When you want what belongs to others and others want what belongs to you, you can't be together without envy and suspicion.

So by forbidding coveting, God works to maintain order in our communities. When covetousness is broken, we can wait and work with our neighbors, helping one another to keep what we have, looking forward together to the day when God will bring in the new day. That is real hope, not a counterfeit that makes us envious and suspicious of our neighbors.

The bad penny comes back

Like counterfeit money, the old self's wishes don't just cause trouble for neighbors. They come back to haunt you. Only it's worse than haunting. Your wishes can make a slave of you and give you a worse enemy than you've dreamed of or met.

Take a car, for instance. Suppose the ads succeed in convincing you that if only you can get your hands on one special car, your whole life will change, that the car will make other people more interested in you, that you'll be sexier, happier, a real man or a real woman if you buy and drive it.

How would you go about getting such a car? Obviously, you couldn't steal it. If you did, you couldn't drive it around town. And the car companies aren't easily deceived. Somehow, you would have to find the money to buy it.

Then what would happen? Well, pretty soon your whole life would be devoted to getting enough money for that car. You'd make sacrifices, working after school, on Saturday, and perhaps on Sunday, saving every penny you could lay your hands on.



Jim Whitmer

There would be little time for friendships, school, or fun.

If you finally got the car, it might succeed in making you the envy of your school, town, or neighborhood at first. But pretty soon you'd wonder if all those people were interested in you or your car. More than likely you'd have to show that no other car nearby was better than yours. And you'd probably worry that someone might scratch the finish or do some other kind of damage out of envy.

Besides that, you'd have as much work on your hands as ever: making money to buy fuel; washing, waxing, shining, and maintaining the car. Again there wouldn't be time for schoolwork, not even enough time to drive the car around, or for friends other than those who really like the car.

It might sound like an attractive kind of slavery. Having a car like that could be a lot of fun. But it would be a slavery just the same, wouldn't it? Everything would have to be organized and sacrificed for the wish—that beautiful "slave maker." That's probably why so many people who get cars like that get tired of them after a while. The wish, which started out as an innocent daydream, has made them slaves.

Cars aren't the only culprits. There are as many slave makers as there are things to covet. Athletes who covet prizes and the recognition they can bring can become blue-ribbon slaves. The same thing happens to people who covet being beautiful. They spend all kinds of time grooming to look just right. They buy only the latest fashions and worry about how they look and what others think of them. They might be beautiful, but they are as much slaves as the ones who wear chains.

Every one of the old self's counterfeit hopes promises some



kind of joy, some special recognition or honor, some special reward. And every one of them eventually falls short. The fancy car is soon outdated or it rusts and wears out. Athletes lose games and are soon forgotten. The beautiful people quickly find out that beauty isn't everything or that they aren't as beautiful as they thought.

When these hopes burn out, the old self has to run out and find other counterfeits to take their places. They burn out, too. Finally it looks as though every hope is counterfeit and we're burned out entirely, hopeless, full of despair, certain that nothing is any fun anymore.

That's the second reason God forbids coveting: to protect us from ourselves. We are our own worst enemies, suckers for just about every counterfeit hope the old self drags in front of us.

Protecting us from ourselves

So God, as a gracious and loving creator, works to protect us from ourselves by forbidding these kinds of wishes before they can get off the ground. "You shall not covet," God says. "Don't set your hearts on what belongs to your neighbors—not on the people who belong to them, not on the things that belong to them, not on the recognition, honor, or praise they can give you."

But God doesn't stop after saying no. He says no to the old you's false hopes because God is saying a much bigger yes to the new you, giving you a hope that won't fail. God has decided to be your God, to give you and all of us a hope that is real, not counterfeit. It is the hope of the promise that there is a new you, a new day coming when God will dwell with us, wiping out death, every tear, all mourning, sorrow, and pain.

God gives wishes, dreams, and hopes in the meantime, too—everything we could wish for, dream of, or hope for to help our neighbors and care for the earth. In fact, that's the only limit God sets on our wishing: that it not be at our neighbor's expense, the creation's loss, or our own. God's going to be our God, after all, right up to the day when we are raised from the dead and forever after. With that promise, God makes everything we need a gift.



WHAT DOES GOD SAY OF ALL THESE COUNTERFEITS?

Malachi 2: 17, the latest year that was a burden
 God, wishing the integrity of the fathers
 upon the children in the land and I have
 judgement of those who have not, but
 despising covenant from to covenant of
 those who have not and keep my
 covenant."

What does the man say?

God is not a man, and he does not
 receive man's love. Therefore we are to love his
 word and not man's love. But he promises
 grace and mercy blessing to all who keep these
 commandments. Therefore we are to love and
 trust him, and gladly do what he commands.

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