

Biblical Topics

Ten Commandments - Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

To *covet* means to lust, to have a strong desire and longing for something. In itself, coveting is not wrong, it all depends on what we covet. We should covet spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 39). We should covet the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2). We should covet the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33-34). We may also covet things that are not forbidden to us, as wisdom, knowledge (2 Chron. 1:10), or ability and skill.

What does God forbid in the Ninth Commandment?

God forbids us to coveting, that is, having a sinful desire for anything that belongs to our neighbor. We may desire and seek to get our neighbor's inheritance and house in a right and lawful manner. If we cannot get it in an honest way, we must no longer desire it in our hearts as Ahab did when Naboth did not want to part with his vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-4).

- Isaiah 5:8: Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.
- Matthew 23:14: Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.
- 1 Timothy 6:8-10: ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

We must not seek to get our neighbor's house by some dishonest scheme or trick. Even getting it by some legal mean may be wrong. Land sharks foreclose mortgages, or pay delinquent taxes to obtain houses and property far below their actual worth. The following is a part of a devotion from Lutheran Hour Ministries is one such example:

The law may be the law, but that doesn't mean I have to like it. That pretty much explains the reaction of a judge in Pennsylvania who had to make a decision against a woman whose case appeared in his court.

The woman is Eileen Battisti and in 2011 her house -- a house valued at \$280,000 -- was sold because of an unpaid tax. Sound sad? You ain't heard nuthin' yet. Battisti is a widow who is trying to raise three children on her own. And the tax for which her home was sold: that was a grand

total of \$6.30.

In her defense, Battisti says she never received any notification about this miniscule tax, which was due, while the authorities said they sent out all the required official documentation. Eileen says she didn't know she had a problem, the folks in control say, "That's your problem not ours. The law is the law, and you didn't pay what you owed."

Looking at the law, part of the job description most judges take seriously, the arbitrator of Battisti's case had to say, "I'm sorry and I wish things were different, but the law is the law." You messed up and you have paid the penalty.

P.S. - The fellow who bought Battisti's home said she could have it back for \$260,000.

What does God require of us in the Ninth Commandment?

There are two things to know before going into this part of each commandment:

First, one of the best ways to move away from wrong behavior or habits is to do the very opposite actions. Each of the commandments asks the question: What does this mean? Following that question and near the end of the explanation, Luther offers positive behaviors that would aid in doing a better task of following God's direction in this commandment. Work at practicing these.

Second, right after the question comes the statement, "we should fear and love God." In the commandments to "fear God" means to "stand in awe of Him," to revere, respect, esteem, and honor Him. We are NOT to shake in our boots from fright.

God requires that our hearts be filled with holy desires only. Such holy desires will move us to help our neighbor and be of service to him in keeping his inheritance or house. If we love our neighbor, we shall rejoice in his prosperity. We will look after his interests and take care of his things as though they were our own.

- Leviticus 19:2: he LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'"
- Galatians 5:13: You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

The above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.