

“Love does not envy” 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 4

Personally, I find I have to exercise considerable Christian forbearance when it come to tv advertisements. The one that makes me grit my teeth most at the moment is surprisingly, not the one with the meerkats that treats us all like children, but the one with Kevin Bacon trying to sell us mobile phones on the EE network. I get especially cross when he assures us that if we have that phone on that network then others will 'envy' us.

This tactic is so blatantly obvious that I'm surprised anybody falls for it. First it plays on our desire to feel superior to everyone else, and secondly it warns us not to be saddled with the misery of envy by being one of the people who buys the thing. The only answer to the problem is for everyone to buy a phone so that no one is envious. Then Kevin Bacon can advertise the next product so that people can make other people envious again. That's not the kind of thinking that comes from love for others.

Of course, the problem is not that you don't have the product that Mr. Smug next door has. The problem is envy itself. We see that someone has something that we don't have and we want one for ourselves. We buy it, then find that the other person has a better one, so we have to go and buy that. Human nature is an advertiser's dream. I sometimes think that advertisers treat us as idiots because they've long ago realised that we are.

Wouldn't it be good to be immune to this kind of exploitation? Well, we can be. In the bible we have a commandment and some advice. The commandment, in the Old Testament tells us not to covet (or be envious of, or desire for myself) anything that belongs to our neighbour. Well, at least that tells us that it is unhealthy to envy, but it doesn't take away that twinge of jealousy and desire when we see the people next door with a newer car than us.

The advice comes from Paul in the New Testament. He says that he has learned to be content with whatever he has in whatever circumstances he finds himself. He's understood that the constant yearning for something new does not satisfy the real yearning in our hearts for connection with God, which is what we all really want, whether we realise it or not. When we learn to satisfy that need by giving our lives in to his hands to live under his rule, care and guidance, then we can be free of Kevin Bacon and his attempts to cash in on our envy.

Prayer.

Father, thank you that in connection with you there is everything we need for our physical and spiritual lives. In you we can break out of the constant cycle of desire, acquisition and disappointment that blights the lives of so many. Lord, we don't want to live in envy of what others have, but to be content with what we have, whether that is a little or a lot. In Jesus' name, amen.

All these devotionals can be found on our website inghamitechurch.org on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.