

Question: If I find something that another person has lost, is it wrong to keep it?

As children, we may have heard or repeated the adage, “Finders keepers, losers weepers.” But such action is in direct opposition to God’s eternal, moral teachings as expressed both in the Ten Commandments and in the teachings of Jesus in his ministry. When Moses explained God’s commandment that “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15; compare Mark 10:19), he said: “If you see your brother's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to him. If the brother does not live near you or if you do not know who he is, take it home with you and keep it until he comes looking for it. Then give it back to him. Do the same if you find your brother's donkey or his cloak or anything he loses. Do not ignore it” (Deuteronomy 22:1-3).

To keep any property that belongs to another person, even if it has been lost by that person, is a form of stealing. Those who trust in Jesus should always make every effort to return any property to its original owner. One is not justified in keeping lost possessions by assuming that the person who lost them was careless and does not deserve to have them returned. Neither can we avoid our responsibility before God by ignoring any lost items we may see. God, who sees all, places the responsibility upon us to be our brother’s keeper by restoring the lost item if at all possible.

In addition, Jesus taught his disciples what we often call the Golden Rule: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). If I want to be faithful to Jesus as Lord of my life, I must ask myself what I would want another person do about anything I accidentally lost. No matter how large or small that lost item is, I suspect that most of us would like to have it returned.

Dishonesty, even in small things, is an indication of a selfish and greedy heart. Another of the basic moral commandments of God says: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17 NIV). A person who is honest enough to return any small items that he finds is a person who can be trusted with things of much greater value (Luke 16:10). No society can long exist without this level of

basic honesty. I believe this is what Jesus would have us do. After all, the reason he came into our world was to seek and save lost people and return them to the Heavenly Father (Luke 19:10).

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