

**Exodus 20:15** 4-29-18

***Thou Shalt Not Steal***

We return this morning to our meditations on the Ten Commandments of our God, handed down to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai. We come this morning to commandment #8 in verse **15** *You shall not steal*. We have seen that the principle behind the sixth commandment is the sanctity of life, the principle behind the seventh commandment is the sanctity of marriage. What then is the principle behind the eighth commandment? It is the principle of the right to private property. The commandment assumes, as does all of biblical ethics, the ownership of earthly possessions by individuals. The notion that God is the owner of all does not contradict this. We agree that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, but in giving man dominion over the earth God has also assigned certain property rights to individuals. One man owns this house, another owns this car and not everyone owns the same amount. Is there a problem with that? Is that somehow opposed to God's order of things? Absolutely not. I was at a Christian event recently where the assembly participated in a corporate confession of sin that included this line: *Forgive us for wealth inequality*. Really? *Forgive us for wealth inequality*. Am I supposed to take responsibility for that? And is that really a problem to be solved? Clearly there are some who believe the government should own everything so that nobody would have a nickel more than the next guy. As nice as that sounds it is not God's way. The Scriptures recognize the existence of both rich and poor. It directs the rich to be generous and the poor to be industrious but it nowhere recommends the establishment of a classless society. And in those places where that supposed ideal has been tried the clear result has been the impoverishment of everybody except the ones running the show. Scriptural teaching supports a free-market economy because of the right to private property. I Timothy 6:**17-18** *Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share*. That is how God speaks to the rich. With instruction, not condemnation. Private ownership is God's idea and He protects it with the eighth commandment against theft.

We may say more about that later. For now let's look at what is forbidden in the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment? I have a list of 9 things. When I saw I had nine I tried to narrow it down to 8 so

that I would have 8 violations of #8 but I couldn't eliminate any. These are all important to understand. The first violation of the commandment is what we might call common theft. That is the plain and simple taking of what belongs to another. Clearly, the thief who breaks into your home and takes off with your set of Bible Commentaries has done wrong. But you would never think of doing that would you? Most Americans who aren't supporting a drug habit have too much conscience to steal from their neighbor. But there are some forms of common thievery that we seem to have no problem with. There is a huge problem in our society of people stealing from their employer. Those things that are given to you for the accomplishment of your job you take for your personal use. To a certain extent I expect your employer will permit your doing that but how many times have you crossed the line? How much personal use of the copy machine is legitimate? I read about a revival in Wales around a century ago in which God moved mightily among the workers in a shipyard. One of the results was that so many people were convicted by God's Spirit about taking things from the shipyard that they had to open up a special division just for the return of stolen merchandise. And after a while the company took out an ad in the paper asking folks not to bring back anymore stuff because they couldn't process it all. That is what I call bringing forth the fruits of repentance. Stealing from your employer is not okay. Neither is it okay to steal from your parents. I'm speaking to you kids here and maybe to some adults with good memories. Have you been honest with your parents about your handling of money? Have you respected their possessions and used wisely what they have given you or have you treated it lightly? Some of you have snatched money from mom's purse even this week. What does God think of that? I remember an episode of the Bill Cosby show in which one of his daughters was having a hard time at school because kids saw her as a rich girl. So she was complaining to her parents about how hard it was for her to be so rich; and Cosby said, "What do you mean? You aren't rich. Your parents are rich; you have nothing." He's got a point young people? Just because it belongs to your parents doesn't mean it's yours. God doesn't wink at inner-family theft.

On to the second way we violate the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment and that is by destroying what belongs to another. You aren't to steal it and you aren't to damage it. We are to have a healthy respect for the property of others. This means you keep your kids and pets out of the neighbor's garden. It means you don't litter. It means you show some concern and care about the property of others. Consider certain things you may see. People walking into stores

throwing their cigarettes on the sidewalk. I've been tempted to pick a cigarette butt up off the pavement and hand it to some inconsiderate guy and say, "here, I think you must have dropped this." I wonder, what are they thinking when they do that? Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Respect the property of others.

The third way we violate the commandment against stealing is through unjust business practices. And please understand that not everything that is legal is ethical. When you sell a car that has a significant problem do you try to hide it, talk around it, keep it a secret or do you treat the person like you would want to be treated - with complete honesty about the product you are selling. There are lots of fancy ways, legal ways to rip people off, through fraud, misrepresentation, or extortion. Don't you excuse them for yourself or your business.

Violation #4 of the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment is a failure to pay what you owe, when you owe it. If you enter an agreement to purchase something you are obligated before God to pay it. Romans 13:**8a** *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another.* Now that doesn't mean it's wrong to obligate yourself in some way. It means it is wrong to not fulfill the obligation. I don't know how many times I've heard TV preachers talk about how they are three months behind paying their bills. And I wonder, how do they justify that? How can they lightly pass over that kind of fiscal irresponsibility as if the problem is with the donors and not the spenders. That seems to be a trademark of our society and the legal system stands ready to defend the irresponsible. And if your bank makes unsound loans, that's okay Uncle Sam will make us all pay to cover the bill. I'm no legal expert but as best I understand bankruptcy, it is not a Christian option if it is used to permanently escape a debt. The courts do not exist to rescue you from contractual obligations into which you freely entered. We are to take seriously what we say we will do. Psalm 37:**21a** *The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives.* The righteous man fulfills his obligations.

Violation #5 of commandment #8 is lazy or sorry work. When you are being paid to do a job and you don't work at it with diligence you are no better than the guy who steals from the boss. Proverbs 18:**9** *He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys.* Do you understand that? God is in favor of productivity. And the lazy worker, like a vandal is anti-productive. I wonder, Christian, I wonder what the people you work with would say about your diligence on the job. Are you giving your employer a hard day's work, a full day's work? Can you leave the office knowing that you have earned your wages?

The sixth way people violate the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment is by stealing time. You know the old saying, *Time is money*. That's true. Time is valuable. Part of having regard for what belongs to others is respecting their time. And we steal time from people continually without giving it a thought. How do you do this? You can do it with small talk. You have some free time so you just chew the fat with somebody who may or may not have an interest in spending his time that way. But you impose. Another way you steal time is by being late or unprepared for meetings or appointments. How many times have you been left hanging by someone who is 20 minutes late and never bothered to call? How many times have you gone to meet someone who had not prepared enough to make the meeting worthwhile? How many times have you set your schedule for a meeting only to have it cancelled on you at the last minute? How many times have you done it yourself? How many times have you forgotten an appointment and left someone stranded? We don't normally think of these things as robbery but that is exactly what it is. So many times I'll have somebody waste an hour of my time and I leave thinking, "*I would rather have just handed the guy a \$50 than lose an hour like that.*" Time is precious. I'm aware when I stand up here and teach that you have entrusted to me a certain amount of your day. I feel responsible to make it worth your while to sit thru a sermon. Given my normal live audience I figure I'm dealing with over 200 man hours every Sunday. Hey, that's precious stuff. The man who wastes it is a thief and a robber.

The seventh way people violate the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment is by not giving what they owe to God. Malachi 3 is one of those texts preachers love. **8a** *Will a man rob God? What a strange concept! 8-10a "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."* Wow! The implications of that are pretty profound aren't they? God expected his people to dedicate at least a tenth of their wealth and income to him and if they failed to do it He considered it robbery. Giving to the Lord through His church is not a Christian option. It's not something nice to do if you have some extra cash sitting around. God says it is due Him from His people who express their love by tithing.

The eighth way people violate the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment is by not paying their taxes. All that is due. You know, Jesus was asked about this and he made plain that you are to render to Caesar that portion of your wealth that goes to civil government. Romans 13:7 *Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom.* Now it doesn't suggest that you need to pay more than your government requires. I think, given the state of the state, our monies are much better used in the church. To what extent you can move your wealth toward God's kingdom rather than Donald's kingdom you should. But, there is only so much you can do legally. You will pay taxes, different kinds of taxes, lots of taxes. And Christians are to pay what they are assessed. When you don't pay a dollar what happens? The rest of us have to pay that dollar. Years ago I bought a used car from a man. I paid about \$2500. When we went to settle and change titles he handed me the state tax form and invited me to write in whatever price I chose. You see, I would have to pay sales tax to the state based on the price of the car. Knowing that I was a pastor this guy invited me to lie. But if I don't pay my share what have I done? I have not only lied I have stolen from you because you will have to make up the difference. Pay what you owe, to God, to government and to your neighbor.

The ninth way in which the prohibition against stealing is often violated is by governmental theft. What I am about to say does not negate the previous point. Once again this year our federal government plans on spending over a trillion dollars more than they plan to bring in. Here is a picture of a trillion. The national debt is now at 21 trillion and our increasing national debt is the equivalent of stealing from our children. It is clearly and essentially immoral. Thomas Jefferson wrote: *The question whether one generation has the right to bind another by the deficit it imposes is a question of such consequence as to place it among the fundamental principles of government. We should consider ourselves unauthorized to saddle posterity with our debts and morally bound to pay them ourselves.* Here is some homework. Google *Davy Crockett Not Yours To Give*. Then read what comes up. The point of what is written there, using the life and words of Colonel David Crockett a former member of the US House, is that according to the constitution our governmental leaders have no right to allocate monies for charitable causes. They are only authorized to use the monies in our national treasury to pay the bills of the United States. But what has happened in our government as well as that of almost every government I know of? The government has become an agent for the redistribution of wealth. It has become a bureaucratic Robin Hood, which takes from some

citizens and gives to other citizens, with a lot of bureaucratic middle men making a good living by the process. This may sound like a political point, but I'm preaching about God's eighth commandment which is based on the right of private property. I'm applying this truth to our culture. God is all for charity. God says much about taking care of the poor, but that was never meant to be the government's job. God commands the rich to be generous and to be ready to share but He doesn't permit the government to make them do it. Do you see the difference?

It is interesting to me that so often these days I hear the word "justice" used to refer to something which sounds a whole lot like charity. And I think that indicates a major cultural shift which has taken place over the last 100 years and can really be traced to the philosophy of Karl Marx and the attitude of the Bolshevik Revolution. It is the sense that the rich uniformly got that way thru some devious means; and the poor, well they are poor because of oppression by the rich. Socialists all over the world have agitated for a welfare state, for a totalitarian government on the basis of class envy. They have nurtured a general hatred of the rich on the part of the lower classes. With the result that most people think it is okay to steal from someone if he or she is rich. You think about it. Modern people don't feel guilty about stealing from a Zuckerberg or a Bezos or from Uncle Sam for that matter. They are rich, and the attitude is that they owe me. They owe me something and if I have to steal it to get it, well that's okay. But it's even neater and cleaner if the government will steal it for me. It is a theft entered into by well-meaning, good-hearted people, but it is strategically disastrous and morally corrupt. People who would never think of sticking a gun at your head and demanding your money will elect politicians whose stated policy, in so many words, is to do exactly that. It is government theft.

Are you aware of the magnitude of this problem? The single largest expenditure by the federal government this year is not for defense, it's not for the department of justice. It's not even for education. It is for health and human services. The 2018 budget for HHS was 1.4 trillion dollars, that is more than defense, justice, education, all put together and it's still not close. And the sad thing is that many of these government programs which we pay for punish industry and reward indolence. George Gilder puts it simply: "*When you tax something you get less of it. When you subsidize something you get more of it.*" Too often we tax industry and profits and success. And what are some of the things we subsidize? Illegitimate children, foolish lending, and laziness. This redistribution of wealth by the government goes by a lot of names meant to make it sound lovely and wonderful but when seen clearly it is theft.

Finally, we are done with our nine forms of stealing. Let's finish with a quick look at how we can positively keep God's rule #8. What would be the opposite of stealing? Ephesians 4:**28** *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.* That verse sums it up. There you see the two attitudes that contrast with that of the robber. You see the attitude of responsibility and the attitude of giving. First let's think about the attitude of responsibility. This is the spirit which says, "It is my job to take care of me of me and my own." There is nothing here of entitlements, of the government or the rich or my parents owing me anything. And this is the attitude God intends for us to have. Now the Lord doesn't want us trusting in self as opposed to Him, and He doesn't want us so proud that we refuse to accept charity when charity is needed or help when help is needed. But God does expect us to look to self rather than someone else to provide our needs. And He requires us to work. Work is a duty not a right. We have a right to the pursuit of happiness, but some people aren't willing to pursue it, they want it delivered at no charge. II Thessalonians 3:**10** *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* What is the spirit behind that? Is that cruel? No, that is godliness. Anyone who expects to get has to put out to the degree that they are able. And to provide for the lazy is to subsidize their indolence. Such a practice doesn't help anybody, indeed it dehumanizes a man and strips him of dignity. **10-12** (ESV) *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.* Notice - he says to earn your own living. Don't go looking for handouts. Look for work. That is the attitude of responsibility.

Then there is the attitude of charity. Ephesians 4 said we should labor with what in view? Not only our own needs, and not only those of our family, but the needs of others. There will always be those in genuine distress and the righteous person will work hard enough not only to provide for Himself but to assist others in need. He is one who believes that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The thief says that what you have is mine. The man of God says, "What I have is yours." He displays the attitude of responsibility and He displays the attitude of giving. And friend, more than spiritual talk, more than heroic deeds in Jesus' name, and more

than religious emotions, a lifestyle of responsibility and charity will mark out the man or woman who is filled with the Spirit of God.

Of course, who is the great example of the virtues I describe? Who is the One who displays love in the most lavishly generous way imaginable. It is our Savior. Our Jesus. II Corinthians 8:9*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.*

Who here has stolen? Anyone? Stolen property, time, reputation. Anyone here not paid what you owed? Stolen time? Robbed God? Anyone here not done these things? Our selfishness, our thievery has put us in debt. A moral debt. A spiritual debt. For this we need Jesus. For this we need to take our empty cup and dip it into the deep spring of His righteousness, by faith, with repentance. Then go out and tell others about this saving grace, how sweet the sound that saved a thief like me. Let's all take a minute right now to reflect on what we've considered and how it may shape our confession to God and how it may change our living.....