

Am I a Thief? – Exodus 20:15

COMMANDMENT # 8 -- *Thou shalt not steal.* (Exodus 20:15; cf. Deu. 5:19)

INTRODUCTION

- I. **8th Commandment Explained** – At one glance, this appears to be an easy commandment to obey. Thieves are put into prison and since most of us have not been put into prison, we are not guilty of breaking this commandment! This is the common reasoning in some minds. Commandment # 8 is simple and to the point in its injunction. We are forbidden by God to steal. The difficulty in applying this commandment lies in the fact that it is not the act of stealing itself but what has been stolen. Many things are stolen that are not tangible and therefore will not land a person in prison. The courts of man arrest thieves only when the crimes committed are tangible including what has been stolen on paper such as doctoring the books for illicit purposes, etc.

However, this commandment involves more than just stealing someone else's possession like robbery and breaking into someone's home. It includes stealing the intangibles such as time. When we are late for an appointment, we cause someone to wait for us and thus we have stolen his time. The length of time we are late would equal how much we have stolen. We do not return what was borrowed; we are slothful instead of putting in a day's work at the office - these are some examples of how some people, including Christians, break the 8th commandment!

Who is a Thief? He is one – who takes from others what belongs to others; and
who withholds from others what belongs to others.

II. Stealing from God –

* in tithes and offerings – Tithes and offerings from God's children belong to God. When the believer does not give his tithe and offering, he is stealing from God. **Malachi 3:7-12** (KJV), "*Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? 8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.*"

The reason they did not give their tithes and offerings is lack of faith. They did not trust God to provide for their everyday needs. Giving is for all believers, whether you are a student, homemaker, full-time worker or a working adult. However, there are some who have the spiritual gift of giving and they are able to give liberally and cheerfully. **Romans 12:6-8** (KJV) reveals this truth to us, "*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that*

giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

* in not keeping the Lord's Day holy -- When we do not keep the Lord's Day holy, we have stolen from God. The Lord's Day belongs to the LORD. When we use His Day to satisfy our own desires we have stolen from God. When the Jews did not keep the seventh year and the Jubilee year they had stolen from the LORD (cf. Lev 25). In other words, when we do not give cheerfully to God what belongs to Him anyway, we are stealing from Him. This includes our lack of service or failure to serve.

III. Stealing from Man – God has placed believers on earth to point others to Christ. We are to direct unbelievers to salvation grace in Christ. We are to help fellow believers to spiritual growth in grace and knowledge of Christ. This means that all believers have a God-given duty to give of themselves to others. Whenever they do not do so they have stolen from them.

* Stealing a man -- i.e. kidnapping, that results in the death penalty. **Exodus 21:16**, *"And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."* The death penalty was enforced even though the victim may be found alive because kidnapping a person is very different from kidnapping, e.g. a baby goat, i.e. a kid! The human being is made in the image of God. The damage done to the person's psyche can be irreparable. There has to be a greater distinction between a man and all other creatures created by God. If it is not the death penalty, then what kind of punishment is fair for kidnapping? The kidnapper cannot pay back fivefold or even tenfold! To be put to death is the just and fair retribution for kidnapping a person.

* Stealing things – this will have many different penalties depending on the amount stolen. **Exodus 22:1-15** (KJV), *"If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. 2 If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. 3 If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. 4 If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double. 5 If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution. 6 If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution. 7 If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double. 8 If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. 9 For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour. 10 If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it: 11 Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and*

the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good. 12 And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof. 13 If it be torn in pieces, then let him bring it for witness, and he shall not make good that which was torn. 14 And if a man borrow ought of his neighbour, and it be hurt, or die, the owner thereof being not with it, he shall surely make it good. 15 But if the owner thereof be with it, he shall not make it good: if it be an hired thing, it came for his hire."

The penalty is to pay back an equitable amount for what was stolen. It is more than what was taken from the person. In the case of sheep, when the animal is small and worth less than the ox, the penalty for stealing a sheep is lower or less severe.

* Stealing in business -- Unjust business practices are also regarded as stealing. **Exodus 22:25-31**, *"If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious. Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people. Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me. And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs."*

All business endeavours must be based upon justice and fairness. It is true that every business is meant to make a profit in order for the business to continue. It is also to do a service. However, when the business is merely to make more and more money and to take advantage of others, especially in the monopoly, then the businessman is charged with stealing by God. The general absolute rule is to not take advantage of others. Be just and be fair!

* Stealing from the government -- * In not rendering unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, believers have disobeyed the 8th Commandment. Do not forget to also include our income tax, parking coupons, etc. These are "little sins" that we commit which we think we can get away with and therefore we become very lax in keeping them faithfully. God watches all the time and He knows even though the government does not know. Jesus taught in **Mark 12:17** (KJV), *"And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him."*

* Stealing in service – When a believer does not serve, he steals from other believers. His life is to be a life of blessing and service to other believers. That is the biblical reason why he remains on earth after salvation. When he does not use his spiritual gift to serve God and bless others, he has in fact stolen from others. He held back what was meant to be given to others! His time and life of service have been withheld! When he is in sin and refuses to forgive or to serve, he has become a thief. The Bible verse that teaches this truth clearly is **1 Corinthians 3:9** (KJV), *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."*

* Stealing a Name – When a believer gossips and a person's life is destroyed, the believer has stolen the latter's life by destroying his name. Character assassination is very common in churches today, more than ever before because of modern technology. **Proverbs 6:12-15**, "*A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.*" **Proverbs 11:9**, "*An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.*" **Proverbs 16:29-30**, "*A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.*" **Proverbs 18:21** (KJV) "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*"

APPLICATION

Clarke's commentary, "All rapine and theft are forbidden by this precept; as well national and commercial wrongs as petty larceny, highway robberies, and private stealing: even the taking advantage of a seller's or buyer's ignorance, to give the one less and make the other pay more for a commodity than its worth, is a breach of this sacred law. All withholding of rights and doing of wrongs are against the spirit of it. But the word is principally applicable to clandestine stealing, though it may undoubtedly include all political injustice and private wrongs. And consequently all kidnapping, crimping, and slave-dealing are prohibited here, whether practiced by individuals or by the state. Crimes are not lessened in their demerit by the number, or political importance of those who commit them. A state that enacts bad laws is as criminal before God as the individual who breaks good ones.

"It has been supposed that under the eighth commandment, injuries done to character, the depriving a man of his reputation or good name, are included, hence those words of one of our poets: -

"Good name in man or woman

Is the immediate jewel of their souls.

Who steals my purse steals trash, -

But he that filches from me my good name,

Robs me of that which not enriches him,

And makes me poor indeed."

We steal another man's life by ruining his good name."

The following verses capture the essence of this commandment very well: **Exodus 21:23-25** (KJV), "*And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, 24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*" This is the law

of just retribution. It does not mean that a person must have his hand cut off when he steals but that he pays a just and fair penalty based upon what was stolen.

The basis for paying back more than what was taken is based upon two basic truths. When a person is robbed he is denied from using what has been taken from him. This is the loss he suffers. He must be compensated. Secondly, the thief has to be punished for what he has taken as the justice of God demands. He cannot just say sorry and return exactly what was taken. The law of just retribution demands a penalty as well as compensation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should the basis for discouraging others from stealing be justification for a prosecutor in the law court to demand a more severe punishment? For example, 10 kittens were thrown down a refuse chute and died. Can the prosecutor say that to stop others from doing the same, the culprit must be put into prison instead paying a fine. Can he ask for a thief's hand to be cut off because he has stolen a man's car? What about castration for committing rape?
2. A church buys groceries from a provision shop and the goods are delivered. The terms of payment are 30 days. The church has the money to pay immediately but holds back until the second last day to make payment. Is it right for the church to delay payment when she has the money to pay promptly?
3. Church A borrows money from Church B for a building project and is given 10 years to make full payment. In five years Church A is able to return the whole amount but holds back and does not. Would you fault Church A for doing so?
4. A Christian borrowed money from the bank to do business. He knows the law of the land. The law says that if the debt he owes is less than a certain amount and not returned, he will be declared a bankrupt. But after three years he will automatically be discharged from bankruptcy without a need to return the money. He takes advantage of this law and deliberately borrowed a large amount and returned only up to the amount that would free him from bankruptcy. He does not mind being declared a bankrupt for 3 years. Would you say that he is a thief? What if he did not do it on purpose but because of bad business sense he became such a bankrupt. Would that make a difference in your opinion of him?
5. i) Christian A loans Christian B some money. Christian B forgot to return the money. Should Christian A ask for the money back and with interest?
ii) I ask someone who will be going overseas to buy certain things for me such as medicine or vitamins and I forgot to make payment and I am either a full-time student in FEBC or a preacher in the church or even a pastor. Can I be accused of stealing?