

The Commands of Christ

The Eighth Commandment-B

Exodus 20:15
Part Twenty

With Study Questions

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Exodus 20:15

You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15).

Review: The Earth is the Lord's

I mentioned these things because I think in order to appreciate the full expression of this commandment we must understand that everything, in an ultimate sense, belongs to God (Psalm 24:1; 50:10, 11). All our accomplishments, and the things that we own or achieve through those accomplishments, are a result of God's grace (Isaiah 26:12).

Even though God owns everything, He has placed His goods in the hands of individuals who are to be considered the owners of those goods from a worldly perspective. Christian socialism is unbiblical. Nonetheless, we should recognize that everything we own is on loan from God and that everything we accomplish, He has done for us.

With this in mind we discussed the idea of robbing ourselves. God holds us responsible for what He gives us. We are to look at the things we own as ultimately belonging to God and should act accordingly. So the most subtle infraction of this commandment involves how we handle what we actually own. And the warning in Scripture is that an improper governing of our own stuff can result in the loss of it (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4).

Things we've addressed:

- **Since God owns everything, should we assume people own nothing, thus producing a mentality which supports a sort of Christian socialism? No.**
- **Since God owns everything, is it possible to rob ourselves of our own stuff? And if it is possible for us to rob ourselves, what difference does it make since we own it anyway? We can rob ourselves and possibly lose the things we are responsible to care for.**

Today we will address:

- **In what ways can we rob others?**
- **How do men rob God?**
- **Who is the master thief and what has he stolen?**

III. Robbing Others

Larger Catechism

The stealing of our own stuff may be subtle. The stealing of other people's stuff is pretty obvious. Again, we look to chapter 141 of The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards which asks, **"What are the duties required in the eighth commandment?"** Let's cover a few of these.

"Truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man." Christians are not to depend upon the 'fine lines' of a contract. Representation should be open, honest and forthright.

The catechism continues, **"Rendering to everyone his due."** If there is a debt, it is to be paid. Romans 13:7 brings this into the realm of the immaterial as well.

Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Romans 13:7).

Time, honor and reputation may also be included. Stealing can be in the realm of time -- making people wait because of your irresponsible planning. Honor -- taking credit for, or not giving credit to, someone else for their accomplishments. Reputation -- this will be addressed in more detail in the Ninth Commandment. But it is a sin to disrespect another person's property or title whether they are an employer, parent, politician, elder, etc.

The catechism continues, **"Restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof."** According to the Scriptures, a thief is to pay back what was stolen plus a fifth more (in some cases more). There shouldn't have to be both civil and criminal cases for the same crime (Leviticus 6:5).

"Giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others." Usury is a sin. To lend money at interest isn't necessarily sinful, but to lend at a rate that would cause undue burden to

the borrower is a violation of this commandment (Deuteronomy 23:19, 20).

“A provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition.” God has given to us, and we are to exercise proper stewardship of the things He has given us for the care of our lives and the lives of others.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

When a father doesn't provide for his household—when children do not care for their aged parents, they are robbing from them. God has determined that we are to do these things. We are therefore obliged to do these things, as if they were a debt (Romans 1:14) we owed. Therefore, not doing these things is essentially stealing.

“The avoidance of unnecessary law-suits, and endeavour, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.” Watching daytime television and figuring out how to sue someone is inconsistent with this commandment. The general idea contained in the Eighth Commandment is having respect for things that belong to other people. We must respect the time, talents, abilities, investments and ownership of others. We are also to teach our children likewise.

IV. Robbing God

Perhaps the most destructive element of the Eighth Commandment is robbing God. How does a person rob God? God considers withholding tithes as robbing Him.

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed Thee?’ In tithes and offerings. “You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! “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.” (Mal. 3:8-10 NASB)

Tithing may not be the best way, but it is perhaps the easiest way (since it is measurable) to measure the spiritual health of the church. Today's church gives about two percent. What we learn in Malachi 3 is that the tithe (the word 'tithe' means tenth) belongs to God and He considers it stealing to withhold that from Him.

I might add that I do not think the blessing associated with faithful tithing is magic; as if the tithing person should expect to hit the lottery because of their faithfulness. I think it is a matter of recognizing that certain works (instruction, caring for needy, etc.) are the responsibility of the church. Those works require funding. A biblical, responsible, well-funded church is equipped to bless people.

In our country, over the last century, a ten percent church has become a two percent church and in its place a six percent government has become a fifty percent government as it seeks to fulfill the responsibilities outside the realm of its jurisdiction. It's almost as if God is saying, "You can give one tithe to the church or five tithes to the government." We have chosen the latter and have suffered for it.

There is much argumentation and speculation about tithing. There are all sorts of arguments about why Christians shouldn't tithe and I respectfully disagree. Here are a couple of reasons why:

Appealing to the Law

When the Apostle Paul instructs how new covenant ministers are to be subsidized he appeals to the law of God.

Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? ⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? ¹⁰ Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? ¹² If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so the

Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:8-14).

In The Same Manner

Paul mentions those who minister the holy things eat of the temple, and partake of the offerings of the altar. He is clearly alluding to the Mosaic system of tithing¹. In verse 14 he makes the statement “even so,” which is literally translated “in the same manner.” Paul is giving instruction on how those who preach the gospel should be subsidized. In the same manner as what? What other answer can there be than the same manner as the old covenant tithe to which he just alluded?

Interestingly enough, when Paul writes in 2 Corinthians about churches giving gifts to other churches (not tithing), he specifically states that he doesn't appeal to the law (2 Corinthians 8:8). Thus we have tithes and offerings. A tithe belongs to God and an offering is what we have “**purposed in our heart**” (2 Corinthians 9:7 NASB) to give. Tithing was never repealed in the new covenant. One of the major causes of the impotent state to today's church is its negligence in this commandment.

The tithe is for the specific ministry of your church. Supporting other ministries or relief organizations, etc. would fall under the category of an offering.

The Responsibility of Ownership

The handling of this earth, and everything in it, is a commission given to man by God. The responsibility of ownership is not something to be taken lightly -- whether it's what we own, or respecting what someone else owns -- whether it's material or immaterial. We are called by God to secure a people's right over whatever God has entrusted to them.

V. Defeating the Thief

Having said all this, we are reminded of the master thief. Jesus spoke of this master thief in John's gospel.

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

¹ Tithing was even before Moses. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20).

There is a master thief—the master usurper. Through temptation and deception (which we will discuss in the Ninth Commandment) the master thief brought all of creation, including the very will of man, into bondage and death. And beyond this, we are not merely captives of the thief, but we became his children, and thieves ourselves. As Paul writes in Ephesians,

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Ephesians 2:1-3).

But Jesus defeated this master thief, this strong man, and took back what was rightfully His. This included *those* who were rightfully His (John 17:2). Jesus explains how He does this in Mark.

No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house (Mark 3:27).

So Jesus defeated and bound that strong man, that he would deceive the nations no longer (Revelation 20:2). He did this at the cross.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (“it” referring to the cross—Colossians 2:15).

Therefore Paul goes on to teach,

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:4,5).

And it is in this grace that we stand (Romans 5:2). The enemy owned us; he owned our very hearts and dispositions. But we were rescued. Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes,

He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8).

The will that was owned by the enemy is now owned by God. The death, which was our inevitable outcome, was vanquished on the cross. Our hearts of stone were turned to hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) and instead of being slaves of sin and death, we became slaves of righteousness and life (Romans 6:16-20).

What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? (Psalm 89:48).

Beloved, the assumed answers to these questions are ‘no one’ and ‘no’. Let us heed the wisdom of God recorded in Isaiah. Where God proclaims,

Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is no other* (Isaiah 45:22).

May God grant us hearts to hear the truth of His word and dispositions to enjoy the glory of His gospel.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss, or consider, ways we can rob others; contracts, time, honor, reputation, restitution, usury, provision, lawsuits, etc. (pages 3, 4).
2. How can a person rob God (page 4)?
3. Discuss the Apostle Paul's appealing to the law in 1 Corinthians versus not appealing to the law in 2 Corinthians. Why do you suppose he uses this method (pages 5, 6)?
4. How has the master thief been defeated (pages 7, 8)?
5. What does this mean to you and me (page 8)?