



# The Ten Commandments

## Part 10 – Excel in Giving

### Exodus 20:15

*You shall not steal.*

The Eighth Commandment forbids stealing in all its forms. In Deuteronomy the commandment is applied to the stealing of persons, land, and livestock. It applies to the stealing of wages and the use of false weights and measures. Contemporary life has only expanded the opportunities to violate the Eighth Commandment. Reporting greater mileage and travel expenses to one's company for reimbursement is stealing. Overbilling hours and artificially inflating costs is stealing. Cheating on exams is theft. With the advent of new technologies

students can simply text answers to one another during tests. Plagiarism is also a form of theft. It steals the intellectual rigor and creativity of another and presents it as original. Music and other property can be stolen in various ways online. Theft in many of its forms has become so commonplace that even God's people often excuse it as a harmless and justifiable transgression.

**Main Idea:** Stealing is a negation of love for God and neighbor.

### 1. Why stealing is wrong

- Everyone knows that stealing is wrong. Since God has written his law upon the consciences of mankind there is no one who does not know deep down that stealing is wrong. Simply defined, stealing is taking something which does not belong to you. The word used in Exodus 20:15 literally means to carry something away secretly. Stealing is the unlawful taking of another person's property.
- Like the rest of God's law, the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment is comprehensive. It prohibits whole categories of sin and extends to both actions and attitudes. People, money, possessions, land, intellectual property, time, and even affection can be objects of theft. Stealing can be accomplished through robbery, burglary, extortion, shop-lifting, embezzlement, overbilling, under-working, misleading in sales, borrowing and not returning, etc.

#### a) It violates love for our neighbor.

- The *Westminster Larger Catechism* teaches that the Eighth Commandment forbids the "neglect of duties required...receiving anything that is stolen, removing land-marks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts...oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits...engrossing commodities to enhance their price...inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods, distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting...idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming, and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us" (Q. 142).
- How stealing violates our love for neighbor:
  - i. *Stealing assaults our neighbor's dignity.*  
When we steal, our neighbor is reduced to a means for gaining pleasure. We cannot love our neighbor and steal from them at the same time.

*ii. Stealing robs our neighbor of our generosity.*

You are intended to be a means by which God blesses others. It is impossible to steal and love our neighbor as ourselves at the same time. Faithfulness to the Eighth Commandment means that we will train ourselves to think about giving. It teaches us that the practice of generosity is more blessed than receiving.

**b) It violates love for God.**

- Like every sin, theft is ultimately a sin against God. Since God is the owner of all things, stealing not only violates our neighbor's rights, it violates God's divine rights. Stealing is a manifestation of a lack of trust in God's provision. It is also a sign of sinful discontent. We steal when we believe we deserve more than what God has given us. Stealing is also the accompaniment to other sins. For instance, people will often excuse theft when because of sloth, irresponsibility, or some other sin they find themselves in want. And like all violations of God's law, stealing is a failure to love God and neighbor.
- How stealing violates our love for God:
  - i. Stealing is a failure to trust in God as Provider.*  
When we steal we reveal our lack of faith that God is a faithful Provider. It reveals our belief that God has been tightfisted with us.
  - ii. Stealing is an attack on God's provision for others.*  
When we steal we show complete disregard for that which has provided for someone else.

**2. The Opposite of Stealing**

- Like all of the commandments, the Eighth not only prohibits particular sins but commends particular virtues. The opposite of stealing is to not steal. The opposite of stealing is giving; it is cultivating a generous life. God is the owner of all we have. Perhaps the most common form of stealing is failing to be generous with what God has entrusted to us. A steward does not have the liberty to use his resources in any way he pleases. A steward uses his resources in ways that would please the true owner. God has made us stewards that we might use the resources he entrusts to us for his glory.
- Good stewards are generous to their:
  - i. Family
  - ii. Church
  - iii. Stranger
- "Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality." – A.W. Tozer

**3. The God Who Gives**

- In one of the most beautiful passages of the New Testament Paul holds forth Jesus as the One who even though he was God in the flesh chose to not take advantage of all his divine rights so that he might save sinners (Phil. 2:5-10). Paul writes that Jesus "thought it not robbery" (KJV) to avail himself of the full measure of his divine rights. Nevertheless he "humbled himself" by taking on a human nature and dying on the cross for thieves. Not only did Jesus never steal, he did not even presume to make use of all that rightfully belonged to him. Instead he gave.
- Paul prefaces that passage with a call for Christians to have the mind of Christ. God has been unimaginably generous toward us (John 3:16). So, rather than searching madly only to acquire more and more let us look for opportunities to give. Rather than excusing what we consider minor infractions let us excel in giving.