

The Law of God

The Eighth Commandment

Ex 20:1-15

- 1 And God spake all these words, saying,
- 2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
- 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
- 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
- 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.
- 7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
- 8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- 9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
- 10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:
- 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
- 12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
- 13 Thou shalt not kill.
- 14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- 15 Thou shalt not steal. KJV

Introduction:

We come today to consider the eighth commandment (at least according to the most popular division), *Thou Shalt Not Steal*.

I don't think that I shall ever forget my introduction to this command. It was late 1955 or early 1956, I really do not remember since I was only 5 years old at the time. My parents were newly converted and my father had just announced that he had been called to the gospel ministry. We were living in the community where my father had grown up and they belonged to the ancestral church of our family, Old Sarepta Baptist Church, in Sarepta, La. Several of the families there had been in the area for 100 years or more, which meant that I was cousins with almost everybody in the community and especially in the church.

One of my cousins was named Donnie Mack Odom, and that's what everyone called him, 'Donnie Mack Odom.' One Sunday night at church Donnie was showing the rest of the kids that he had a nickel. Now, a nickel isn't much today but in 1956 you could buy a soft drink or a large

candy bar with it, so that makes it about \$1 in 2016 money. Anyway, as I recall it, Donnie wanted to give me the nickel and I took it. When we got home from church I was showing it to my sister and my father happened to walk into the room. "Where did you get that?" he asked. "From Donnie Mack Odom." Without asking for any explanation, my father took the assumption that I had stolen it from him. Donnie was a little younger than me. So, my father and I got into the car and he explained to me how wrong it was to take things that were not mine. He did not want to hear any of my explanations. When we got to the house, about a mile down the road as I recall, he told me that I was to go and knock on the door, give the nickel back, and apologize for taking it. I knew that Dad was in no mood to be messed with so I did exactly as he said, still not understanding fully why I was doing it.

Needless to say, the event made a huge impression on me and the issue of taking things that were not mine never came up again. I think that I refused a number of gifts over time for just that reason.

On the one hand, this command of God is simply and straightforward, "do not take anyone's property except with his free consent, usually after a fair and reasonable price has been paid."

But behind this simple command lies an eternal and Divine Principle - "He who owns property, having acquired it by legitimate means, is entitled to own it, keep it, and use it as he sees fit. He is to be free of any danger of having his property taken away by force, by theft, by fraud, or by legal conspiracy." This is affirmed repeatedly both directly and indirectly throughout the Word of God and was written into the Constitution of the United States as well as into the laws of the individual states. Any violation of this principle is considered theft and is a sin against God as well as a criminal act.

Conjoined to that principle is another, understood if not stated outright, - "Every human owes every other human loyalty to that principle."

The Reflexive Principle related to the ones already state is an idea that our culture is losing sight of but one which we all grew up understanding, "If you did not earn or acquire a thing by legitimate means (purchase, barter, inheritance, or as a gift) you are *not* entitled to have, own, or possess it."

All of that can be reduced to a very simple statement, "Do not take things that do not belong to you."

"Thou shalt not steal," is a very short statement, just four words in English, two in Hebrew, but imagine how different our world would be if it were obeyed: fewer policemen, judges, attorneys, jails, prison cells, iron barred windows, and safes. Insurance rates as well as the prices of almost all goods would be significantly reduced. ("Did you know that between 3 and 5% of every dollar you spend in stores goes to offset what is called 'shrinkage,' which is just a fancy word for 'theft'?) That savings would multiply itself over and over again as it processed through the world's economy and I have no doubt but that the prosperity level everywhere would significantly increase.---- Just from this one principle of God's Law being obeyed.

But, of course, it is not obeyed. In fact, it is disobeyed so regularly, consistently and profoundly that we really cannot imagine a world where this command would be faithfully obeyed.

On one hand it is incredible that this particular little issue should be mentioned among the 10 most profound principles of Divine Law. However, when one thinks about it a little he realizes that this principle in all of its' various forms and constructions it tied intrinsically to the other nine.

He who violates the principles of the First Table steals from God.
Worship, honor, glory, service, devotion that is due only to Him.

And he who violates the principles of the Second Table steals from his fellow man.
Obedience and respect due to parents,
Life,
Moral purity, marriage fidelity, the keeping of promises and commitments,
Reputation, integrity,
And what is coveting but the plotting to steal or defraud?

This principle concerning stealing is far more than a mere detail on a list of moral principles. It is tied to the very fabric of True Religion and is woven throughout all of its principles.

If you tink about it, from the time we open our eyes in the morning until we close them at nigh our existence is tied up in figuring out whether we are going to steal or live in integrity.

- Are we going to give God our first attention of the day, committing ourselves afresh to obey Him, or are were going to steal that from Him?
- Are we going to give to our wife, our husband, our children, the love and devotion which we owe to them, or are we going to behave selfishly and deprive (steal) them of our affection and attention?
- Are we going to give our employer or our customer a day's work for a day's pay or are we going to defraud (steal) them of our best effort?

On and on it goes. Every encounter, every event, presents this option, "do I steal or do I do what is honest and right?" The principle, as I said, is woven into everything.

The idea of stealing involves far more than merely taking property that is not ours, it also involves the failure to pay what we owe, even to God.

The scriptures teach us that we should not steal from Him.

Mal 3:8-12

- 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. KJV

This is a passage that has been greatly misused in our day. It references the conditional covenant between Israel and God, established at Sinai, which tied their physical blessings to their performance. Here it is being referenced concerning the paying of tithes and offerings required under the Old Covenant. The Jews owed specific amounts of money as well as their produce to God. There were penalties if they withheld and promised blessings if they paid those sums.

There is no such covenant between God and His Spiritual people in the New Testament era, no promise of prosperity that is directly linked to one's giving by a concrete and covenantal promise.

That being said, we can affirm two principles related to this issue.

1. Every saint owes God, and
2. He blesses those who give freely.

It is impossible to imagine an understanding of Christianity that does not involve the believer being massively indebted to God. There are two issues involved in that debt.

First, we were profoundly lost.

Eph 2:1-3

1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. KJV

Eph 2:11-12

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

KJV

One cannot imagine a more absolutely hopeless situation than that of a lost Gentile. He is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. He has no life, no power, no ability to save himself...and

no desire to do so. He is walking according to the course of this world, under the power and influence of the Prince of Darkness. He is a slave to Satan's kingdom and a slave to his own sins, spiritually blind and stupid beyond all words to describe. He is bound for Hell and enjoying the ride. Every choice he makes, every step he takes, every word he speaks carries him closer and closer to an eternal misery from which there is absolutely no escape and for which there will be no end. Paul described him as a child of wrath, meaning that he is on a collision course with the Wrath of God and he cannot win. He is without Christ, without God, he has no hope, and there is no covenant of promise for him.

How could a person be in a worse state than that?

But those who are truly Christians have been miraculously and powerfully saved.

Eph 2:4-7

- 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
- 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
- 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:
- 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. KJV

God was merciful. He loved us. Even when and while we were dead. He quickened us, gave us life, so that we might believe and repent. **HE SAVED US!**

Most churches and preachers today have that backwards. They say that the dead sinner believes and repents for which God grants him spiritual life as a reward. But that cannot logically be true and neither is it biblically true.

Eph 2:8-10

- 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
- 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.
- 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. KJV

He did all of the work. That is what it means to be saved by grace. He did everything from speaking life into our dead souls to granting us the wherewithal to trust Him and put away our stupid and self-destructive behavior.

What does a person like that owe who was lost beyond remedy and yet the Infinite God took pity on Him, provided a Redeemer for Him, carried the entire load on His Own back and rescued him by His Gracious Gift?

The old Chinese culture had a belief that if one man saved another man's life, then the one saved should demonstrate his gratitude by become his savior's slave for the rest of his life.

In our day it is almost as if the sinner saves himself. We hear them talk about, “when I got saved,” or “when I trusted Christ,” and even, “When I got born again.” All of this has the flavor of a person earning something and being rewarded for their actions with salvation.

But one who understands how it all works speaks more like Paul.

Gal 1:15-17

- 15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,
16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:
17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. KJV

He comprehends that God gave him life when he was dead, purely of grace, with no personal effort involved and that faith, repentance, and obedience are only manifestations of that life which was given by mercy and grace, completely apart from works.

He knows that he didn't earn anything and that he owes God *everything*.

The early Christians were so impressed with this sense of indebtedness to God that they freely gave to Him in financing the work of the church.

Acts 2:44-47

- 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;
45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.
46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,
47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. KJV

Acts 4:32-37

- 32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.
33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.
34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,
35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.
36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,
37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. KJV

2 Cor 8:1-6

- 1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,
- 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.
- 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord,
- 4 begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,
- 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. NAS

The key is to be found in that last verse, “they first gave themselves to the Lord...”

There is no believer who does not owe everything he is and everything he has to God. That erupts into generous and faithful giving but the debt can never be paid and we should remember that. 10% does not pay it, neither does 25%, 50% or even 90%.

There is a famous story that is told about a man who returned home to the USA after the Second World War with a desire to start a company building heavy equipment. He was a believer and an honest man but he was having a difficult time getting financing. Heavily burdened, he made a promise to God that if He would help him 90% of the profits would go to the Lord’s work. R G LeTourneau kept his promise and God blessed him greatly. But even there, Mr. LeTourneau knew that his debt was not paid.

We owe everything to God, all of our devotion, all of our worship, our obedience, our love, all that we own and our own selves besides.

We can never keep the Law which says, “Thou shalt not steal,” until we have, like the ancient Macedonians of 2 Cor 8, given our selves to Him.

I urge you to pay what you owe. Children, obey your parents, you owe it to God to do so. Husbands, love your wives, you owe it and, wives, you likewise owe it to God to honor your husbands. Church members, love one another, the One to Whom you owe everything requires it.

Matt 5:43-45

- 43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
- 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
- 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. KJV

You don’t owe them love but you do owe it to God to love them.

And then, when you have done all that, make sure that you have given yourself to God. Otherwise, you are a thief.

It is pretty amazing how the Eighth Commandment of the Law works out, is it not?