

The Lunacy Of Larceny

Exodus 20:15

Pastor John Miller

Exodus 20:15 says, “You shall not steal.” But in the Hebrew, it’s “Not steal.” Very simple.

The Eighth Commandment addresses one of the most common sins of our culture. It is the sin of stealing, theft or burglary.

Today in California, we have decriminalized petty larceny. It blows my mind. We passed a new law in California that if you steal something under \$900, it’s no longer a federal crime; it’s just a misdemeanor. All you get is a ticket. The police don’t respond. They won’t arrest you. You won’t go to jail.

So you can go into Walgreens and steal whatever you want. Just make sure it’s not over \$900. Take your calculator with you. If it’s under \$900, you can just walk out with it, and then come back the next day and do it all over again. It’s insane what we’re doing in our culture today! So this Commandment is so apropos to what we are dealing with today.

And we all know what it feels like to be victimized by theft of some sort. Many years ago I was kidnapped, which is a form of theft or stealing, and I was robbed with two other pastors. They took wedding rings, wallets and watches. When the guy who robbed me was caught, he was wearing my watch. So I know how it feels to be victimized and taken advantage of.

I heard of a woman who was home alone one night, and she heard a burglar come into the house. She didn’t have anything with which to defend herself, but she had been reading the Scriptures that night. She read Acts 2:38. That’s all she knew but she wasn’t able to quote it. But when she confronted the burglar, she lifted her hands toward the burglar and said, “Acts 2:38!” And the burglar just froze. Then she dialed 911 and the police showed up.

The police asked her, “How did you stop the guy in his tracks like that?!”

She said, “I just quoted Scripture.”

Then when the police interviewed the burglar, they asked him, “Why did you freeze like that?”

He said, “She just quoted Scripture. She had an axe and two .38s.” I like that story. So even if you don’t know the verse, just say “Acts 2:38,” and they’ll just freak out and get arrested.

But we all know what it’s like to find your car broken into, find your home broken into, have something stolen from you—maybe violently or by stealth. It’s a very common crime today, and we know that it’s prevalent in our culture.

But God’s Word is clear; stealing is forbidden. And God’s standards do not change over time.

Today we live in a relativistic society where everything is relative and changing. But God's standards, God's Word, does not change. God forbids stealing.

Think of the kind of world we would live in if we followed God's Law. Let me give you a small sampling.

Commandment Five, in verse 12, says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you." If we dishonor our parents by stealing, we've broken the Eighth Commandment.

In verse 13, the Sixth Commandment, it says, "You shall not murder." How many people are killed in order for a murderer to steal what others possess? I heard of a boy in Los Angeles who was killed for his tennis shoes. It's so sad what is going on in our culture.

In verse 14, the Seventh Commandment, it says, "You shall not commit adultery." Someone else's wife or husband is stolen.

And we have in verse 15 our text today, "You shall not steal."

Then in verse 16, the Ninth Commandment, it says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." We lie to cover our thievery and stealing.

And then verse 17 says, "You shall not covet..." We'll see that coveting causes us to break all the other Commandments.

So God clearly commands that we should not steal.

And this Commandment also clearly implies that we have a right to private property. It's clear that we are not to steal, so then if you steal, it clearly implies that you are taking what belongs to another individual. The Bible knows nothing of Communism or Socialism; it promotes private property.

But we must acquire our property the right way. If you study the Bible, you would find the right way would be through diligent labor and work, properly investing or somebody gives you a gift, and not by the wrong way by stealing.

We also see that this Commandment is written on the second tablet of the Law. That says that stealing is not loving "your neighbor as yourself."

The first question I want to ask and seek to answer is, "What is stealing?" The definition of "steal" is "to take by stealth, force or deceit that which rightly belongs to another or is due another."

R. Kent Hughes said, "The command plainly forbids robbery and extortion, the taking of anyone's possessions by force, or threat of force. It also forbids similar crimes of stealth, such

as embezzlement, graft, and bribery.”

How do we steal from people? There are many ways. There is theft of property, tax theft, customs theft, debt theft, borrowing theft, welfare theft, time theft, work theft, phone theft, computer theft, accounting theft, supply theft, plagiarism and theft of another's reputation.

We can steal from others, but we can also steal from God. We can take God's glory and God's name and steal from God.

Stealing comes in two categories. Number one is active, and number two is passive. Active theft is the sin of commission. Passive theft is the sin of omission. So we sin by doing something or we sin by not doing something.

I want to show you an example of these two categories in the parable of the good Samaritan, in Luke 10:25-37. In this parable, we'll see three philosophies of life, as they pertain to possessions: that of the thieves, of the Levites and religious leaders (Scribes and priests) and of the good Samaritan.

Verses 25-29 say, “And behold, a certain lawyer...”—this was a religious lawyer—“...stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Notice that he was trying to trap Jesus, so his question wasn't sincere but tempting. “He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”

What is so fascinating to me is that this guy answered Jesus with two Scriptures from the Old Testament. This first is Deuteronomy 6:5, which is called “the great Shimei,” “hear O Israel.” “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” This actually deals with the first tablet of the Law, the first Commandments. Then he answers by Leviticus 19:18, which deals with the second tablet of the Law. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So these are the two sets of stone or tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Eighth Commandment, “You shall not steal,” is on the second tablet of stone, pertaining to loving “your neighbor as yourself.”

Verse 28, “And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.’ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

Whenever you are studying a parable, you need to look at the context and at what precipitated it or what caused Jesus to give the parable. Parables mainly have one lesson, purpose or idea. So you look at the context to find out why Jesus gave the parable. This parable was given, because the man asked the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

The reason the man asked Jesus this question is because the Jews hated Samaritans. The Jews were very prejudice toward them. The Jews didn't believe the Samaritans were their neighbors. Anyone who was not a Jew was not their neighbor. So this man was trying to justify

himself and trap Jesus in His words.

Jesus is going to give a parable, which is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The Greek word “parabole” means “to lay alongside,” so He takes a story and lays it alongside a spiritual truth to make a point. Jesus is going to give the parable of the good Samaritan to answer the man’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” in verse 29.

Now notice the first, or active, category is one who steals, in verse 30. “Then Jesus answered and said: ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.’” One of the valuable things in those days was clothing. So these thieves beat this man up, took his clothes and left him naked, half dead and lying on the road.

So what we see in verse 30 is stealing by force and violence. When you watch the news today, this is very common. People are being attacked. I saw a video of a car that pulled up in a neighborhood, thugs jumped out of the car, attacked a woman as she was walking down the street, took her purse, jumped back in their car and then drove off.

And we know that crime is increasing in the United States today. It’s so sad and tragic. In the United States, there are 2.5 million burglaries annually, and every 15 seconds, a home is burglarized. That’s because we have decriminalized theft, so it has become rampant in America today.

We know about the “smash and grabs.” If you park your car on the streets of San Francisco, leave your windows down, your glove box open and your trunk lid up to show people there is nothing to steal, you might as well just leave the keys in your car with a note that says, “Go ahead and take it; the gas tank is full.” It’s so insane what’s going on in our culture today.

There are many shades of active stealing. Let me list them for you with comments. There is employee theft. Employee theft is rampant in America today. Taking goods, money, items, actually calling in sick when you’re not sick, taking longer breaks than you’re supposed to when you’re being paid by the hour are all ways of robbing from your employer. It’s theft.

There is also employer theft of not paying a fair wage to those working for you.

Then there is fraud, James 5:4. “The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” God will take vengeance for them. The cries of those who have been defrauded by those they are working for have been heard by the Lord, and He will defend those who are defrauded.

Another way of stealing is exploitation. That is exploiting another person’s plight or difficult situation. The Bible says that Jacob stole the birthright from his brother, Esau. It doesn’t say that he tricked him; it says he stole it from him. Esau came back from a hunting trip, was very hungry and Jacob was cooking stew. Esau smelled the aroma and said to Jacob, “Give me

some of your stew.” But Jacob asked his brother, “Will you give me your birthright?” And out of hunger, Esau gave up his birthright. But the Bible says that Jacob actually exploited Esau and stole his birthright.

Then there are deceptive business practices. You may take your car in to get it fixed at an auto repair shop. You need to fast and pray before you do that. I’m thinking of a poor woman who doesn’t have a husband and something is going wrong with her car. She takes it to a repair shop and is told, “Oh, you need this and that, and it’s going to cost \$3,000.” They do a lot of things, don’t give her an itemized list, she pays the bill and the car runs worse than it did before.

I think of false advertising. A product is advertised and if you act right now, you’ll get two for one. You get your item, it doesn’t work, it’s not what was advertised and you lose your money. That’s another way of stealing from individuals.

Falsifying insurance claims is also stealing. Or falsifying business expenses is a form of thieving.

Embezzlement or “white-collar stealing” is against this Eighth Commandment. That is stealing funds that are placed in your trust.

Plagiarism is a form of stealing. “You shall not steal.”

Borrowing and not paying or giving it back is stealing. If you borrow money and agree to pay it back, you need to pay it back. If you borrow something with the agreement that you’ll bring it back, do so. We all know those people who are “professional borrowers.” The Bible calls it thievery. You borrow but you never intend to give it back, so in reality you’re stealing from that individual.

How about the books you’ve borrowed from the pastor? Usually when I loan books, I kiss them goodbye. I buy extra copies, because I know I’m not going to get them back.

Thieving has also entered into the church. When Jesus went into the temple, he overturned the money-changers’ tables; they were charging exorbitant interest rates on the money exchange from Roman coins to Jewish coins so the Jews could pay the temple tax. If the Jews brought a lamb from home, the money exchangers would examine the lamb and say that it wasn’t good enough for the sacrifice, so the person was directed to the table where a “good lamb” was for sale at three times the price of a lamb bought outside the temple precinct. Jesus said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

There is false advertising in the church. You give your money to missions, but it goes for something else. It goes to buy a jet airplane for the traveling evangelist. It was being used for a purpose other than the purpose it was announced it was to be used for. That’s stealing from God’s people.

There are also more forms of stealing. There is kidnapping and slavery. And there is stealing

someone's purity. That's stealing. There is stealing someone's reputation with gossip and slander. That is something that sometimes cannot be restored.

And the value of the thing that is stolen has no bearing on the guilt of the act. You say, "Well, it didn't cost that much. There are plenty of them; they'll never know." But God knows. So if you are pilfering on the job and taking from your employer or cheating on your taxes, God knows.

I know paying taxes is painful. You ask, "You want us to pay taxes?!" Jesus said, "Render...to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." So we are not to steal from the government or from others. And we can also steal from God Himself.

1 Corinthians 6:10 says, "...nor thieves...will inherit the kingdom of God." And in the book of Revelation, where it talks about those who are in heaven, all those who are outside the kingdom are those who are thieves, adulterers, liars and idolaters.

Stealing is sinful and harmful to others and to yourself. I think of Achan in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were told not to take anything when they conquered the land. But Achan saw a beautiful Babylonian garment and lusted after it in covetousness. He stole the garment and some silver, went back to his tent thinking no one saw him and dug a hole and buried the spoils. Then when they went to the next city to take it, the Israelites were defeated, because of Achan's sin.

So God said to have all the tribes pass by, and the tribe of Judah was chosen. Then all the families of Judah passed by, and the family of the Zarahites was chosen. Then those families passed by and Zabdi's family was chosen. Then Zabdi's grandson, Achan, was chosen. Then Achan repented and said he was sorry, but Achan and all of his family were put to death by God because of Achan's thievery. It was so terrible.

You say, "But John, I'm not a thief! I've never broken into someone's house, stolen or taken anything by violence or force."

But remember that stealing also comes in the passive form. This is the second category we see in our parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:31-32. "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road." This man left from Jerusalem, went all the way down to Jericho on a dangerous, winding, mountain road, fell among thieves, who beat him up and stole from him. He was laying in the road naked and half dead.

"And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked..."—he looked at the man who had been victimized—"...and passed by on the other side."

The first people in the parable were the thieves. This was their philosophy: "What you have, I want and I will take it." That's stealing by force. Then comes the priest and the Levite, the religious leaders, and their philosophy was "What I have is mine and I will keep it." This is the sin of omission. So not only can we steal by taking from others, but we can also steal by

withholding from others what is their due.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus said, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets," or "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." It's called the golden rule.

Critics of the Bible say, "Well, Jesus wasn't original here; Buddha said that many years before." Buddha said not to do to others what you do not want them to do to you. But Jesus said it in the positive: "Do unto others what you want them to do to you."

Now if I'm beaten up and laying half naked on the street, I want someone to have compassion on me and help me in my time of need. This is called loving "your neighbor as yourself." We are to have this attitude. But these religious leaders passed by the man without helping him.

1 John 3:17 says, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" If you claim to be a Christian and you have something that will help someone in need but don't use it, you don't have the love of God in you.

You say, "But I didn't do anything!"

"That's the problem." If you don't use it to help someone else, how can you claim to have the love of God in you?

It reminds me of the parable of the rich fool. He was a farmer who had a bumper crop. He thought, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? He said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'" So the man planned to build bigger and bigger barns.

We make more and more money, we build bigger barns, and we forget about others who have needs.

So the religious leaders' philosophy was "What is mine I will keep and I won't share it."

The third category is the positive side of the Eighth Commandment. In Luke 10:33-37, we see the good Samaritan. "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was." This refers to the wounded, violated, robbed man. "And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii..."—or "two-days wage"—"...gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'"

Then Jesus asked the religious lawyer, "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" Good question. "And he said, 'He who showed mercy on him.' Then said Jesus to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

So the thieves had a philosophy of "What is yours I want; I'm taking it." The religious leaders had a philosophy of "It's mine and I'm keeping it." But the Samaritan had a philosophy of "What I have is a gift from God, and I will share it with others."

All of us fall into one of these three categories.

The Jews hated the Samaritans, yet the Samaritan became the hero of the story. The Jews would never think of a Samaritan as their neighbor; the Samaritans were half Jew and half Gentile.

The primary lesson in the parable is "Who is my neighbor?" The inference is that anyone is my neighbor who has a need. It doesn't matter if they are a different race, a different religion or from a different country. If a human is in need, I need to help.

So the lesson is clear, but the implication is either you choose to say, "I'll take what is yours, whether you like it or not," "I'm going to keep what is mine" or "God has entrusted money to me, I see it as a stewardship and I'll be a channel of it rather than a reservoir. I want to be a blessing and share with others what God has given me."

In Acts 20:33-35, Paul the Apostle said, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands..."—I imagine he lifted his hands—"...have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

So Paul was saying that "These hands have labored." That is the right way to acquire wealth. We are to realize that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," and we are only stewards of what God has entrusted to us. He also said that "What I labored hard for is so I can give to others who are in need." So Paul's needs are met, and others are benefitted as he also shares with them. We have to support the weak. And remember that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

If Paul had not said this last statement in the Acts passage, we wouldn't know that Jesus said these words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This is the only place they appear in the Bible.

I want to remind you that we can also rob from God. Not only do we rob from others, but we can rob from God. Let me give you three ways we rob from God. We rob God of glory by our sinful behavior. You break the Eighth Commandment, "You shall not steal," when you profess to be a Christian but you live inconsistent with Christian principles and Scripture. Your life doesn't glorify God, and you dishonor God by your behavior. You're stealing glory from God.

The second way we rob God is by not using our time, talents or our treasures for God's glory and the good of others. You need to use your time, gifts and goods for God's glory and for others' good. Malachi 3:8 says, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." We have robbed God by not paying our tithes and our gifts and our offerings.

I don't want to get sidetracked on the issue, "Do Christians have to tithe today?" I believe we're under grace and it's not mandatory. But if under the Law, Israel tithed 10%, how can we do any less under grace with our gifts and offerings? We need to realize that all we have belongs to God. So it should be given to God for His glory and for the good of others. So we rob God by not doing that.

The third way we rob God is by not giving Him the proper worship He is due. God is worthy to be praised. From "worthy" we get our word "worship" or "worth-ship," giving God His due, His worship. He is worthy. And when we don't worship God, we're stealing from God the glory that He is due.

Now what is the remedy for stealing? Two things. Number one, regeneration; you must be born again. We all have this Adamic, sinful nature, and we learn from the earliest age to take what we want. Put some toddlers in a room together. Their favorite word is "Mine!" They steal from one another. Imagine going to pick up your kid from the nursery and hearing, "You child's a thief!" It's that Adamic nature. It's sin that has been around since Adam and Eve.

So we need to be born again of the Spirit. We need to be born from above. It's a spiritual birth. "Regenerated" is a technical term for being "born again." It means "new life." You need to repent, believe in Jesus, and be born again. Then the Bible says that "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." You become "a new creation."

Then, number two, once you are saved, you need to restore what you have taken. That's restitution. This is the hard part. If you borrowed something, take it back. Go in your garage and figure out who you borrowed this stuff from. And if you've stolen something, then restore it back to that person.

In the Bible, it says that if you've stolen something, restoration is four times what you took in paying it back. Go to your employer and tell him that you've stolen something and pay it back. Go to your friends—or whoever it might be—who you have stolen from and pay it back.

The Bible says that Zacchaeus, in Luke 19, climbed a tree to see Jesus as He was passing by in Jericho. Jesus stopped, looked up and saw Zacchaeus up in the tree. Zacchaeus was a very wealthy tax collector. He was a Jew who taxed other Jews for the Romans. The Roman government set an amount they needed from the Jews in taxes. Anything above that amount the tax collectors could put in their own pocket. They would double and triple the amount of taxes they collected. That's how they got paid. So the Jews hated the tax collectors; they were synonymous with harlots and prostitutes in the Bible—sinners and tax collectors.

So Jesus stopped and said to Zacchaeus, "Come down, for today I must stay at your house." It's kind of cool that Jesus invited Himself over to eat at Zacchaeus' house. Find someone today and say, "Behold, I'm going to thy house to eat." Remember that Jesus said, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." It's Biblical.

Jesus went into Zacchaeus' house, and then others were outside saying, "I can't believe He did that! He just went into the house of Zacchaeus, the sinner! How could He do such a thing!"

I would have loved to be a fly on the wall listening to the conversation between Zacchaeus and Jesus. This guy had been stealing and ripping people off for years! Yet he was sitting there looking into the eyes of Jesus, the pure Son of God.

What happened was that Zacchaeus got saved. And when they both came out the door, others were gathered on the front porch. Zacchaeus said, "If I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." Everybody started clapping.

You know that when a tax collector promises to give money back, he got saved. That dude was born again.

Then Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus was regenerated and got saved. Regeneration will change your life. Then he said that he would restore four times what he had taken unjustly from others. Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

This statement from Jesus was given because a tax collector was saved. And Jesus hung upon a cross for our sins. He hung between two thieves. One of the last things Jesus did before He died on the Cross was He heard a thief say to Him, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

Jesus didn't say, "No way! You're a thief!" He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." Isn't that wonderful? The blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse from all sin.

So if you are stealing—if you read this sermon today thinking, It's just a church sermon. I can't wait to see the football game today, but God's Spirit is convicting you of sin—whether the sin of commission or omission—ask God to forgive you.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If Jesus would save a thief on a cross, Jesus will save you today.