

The Words of a Covenant

Part 9 - The Eighth Commandment

May 17, 1998

Exodus 20:15

15 "You shall not steal. NKJV

• Review and Introduction

We continue our study in the second table of the Ten Words. The commandments in this table refer to the manner in which we deal with one another. When God established this covenant He knew that He was doing so with a people. He was sanctifying a nation not just a person. Therefore, God knew that it would be necessary for these people to dwell with each other in decency, order and peace. This table contains the summary law which ensures that the constituents of the land will enjoy the civil rest.

• Definitions

- The only way to properly understand stealing is to understand the concept of claims. Stealing is a violation of someone's or on occasion, something's claim to an asset. When God prohibits stealing He does so because He has embraced the ownership of property. He has made the world in such a way that we are given charge over various assets over which we render faithful stewardship to God. When God places us over these things it is an abomination for others to come and deny our claim or responsibility over them.
- The heart of this command is a covetous heart. It is a covetous heart that looks upon what someone else has and decides to steal. A covetous heart is one who does not believe that God rewards as He sees fit. In order to properly understand God's prohibition of stealing we must understand that God is not an egalitarian magistrate. He is a God of inequity and He gives to one and withholds from another according to His good providence. The ironic part is that God giving us any good gifts at all is more than we deserve so we should be careful to receive the gifts He gives us with thankful, gracious hearts. *Matthew 14:19*

• The Basis for the Commandment

- Everything in the universe is God's. There is nothing which exists which He has not made. Because He is the creator of everything, He has claim to everything and may do with it as He pleases. All of the descendants of Adam are also in this category. We are all made by Him and without Him we would not and could not exist. As the creator, He has seen fit to give to some more than others. As creator He is completely within His jurisdiction when He does so. When we steal we are demonstrating very bad theology which denies that God is the creator of all things and they belong to Him. *Proverbs 22:2*

• The Many Faces of Stealing

- Withholding the tithe is theft - *Malachi 3:8-12; Isaiah 61:8*
- Taking that which belongs to another is theft - *Exodus 22:1-4*
- Extortion is theft - *Leviticus 6:1-5; 1 Kings 21; Isaiah 1:22*
- Making payments untimely is theft - *Leviticus 19:13; Psalms 37:21*
- Using dishonest scales is theft - *Proverbs 11:1*
- Kidnapping is theft - *Exodus 21:16*
- Laziness and pilfering from an employer is theft - *Proverbs 18:9; Titus 2:10; Matthew 20:1-16*

• The Fruit of Stealing

- Defilement of the Land - *Joshua 7:11-26; Hosea 4:2*
- Shame - *Jeremiah 2:26*

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• Putting Things Right

- Clearly stealing is a sin against God. But it is also a sin which manifests itself in tangible ways. It is not enough for us to confess our sins and repent from our behavior if the tangible manifestation of our sin remains. Becoming a Christian or even confession of sin does not transfer property rights. God insists upon restitution. God embraces the time value of money and that there is a blessing that comes from having things. When someone denies us the advantage of having those things for some period of time, He requires not only that the thing taken be replaced, but that additional compensation is given to recognize the advantage lost over time. *Leviticus 6:1; Luke 19:8*
- God has created the world in such a way that it is necessary for us to work. But God is not a big slot machine where if keep working and working, someday maybe He will pay out. He may reward our labor through consistent wages and at other times He may reward with larger blessings. But God's desire for us is to labor by faith counting on His provision and not chasing after treasures. Then once we have enjoyed the fruit of our hands, He commands us to give thanks and be generous in our giving to others. *Ephesians 4:28, Philippians 4:6*