LD 42; Prov. 1:8-19; Eph. 4:25-28; “Content with What God Gives” I. The Foundation of this Command II. Avoiding Theft in all Areas III. Pursuing a Content Life

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how much is enough? How much money do you need in order to be happy? How much do you need in order to retire? How much money do you need to have in order to feel rich? Well, when John D. Rockefeller was asked how much money is enough, he responded by saying just a little bit more. The world’s first billionaire is credited with saying- I always want one more dollar. In other words, I will never have enough. To this worldly, materialistic mentality the Bible responds in Proverbs 23:4 by saying- do not toil to acquire wealth, be discerning enough to desist. It takes wisdom to know when to stop- to be content. As you know, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. So today we come to the 8th commandment- you shall not steal. As I said last week, our personal phones are ripe with temptation- not only in the way of sexual sins and pornography as we saw last week- but also in the area of theft. We are tempted to steal time as we waste hours on entertainment- we are tempted to covet as we constantly compare ourselves to what others have- and we are tempted to pursue unjust gain in the area of online gambling. Rather, God’s people are to learn to be content with what our God gives. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ redeems us from the life of constant craving so that we might be content with the gifts He gives.

**I. The Foundation of this Command**

In our first point, we find the foundation of this command. You shall not steal is rooted in the fact that God has the right to tell us this command! This is because God owns everything- the earth is the Lords and everything in it as Psalm 24 states. The cattle on 1000 hills are His. God is the direct creator, owner and sustainer of everything that is. Nothing exists that He did not first create! Why is this important? Well, the fact that God owns everything means that He is free to give and distribute as He sees fit. We are simply stewards of the blessings that He places in our hands. We have no innate right to anything if not for the fact that God has seen fit to give us a portion of His gifts. Added to this fact, God is also sovereign over all. He is free to give or withhold anything that He sees fit. As Job puts it, the LORD gives and takes away. He bestows His gifts on His creatures according to His desire and plan. If God gives you something- it remans a gift from His hand. If He withholds something, it is He who withholds it. At the core of this commandment is the fact that God does not give everyone the same thing. God is free to do as He sees fit- and to distribute according to His good plan and purpose. He is the fountain and source of every good and perfect gift. When God gives something to your neighbor and not to you, it is His free and sovereign right that is being expressed. This commandment also makes clear that there is a distinction between what and to whom things are given. God recognizes a difference between what is given to “them” and what is given to “you.” What is yours is not theirs- and what is theirs is not yours. Communism or the government ownership of all possessions is not a Biblical principle. Individual, private property is clearly upheld in this command. Even as we learn in Acts 5 with Ananias and Sapphira- the land was their rightful property, and they were free to do with it as they saw fit. The land and the proceeds from the sale remains their own. So in order for this commandment to apply, we have to see that there is a divine distinction between what is yours and what is not yours. This is an important point. No man should take what is rightfully given to you by God- and you are not to take from others what God has given to them. But man is not content- and there is a restless evil inside our heart. We lust, covet, crave and desire the things that God has not given. The 8th commandment is transgressed on a regular basis- and it was broken in the very beginning. When thinking of an OT example of this commandment being transgressed, we do not need to go very far into Genesis to find this example. In the beginning, God made a tree, and He said to Adam and Eve- do not take from this tree. The fruit on this tree is not yours! I have given every other tree and its fruit to you as food- but this one tree is not yours. But what did Eve do in Gen. 3? She saw, desired, took and ate. This was the first robbery committed by mankind. Eve stole the fruit that God had withheld. She took what was not given- and gave Adam what was not hers to give. So at its heart, this commandment is dealing with God’s possessions. Stealing is theft from God at its core- taking what God has given to others. So it remains a sin against God and man.

**II. Avoiding Theft in all Areas**

As we continues, lets dig into the various areas and ways in which we transgress this command. QA 110- what does God forbid in the 8th commandment? The answer is that God forbids not only outright theft but also all other forms of robbery. As our text in Eph. 4:28 states, let the thief no longer steal. So what are few ways in which people take or steal the possession of others. Obviously outright robbery- breaking into homes, car jacking and mugging on the streets would fall in this category. If you visit California today, you will find that the majority of items in Walmart and Walgreens are locked behind glass- because so many people shoplift, and these companies are unable to stay in operation with that amount of theft. But also many other white-collar crimes such as fraud, counterfeiting and swindling your neighbor. So there is a list of unjust ways to make money as well. Get rich quick schemes are rooted in greed- wanting to make a buck off the ignorance of your neighbor as well. Here I would include gambling- like the online gaming that offers payout for no skill or effort. Gambling seeks to gain from the loss of others- a form of robbery where you can win only in the hope of making others lose. But we can also steal from our employers when we do not work hard. I was speaking to an employer a few weeks back, and he was bemoaning the fact that he can’t even get people to show up to work. And when they show up, they are spending all their time on their phones. So being a bad employee is also breaking this command. For business owners- to refuse to pay your employees a fair wage- or to withhold payment when it is owed- is also a form of stealing. And for our children- cheating at school is in fact stealing answers that do not belong to you! To claim as your own an answer that was actually provided by ChatGPT is to claim possession of an answer that was actually created by AI. But not only the actual act- this commandment is once again dealing with the heart as well. The desire that leads to theft is that of coveting. Craving after worldly things that are not yours. As we read in Prov. 1- “such are the ways of everyone greedy for unjust gain. It takes the life of its possessor.” The endless desire for more- the desire to amass wealth- is a sickness that often accompanies the treasures of this world. Never content with what you have- always wanting more. So this commandment is really pushing back against the consumerism and materialistic spirit of our day and age. Greed is the root sin that being identified- craving for things that do not belong to you. This mentality must be fought against for it leads to lifetime of heartache and pain. The love of money being the root of all kinds of evil means that there is no shortage of pain that follows after greed that resides in the heart. Remember that it was Achan’s coveting of gold at Jericho that led to the destruction of his entire house. Judas was also a thief- selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Coveting also arises from a heart of doubt and fear. We do not think that God can or has provided enough for us- so we make plans and take actions to secure what we think we need. But even closer to home, Malachi 3 says that if you do not bring your tithes and offerings to the church as you ought, you are in fact stealing from God! Even in a more general sense, since we have been purchased by the blood of Christ, we belong totally to Him. To withhold or keep back a portion of our time, talent and treasure from faithful use is to in fact steal from what we should rightfully offer Christ as our living sacrifice of praise!

**III. Pursuing a Content Life**

Now that we have seen the wrong or unjust ways to gain, in our last point we look at what we are to pursue. To start off, it is clear that there are various ways in which we can justly gain earthly treasures. God is not saying that we need to be poor- for many of the saints of old were very wealthy. But money and earthly treasures must be gained in an appropriate way. So valid means of increase include hard work where your labor is rewarded and there are funds received by way of gift and inheritance. As well as a more passive way of increase by way of investments and even reasonable interest. So God is not against His people making an honest wage, but it must be made and viewed appropriately! And when God has blessed you, the response of God’s people must be gratitude and thanksgiving. Not self-reliance and pride, but thankfulness to God for these gifts. So live in your calling and be content with what God has given. Be thankful when God blesses you, cheerful in your giving and support of the church, and satisfied with your portion in life. That is the Christian’s calling! As we read from Eph. 4:28; let this man labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Working hard to be sure-but not to amass wealth- but so that you can become a cheerful giver. When God blesses you with an increase, the support of the church and the benevolent needs of others is where we turn our attention. Using the talents and treasures God gives us in order to bless and minister to those in need. As QA 111 summarizes, do whatever I can for my neighbors good and treat others as I would like them to treat me. Remember that obedience to this command is rooted in faith. Has God given you what you need? Well, if God has already given you the greatest gift in the form of His Son, will He withhold what you body needs on a daily basis? It is faith that moves our hearts to pray- give us this day our daily bread! Do meet our needs for life as you promised! Teach us to believe in you, heavenly Father! To trust that you will provide! And when God does provide, let us learn to be content, happy and satisfied. For godliness with contentment is great gain.

To conclude, as God’s people we are called to love God and to love our neighbor. In this commandment is has become clear, we show our love for God when we respect our neighbor and the possessions that God has given to him. Jesus Christ redeems us from the life of constant craving so that we might be content with the gifts He gives. The constant craving in our society leads to a life of greed and despair; but God’s people have learned to be content and thankful for the gifts our God has given. So may we all work hard, be thankful and share with those in need. Offering our lives as a living sacrifice of praise!