

LD 42; Eph. 4:28; II Thes. 3:6-12; Concerning Theft I. The Foundation of this Command II. Avoiding Theft and its Parts III. Pursuing Generosity

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, stealing used to be taboo in our society. A thief would be shamed- so they would at least try to hide or conceal their actions when they were stealing. But now our society has lost the fear of consequences. This is because the laws of the state no longer punish those who steal. For example, you can now steal up to 950\$ in California and your actions are still only considered a misdemeanor. No consequences. And the California Senate just passed a bill which forbids employees from interfering when their stores are being targeted by thieves. So the state will not punish the thieves and the store employees are forbidden from stopping them as well. It is no wonder that so many stores are closing and moving out of these cities. The fact is, society cannot function when thieves are no longer punished. But robbery is not just something that happens when people shoplift, it can happen in the school and in our own places of employment as well. We can steal time or we can steal tools- we can even steal grades when we cheat. And even here at church, those who refuse to bring their tithes and offering to church are in fact stealing from God as Malachi 3 states. So this evening as we consider the 8th commandment, we see that stealing and theft is a sin that we all must confront. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ teaches us to avoid stealing as He teaches us to be content.

I. The Foundation of this Command

In our first point, we consider the foundation of this commandment which reads, you shall not steal. When God forbids the stealing of possessions, He is declaring His right over those possessions. Since God is the creator of all things, all things that exist have been brought forth by His hand. As Psalm 24:1 puts it, the earth is the LORD's and everything in it. When man mines gold from the earth or when he uses coal or gas to heat and bring light, these are all products of the LORD's hand. Everything we have is from Him. Even our very breath- for in Him we live and move and have our being. So the first

foundation of this command is this- everything belongs to God. He has sovereign ownership and possession of all that exists. And it is from His hand that we receive everything. Whatever we have been given, we have received from His hand. Not only is God sovereign over all- He freely bestows gifts upon man as He sees fit. The distribution of gifts is also a sovereign work. He gives to each in due season. So when the LORD says, you shall not steal, He is saying that you shall not take what He has not given to you. You shall not grab and grasp what He has not placed in your hand. This commandment makes an important distinction. God has given some things to you- and He has given other things to your neighbor. But what belongs to your neighbor does not belong to you- and what you have rightly belongs to you and not your neighbor. So there is a principle at play here. You are to respect your neighbor's house, land, wife, animals and possessions because they belong to your neighbor. They are not yours. So there is a biblical ground of ownership also at play. From time to time, we hear of the supposed benefit of Communism- how having everything held by the state is supposedly better than personal ownership and capitalism. But communism is not Biblical. Yes, it is true that in Acts we read that the early church had all things in common. But this was not communism, it was the free choice of saints who would sell their possessions to give to the church for the sake of the poor. But communism is the state forcefully taking what belongs to private citizens- so it is actually stealing what God has given to other men. So this commandment is clarifying that what God has given to your neighbor rightly belongs to him. To take or steal what your neighbor has is not only an attack on your neighbor's good, it is also an attack on God who distributes these gifts. Those who receive good gifts from God have been blessed by the Divine giver. James 1 says that every good and perfect gift comes from above. So the Father of lights is the benevolent giver. Those who receive have no right in themselves to these gifts as they are graciously given. But when God sees fit to give someone these gifts- no one has the right to rob him of them.

II. Avoiding Theft and its Parts

Now that we understand how our LORD has the right to determine who has what, in our second point we consider how we are to avoid theft in all its parts. As we have seen with each commandment, there is both an internal and external aspect to this command. In other words, the actual sin of stealing starts with a wicked desire first. So the desire at issue in this command is that of coveting. Although we will consider coveting again in a few weeks, it is important to see that the desire to steal starts in the heart that wants something that belongs to someone else. As Jesus warns in Luke 12:15, take care and be on your guard against covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Directly connected to coveting is the love of money. As we find in Timothy, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. So, theft starts in a heart that loves things more than people. A heart that craves and desires what it is not supposed to have. When this craving, lusty desire is not killed, that desire develops into schemes and eventual actions. So what actions are actually condemned in this commandment? Well, as we read from Eph. 4:28, let the thief no longer steal. So outright theft and robbery are forbidden. These actions are not only forbidden by the Word of God, they are also normally punished by the state as well as our QA 110 states. But there are many other actions that are simply forms of robbery as well. Not just holding up a bank and stealing money- but other schemes that seek to defraud your neighbor as well. To take from your neighbor unjustly. As QA 110 puts it, you can take things from your neighbor by force or by means that appear to be legitimate. So robbery can be by strong arm or by coercion. For example, you may remember the Ponzi Schemes of the past. When investors would promise great returns but they were secretly lining their own pockets with the proceeds of others. Another example of a scheme today would be to use the work of others and try to pass it off as your own. Not only counterfeit merchandise, but even stealing the words of others without giving credit is a form of robbery. Chat GTP is a very convenient way to get the computer to do your work for you- thereby pretending that you producing something that you did not. But this commandment has more to say- even in how we use money. What we have gained rightly can be used wrongly. Greed and

pointless squandering of God's gifts is also considered robbery. Refusing to pay for what you have received- refusing to give the person their due when it is in your power to give it. Recently, the "Buy Now Pay Later" plan has been applied to almost everything. But even how you invest- or what you invest in. Is your desire to get rich quick or to amass wealth for no purpose other than having more? So you can see the far reaching implications of this commandment. As Prov. 13:11 puts it, wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it. So anyone who is greedy- who refuses to use their possession and treasures in a way that glorifies God and benefits others is rebuked by this command. We are warned against idolizing things- for cars break down and rust, house get old, silver tarnishes and money can be stolen. These things do not last.

III. Pursuing Generosity

So instead of coveting- instead of loving money and committing robbery; we are positively called to be generous. To view and use our treasure, time and talents properly. Stated positively, we not only are to avoid stealing but rather we are to work hard in order to provide and share. Eph. 4:28- instead of stealing, labor with your hands. Do honest work so that you may have something to share with anyone in need. So the goal of working hard is so that your own needs would be cared for. God has linked hard work with pay and provision. There is a normal correlation between effort and reward. Stated negatively, if you do not work you should not expect to eat. There are three key ways in which to apply this principle to our lives. First of all, whenever God gives you the ability to work and when He gives you any good gift- even as a reward for your work- the result should be thanksgiving. We acknowledge and give thanks to God for blessing us. Godliness with contentment is great gain. Contentment and thanksgiving come together- both happy and satisfied when God fills your hands. Second, when God provides for your needs, we are to be good stewards of His riches. We are simply caretakers of what God has placed in our hands. Remember that you have been purchased- you belong body and soul to Jesus Christ. Everything you have is a gift. How you use the gifts of God must reflect this fact. So we

take care of the blessings God has given to us. Work hard, save for the future and spend for the future. As we read in II Thes. 3:12; working quietly to earn our own living. This is not to say that we cannot enjoy the blessings God gives us today. As long as we acknowledge and give thanks to God for His blessings, we can enjoy vacations and a fine meal as blessings from our God as well. And third, we are to be generous. As we work diligent, God is pleased to give us extra so that we might share with those in need. Specifically, we can think of how God calls us to support the local church and ministries of mercy. We can think of those ministries that aid those with special needs. In this way we are giving to support those who may not be able to work to support themselves. Or when we financially support a church plant- helping a ministry succeed where it can not yet be self-supported. In this way, we invest with eternity in mind. As Jesus says in Mt. 6:19- storing up treasures in heaven.

As we close, Heb. 13 brings all these points together. “Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for He has said “never will I leaven nor will I forsake you.” The fact that God has promised to provide for us each day our daily bread is what removes the worry and stress that usually comes with possessions. As Abraham believed “Jahovah- Jirah”; the LORD will provide! Since our Father has already given us His Son, will He not also provide food and shelter for us His children?! So we need not steal or covet- but rather be content and grateful! Jesus Christ teaches us to avoid stealing as He teaches us to be content. The rule of love applies today- Love your neighbor as yourself. Treat him as you would want to be treated. Not stealing from but being generous with.