

CONTENT WITH OUR INHERITANCE

“You shall not steal.”

— Exodus 20:15

How much stuff do you need? What stuff in particular? Whose stuff is it? We have a lot of confusion about stuff. One of the radical claims of God’s law is that it all rightfully belongs to the King—all the stuff, people, animals, creation itself. This touches on not only larceny, but also slavery, environmentalism, kidnapping, tithing, social injustice, plagiarism, eminent domain, fair business practices, budgeting and debt, property rights, and charitable giving. When everything in creation belongs to the Creator, His commands regarding that creation direct everything we do with it.

What we have, it must be recognized, comes from God—our abundance and our want. We need to praise Him for it and not look for ways that we can get more from others. In fact we need to be looking for ways that we can give what we have to others.

God loves a cheerful giver, because those who know the freedom to give have usually learned it through recognizing that God is all we need. Let our delight be in Him, rather than in what He can give us.

“Sin comes when we take a perfectly natural desire or longing or ambition and try desperately to fulfill it without God. Not only is it sin, it is a perverse distortion of the image of the Creator in us. All these good things, and all our security, are rightly found only and completely in him.”

— St. Augustine

THE LAW REVEALS THE EXTENT OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

God not only owns the cattle on a thousand hills, He owns all that there is. Everything belongs to the King and He gives it to us as stewards according to His good pleasure. It is His right to command us not to steal, because He has reign over us and those things that we are tempted to steal. This command is staggering in its breadth—everything there is exists under God’s authority. There is nothing outside of His sovereignty.

The greater we see God to truly be, the greater is our duty to Him. The law reveals ways in which we have not honored Him, that we were unaware of our obligation. It is not merely unwise or ungrateful to follow His law, it is treasonous. We struggle to reckon rightly with these implications in part because we are so democratized as to have forgotten concepts like the crown lands of the king. Poaching from His land was not merely stealing, but stealing from the King.

THE LAW REVEALS THE EXTENT OF OUR SELFISHNESS

When we take something that is not ours, we are not only stealing it from them, we are also taking it from God. We are also expressing dissatisfaction with how God has distributed His possessions and grumbling about His unfairness to us.

We are called not only to refrain from stealing, but to work that we might give generously. It is not enough for us to simply “pull our own weight” so to speak (though certainly not less), but rather to see our resources as means with which to worship Christ. And that is precisely the point that the law reveals about our own hearts’ preoccupation with ourselves—stuff is not meant as a measure for us at all; they are kingdom resources intended for the glory of the King.

“Being a businessman is an honest calling, as long as the merchant ship has a spiritual rudder . . . the eighth commandment steers us as we do business.”

— Jochem Douma

HOW DID CHRIST FULFILL THIS LAW?

Our Lord honors His Father's ownership in all things. Not only does He perfectly keep this law by not stealing, He shows the ultimate generosity in giving up all that He had and coming to save us from our own disobedience. Jesus shows us how not to steal. He is content with what the Father has given Him. This frees Christ to lay it all aside out of love for His Father and for us.

He was tempted by Satan specifically in this regard as Satan offered Him the riches of this earth apart from loyal obedience to His Father, and Jesus rejected it. His work has provided us with the wealth of being co-heirs together with Him. With these riches, why do we rummage about looking for trifles in the garbage? Why do we hoard what we have and deny our brothers and sisters in need?

“Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God's plans, but God *is not helpless among the ruins*. Our broken lives are not lost or useless. God's love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out his wonderful plan of love.”

— Eric Liddell

FLESHING IT OUT—BOTH SIDES OF THE LAW

What are the **duties required** in the eighth commandment? (WLC #141)

The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary law-suits, and suretiship, or other like engagements; and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.¹

What are the **sins forbidden** in the eighth commandment? (WLC #141)

The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving any thing that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing landmarks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious law-suits, unjust inclosures and depopulations; ingrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbour what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness; inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.²

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does stealing point to our spiritual failings?
2. What aspects of stealing are things you have not before considered covered by the law?
3. How has Christ revealed the fullness of this commandment?
4. What are you doing to grow in generosity?

APPLICATION

How do we repent of stealing? We have stolen. So what are we to do? How do we avoid stealing in the future? Now that we see all things belong to God, our worship of Him takes on whole new dimensions. We cannot keep this law apart from Christ. Let Him lead us through His Spirit in right uses of God's creation. Let us be faithful stewards of what He has entrusted to us.

¹ Ps. 15:2,4, Zech. 7:4,10, Zech. 8:16–17; Lev. 6:2–5, Luke 19:8; Luke 6:30,38, 1 John 3:17, Eph. 4:28, Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:6–9, Gal. 6:14; 1 Tim. 5:8; Prov. 27:23–27, Eccl. 2:24, Eccl. 3:12–13, 1 Tim. 6:17–18, Isa. 38:1, Matt. 11:8; 1 Cor. 7:20, Gen. 2:15, Gen. 3:19, Eph. 4:28, Prov. 10:4; John 6:12, Prov. 21:20; 1 Cor. 6:1–9; Prov. 6:1–6, Prov. 11:15; Lev. 25:35, Deut. 22:1–4, Exod. 23:4–5, Gen. 47:14,20, Phil. 2:4, Matt. 22:39

² James 2:15–16, 1 John 3:17; Eph. 4:28; Ps. 62:10; 1 Tim. 1:10; Prov. 29:24, Ps. 50:18; 1 Thess. 4:6; Prov. 11:1, Prov. 20:10; Deut. 19:14, Prov. 23:10; Amos 8:5, Ps. 37:21; Luke 16:10–12; Ezek. 22:29, Lev. 25:17; Matt. 23:25, Ezek. 22:12; Ps. 15:5; Job 15:34; 1 Cor. 6:6–8, Prov. 3:29–30; Isa. 5:8, Micah 2:2; Prov. 11:26; Acts 19:19,24–25; Job 20:19, James 5:4, Prov. 21:6; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:5, Col. 3:2, Prov. 23:5, Ps. 62:10; Matt. 6:25,31,34, Eccl. 5:12; Ps. 73:3, Ps. 37:1,7; 2 Thess. 3:11, Prov. 18:9; Prov. 21:17, Prov. 23:20–21, Prov. 28:19; Eccl. 4:8, Eccl. 6:2, 1 Tim. 5:8.