

Stop Thief! (Exodus 20:15)

There was a show years ago, America's Dumbest Criminals.

- It was true stories of people often trying to break the 8th commandment but stupidly.
- One guy wanted to steal money from a store.
- He came in pretending he was applying for a job, asking for an application, the manager.
- For a bit he wrote on the form till the manager came out, then the thief pulled a gun.
- He stole from the manager and ran off, but the genius wrote his real address and left it!
- So the cops went right to the robber's address and arrested him!

We have detectives here and I heard one tell another true story of a home burglary.

- While stealing from the house they took a selfie in it but accidentally left the camera.
- The detective had their mug shots date and time stamped at the scene of crime!

As dumb they were, we're dumber if we think our sin won't find us out by God!

Today in Ex 20:15 we'll look at the 8th commandment, just 4 simple words: *You shall not steal.*

- Maybe you're thinking 'finally one of the 10 commandments I don't break.'
- I never burglarize homes or do armed robberies, and I'm no shoplifter or pick-pocket.'
- But it would be foolish to think you can't or don't or won't ever steal in some way.
- All sin is stupid, especially if we think no one sees.
- The fool steals as if there's no God, but every date and time is seen by God.
- Today we'll see we can all steal.
- This sin IDs us, has our names written on it, it finds us where we live

1. Our problem – how we can steal

2. Our solution – what Jesus pays for and restores

3. Our application – don't be a taker, be a giver

It's as if God is calling out 'Stop thief!' This is a call to His people to not steal or stop stealing.

- Ex 20:15: '*You shall not steal.*'
- Definition: We steal if we take without permission what isn't ours to take.
- By that definition, this was part of the original sin, Adam and Eve wrongly took and ate.
- This is one of the earliest sins of toddlers, taking away things from family without asking.
- Before they can talk, they can take. If they could, they'd do violent crime for it
 - o (PTL He makes them small). We're natural born stealers.
 - o Young moms see this often, it's not taught. We need to teach v. 15.

Toddlers can be robbers, taking toys by force, but this sin is no game to God.

- As kids grow, they steal things or food secretly eaten without permission in a garage.

Al Mohler tells a story of a 5-year-old coming home with a kitten she said her neighbors gave.

- 2 years later it came out the neighbors didn't give it like she said. She was a cat-burglar!
- But the neighbors weren't mad, they were just glad it was stolen to a good home!
- It can be hard to find homes for kittens (impossible for adult cats).
- But I remember as a boy stealing stuff and being stolen from.

Most of us did worse as kids than kitten-napping

The serious truth is sin that starts in little things or little kids gets bigger and in big government.

- I grew up in a poor country destroyed by a leader who stole billions from the poor (RP).
- My son was born in DRC where the president's embezzling destroyed their economy.
- Multi-billionaires have robbed their own nation.

Corrupt criminal thievery and bribery rules the 3rd world. The US gives billions to arm robbers.

- Some of you grew up under communism where the State takes the property from citizens.
- Socialists take what you worked for to give to others who won't work.

To refuse to work but receive a handout or bailout, even if legal, can be a type of stealing

God's law tells us not to wrongly take, and that would include taking government resources.

- God commands the able-bodied to work and labor weekly (4th commandment in v. 9).
- The NT says if a man is not willing to work, he shall not eat,
 - o and we're not to steal but must work with our hands (2 Thess 3:10, Eph 4:28).
 - o Don't take from the State what God tells you to work for.

Ex 20:15 teaches there are things you rightly own you've paid for that aren't to be taken.

- In this commandment is the right to private property that it's wrong to take by force.
- The communist Marxist taking that away and making the government own it violates this.
- State-sponsored theft violates God's law.
- So does taking away rights, stealing personal information, privacy, identity.

In Ex 20:14, just one verse before, adultery or immorality is a way we can steal what's not ours.

The NT calls it defrauding, taking physically or visually what doesn't belong to you.ⁱ

- In Ex 22 a man seducing a young virgin is robbing her virginity and paid a huge price.
- Or a dating couple partially or illicitly stealing pre-marital intimacy are wedding thieves.
- Porn rips off images and sex from God's design
 - o and holds up humanity as if just an object (some are trafficked property).

21:16 *He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.*

- That's the most serious stealing, man-stealing.
- By God's law, Hamas, hostage-takers in Israel deserve whatever deadly force they face.
- I believe it's also dead wrong for a government to pay ransoms to a nation that funds that.

God is also deadly serious against human trafficking that we can be complicit in financially.

- v. 16 says not just buyer or seller, it's a sin to have what's stolen

To possess what someone else stole makes you guilty in God's eyes

We could talk about the dangers in our world of the socialist push, scams, cyber-theft and so on.

- It's good to ask wise friends or family if you're unsure with messages or mail or emails

We need to honor the elderly and our parents (5th commandment) by protecting them from theft.

- But I don't want to focus on stealing by others, I want to focus on ways we can steal.

I think of Paul Washer preaching to a big youth gathering 'we're not to be like the world.'

- They cheered, till he said 'I don't know why you're clapping. I'm talking about you.'
- Ex 20:15 is for you. Stop thief! God is talking about you!
- Don't think of others in the world or be like the world

SLIDE: Norman Rockwell Painting, [Saturday Evening Post](#) 10/3/1936

One writer said "the butcher and the lovely lady would resent being called thieves. The lovely lady would never rob a bank or steal a car. The butcher would be indignant if anyone accused him of stealing and if a customer gave him a bad check, he would call the police, but neither saw anything wrong with a little deception that would make a few cents for one or save a few ...for the other"...a picture of how we seek to live, trying to manipulate life for our advantageⁱⁱ

Proverbs say imbalanced weights or scales to profit you are an abomination to God (20:10, 23)

It's one thing to seek a deal, it's another thing to steal, to tip the scales even a bit in your favor.

Rom 2:21: *While you preach against stealing, do you steal?* 3:20 *'through the law we become conscious of sin.'*

Rom 13 quotes the commandment ‘do not steal’ with this context: *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.* ⁸ *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.* ⁹ *The commandments, “...Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁰ *Love does no harm to its neighbor (NIV).*

- so you can steal from your neighbor’s well-being by harming him, or not giving him respect, honor, love
- the context of stealing includes not giving what you owe (can be relational or material items borrowed)
- some of you need to give back what you’ve borrowed from your fellowman, physical stuff, funds, food
- some of you need to pay Uncle Sam or a real family member or high-interest debt or your unpaid taxes

To our credit card world, God says pay promptly for work done for usⁱⁱⁱ or for resources we use.

- If you stream movies or music illegally you didn’t pay for, the law calls that stealing.
- To take someone else’s license or log-on outside the home or the legal agreement is theft.
- Even if he let you willingly take it without paying, violating copyright law is stealing.
- I had CDs and DVDs in my house I realized this week were illegally copied overseas.
- Not all bought on eBay is ok. I realized it researching this, threw them all away this week

A friend here told me years ago he deleted downloads and trashed digital unlawful copies.

- Maybe you need to clean house today.

If you’ve given your log-on to friends for free access to a paid service, change your password

The Bible calls taking away people’s rights a type of robbing (Isa 10:2).

- Copyrights are a part of legal rights that I think some Christians violate all the time.
- Also taking words or ideas without permission or attribution is the theft of plagiarism.
- In Jer 23:30 God says He’s against all ‘*who steal my words from one another.*’

To quote without credit or cut and paste online as if it’s mine is unlawful intellectual theft.

- This is a big problem with Chat GPT or other AI that steals text for work or homework.
- People here have seen how that type of stealing literally ends a career.

Big name pastors and a recent president of the SBC have been proven thieves in these ways

Kids here who take answers from someone else for a school assignment are stealing.

- Even if a friend lets you, if the authority doesn’t authorize it, it’s sin.
- Don’t take what’s not rightly yours.
- Don’t even take from a family member without asking and not returning (clothes, stuff).
- I felt conviction this week for robbing the fridge of leftovers my wife had other plans for.
- I also too often steal time that belongs to my family, being on my phone without asking.

I’m guilty, and it’s good to ask if something urgent comes up that robs you of family time.

- We think stealing is financial, but precious time has a price.
- If you meet with someone and you show up late, you’re taking away their valuable time.
Or if you take way more time than asked for or don’t ask to go longer, that’s not right.
- It’s also wrong to hijack someone’s group for your own soapbox.

Remember the definition of stealing: taking what’s not yours to take without asking

This isn’t a new spin on the 8th commandment, the old Westminster Larger Catechism says it’s ‘taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him...wasteful gaming...idleness’ or Heidelberg Catechism adds ‘abuse and waste of His gifts [can be taking time or wasting time].’

- And there is money involved when you steal from your employer:
 - o you take company supplies or take longer breaks or lunches than you’re paid for,
 - o squander time, surf the web, solitaire, etc.
- If you’re texting on your phone for minutes on the hour on the clock, that’s stealing.

If a copy machine or phone is for work, it's not for personal use without asking your boss.

- Wasting time that is company time by chatting all the time is a type of theft of resources.
- Pirates steal treasure but people of God need to steward time, talents, and treasure.
- Even if you asked permission to borrow something, not giving it back is sin.
- Ps 37:21 says it's wicked to borrow and not return.

That includes books loaned from a pastor or all kinds of things you borrow from others

Mal 3:8 *Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions [offerings].* ⁹ *You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.*

- In old covenant law they were to give a tithe or tenth of their produce or profit (1st 10%).
- There were also voluntary contributions and offerings, that's the NT ideal in 2 Cor 8-9.
- To not give to the Lord's work robs God.
- We're not OT Israel but we're to be generous, not stingily give less.

To not give of first-fruits or finances may be the worst stealing in the OT as it brought a curse

To those not regularly and generously giving, He says test me, see if I won't bless and provide.

- Worse than stealing from Peter to pay Paul is taking for us what belongs to their Master.
- in a real sense, if you don't serve the church, you rob a blessing from yourself and others.

A final way we can steal is by taking credit or glory from God for what He's done by us.

- If men praise you, don't take what belongs to Him (I've been guilty).
- Give God the credit, don't rob His glory

By God's Law we're all takers by nature, but God in the gospel is a giver and a Savior

Those are ways we can all steal, our problem. #2. Our solution: what Jesus pays for and restores

Phil 2:6 says for Jesus it wasn't '*robbery to be equal with God*' (NKJV) but He came as a man to pay for sin.

- In Ps 23 the Lord is my shepherd and '*He restores my soul.*'
- In the NT Jesus the Lord is my shepherd who restores

He says in Jn 10 '*All who came before me are **thieves and robbers**...The thief comes only to **steal** and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I lay it down that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me...I have authority to take it up...I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*'

In other words, no sinner or Satan can steal a believer from eternal security in Christ

For us who sinfully take what isn't ours, He takes what our sin deserves and lays down His life.

- No man could take it from Him
- No man could take up His own life in resurrection but Jesus.

He came to pay for sin and to restore all that was lost when Adam and Eve stole in the garden.

- Satan is a thief who steals, destroys and robs of life,
- our Savior pays for and gives abundant life.

For us who wrongly take, He takes the wrath our wrongs deserve and gives what we can't earn!

Acts 3 says Jesus comes to restore all things: repent and turn to Him and He'll blot out sin

Religion can't save. Jesus turned tables on the religious who'd made His house a den of thieves.

Ps 69 is a prophecy of His cleansing the house of robbers: *zeal for Your house has consumed me... for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* [that's on the cross, v. 4] **What I did not steal, I then have to restore.** (NASB).

NKJV: **Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it.** That's Jesus on the cross restoring what sin stole.

- In the garden of Eden paradise lost was stolen by sin,
- but Jesus is the way to paradise restored.

In the garden of Gethsemane He said as they arrested Him '*Have you come out as against a robber...*'

- Jesus suffered as if a thief and for thieves, crucified between two robbers (Mark 14, 15)
- But the thief on the cross next to Him turned to Him in faith

- That dying thief begged Jesus to remember him in the kingdom to come.
 - o So Jesus said to that convicted robber *'Today you will be with me in Paradise.'*

Jesus paid the fine for the sinner's crime! For all our sin steals, He restores thieves who believe!

What good news for us! The hymn In the Cross of Christ I Glory has this line:

'Once, the love of this world could sway me. I, with dying thieves, agreed:

"Washed in blood! Ridiculous notion! Jesus? None but fools believe!"

Came the day, He found me dying. Death and hell awaited me.

Like the thief, I cried to the Saviour, "Wash me! LORD! Have mercy on me!" And our closing song:

'The dying thief rejoiced to see...in that day, and there may I though vile as He was all my sins away!'^{iv}

When Jesus died, the leaders wanted to keep the disciples from stealing the body (Mt 27:64).

- But Jesus stole the thunder by rising from the dead! He plundered the enemy!

In His spoils of victory He offers treasure in heaven where thieves can't break in or steal, Mt 6.

But if you don't repent Jesus will come as a thief in the night to judge all who sin in these ways.

1 Cor 6:10 says no unrepentant idolater, sexual or homosexual sinner *'nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit...* (NIV) Praise God for the gospel! Those sins don't define you and aren't your identity. You're new in Him, live like it!

So turn to Lk 3 for our gospel application in conclusion

3. Our application – don't be a taker, be a giver (the gospel doesn't just save us, it changes us)

In Lk 3 John the Baptist came preaching in v. 8 *'bear fruits in keeping with repentance.'* Look at 3:10: *And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?"*¹¹ *And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."*¹² *Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"*¹³ *And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."*¹⁴ *Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"* *And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."* ... [instead of theft, be content, generous, share]...¹⁸ *So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.*

- The gospel doesn't just tell us to put off, it transforms us so we put on the opposite as fruit of repentance
- Don't just stop violating the 8th commandment, start by a change of heart to be a giver instead of a taker

Turn to Lk 10 and remember the 10 commandments are about loving God and loving neighbor. Jesus says that's the right summary of the Law, but what does love for our neighbor look like?

³⁰ *Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead."*³¹ *Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.*³² *So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*³³ *But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.*³⁴ *He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.*³⁵ *And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back."*³⁶ *Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"*³⁷ *He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."*

- it's not enough to not be the robber in the story, we're not to be the religious merciless indifferent ones
- *'love your neighbor'* is the fulfillment and flipside of *'you shall not steal,'* spending for needs of others
- putting off criminal theft isn't enough, we must put on compassion and care and close-up mercy shown
- Jewish-Samaritan relations were like Israeli-Palestinian relations today, this non-Jew proved a neighbor
- We call him a good Samaritan, think a good Palestinian, one expected to hate is a model for love of God
- In v. 37, the Jew won't even call the hero the Samaritan, he calls him *'the one who showed him mercy'*
- Gospel grace can transform enemies to love neighbors, that's the point he missed and the love he needed

That's our hope and prayer for the middle east and merciless Americans

Now go to ch 19 to see how Jesus transforms even chief tax collectors,

- considered the chief of sinners for how they stole a cut for themselves with their tax bills.
- One of them was a wee little man, a wee little man was he, who climbed a sycamore tree. Maybe we can sing it for a closing song? The Savior passed that way and v. 5 says
- *he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."*⁶ *So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.*⁷ *And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."*⁸ *And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. **And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.**"* He understood Exodus 20 and 22, fourfold restitution.

Religious Jews saw Zaccheus as a Roman govt sellout, Jesus saw a redeemed guy saved in v. 9

I'll close with Eph 4, but that's bearing fruit of repentance,

- receiving Jesus joyfully, repentantly restoring with all he wronged.
- Some of you need to come down in a hurry, receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior today.
- Some of you today need to make restitution for past wrongs.
- For others, what can you give to the poor, the work of the Lord, or give to church more?
- Don't stay a taker. *Jesus said 'freely you have received, freely give' (Mt 10:8 NKJV)*

Look at Eph 4:28 *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

- When is a thief no longer a thief?
- Jay Adams says it's not when he stops stealing, that's just a thief in-between jobs!
- Coveting hearts continue to thief but true change is in motivations: a new heart to share with others
- Gospel transformation puts off stealing to put on striving to help meet others' needs, not our own greeds.
- God can change those who dishonestly get extra from others to work honestly to share extra with others.
- May God help us who are takers by nature to be givers by gospel grace

ⁱ 1 Thessalonians 4:6 and context.

ⁱⁱ T. Cecil Myers, *Thunder on the Mountain* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 119–20. Concluding sentence by Maxie Dunnam and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Exodus*, The Preacher's Commentary (Thomas Nelson Inc, 1987), 2:234–236.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leviticus 19:13, Deuteronomy 24:15, Proverbs 3:28, 11:24, 22:7 (warning against borrowing), James 5:4, etc.

^{iv} William Cowper, "There is a Fountain," and Kathleen Shea Vick, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory."