



## *The Eighth Commandment – the things forbidden*

Exodus 20:15 " You shall not steal."

Next Week we will go over in greater detail the many ways that a person can steal, including some controversial ones. But before we should do that, there is a more central question we must deal with which will form the root of :

***What makes a person steal?*** This is a question that has occupied social theorists and engineers for ages. *Many have concluded that it must be a lack of social opportunity.* Ok, that sounds convenient but it simply does not explain why many of the kids who I grew up with, who had opportunity coming out of their ears were frequently busted for shoplifting or stole things out of other kids lockers.

*Perhaps then it is a lack of education.* If people were simply schooled more, they would perhaps learn that stealing was wrong. So theft is a result of ignorance. Well then how do we explain the actions of the ultra-educated executives at institutions like Enron?

We can flail about like this for hours, looking for explanations for theft in all sorts of external criteria and pressures, but ultimately the answer to why do people steal is not going to be found by sociologists out there or even by psychologists up here. Rather the explanation for what makes men steal are to be found locked up in here [point to the heart] and are exposed in the word of God.

The two largest factors that the word exposes for us are unbelief and discontent or covetousness:

**1) *Unbelief*** – How does unbelief make us into thieves? If we do not believe in God, we do not believe that there is anyone who is **a) watching us and to whom we will give an account** and **b) able to provide for us other than ourselves.**

**A)** When Israel and Judah were sunk low and each man robbed from his neighbor and defrauded widows and orphans and sold their brethren into slavery, what was the conviction of their heart? The prophets revealed it:

***Isa. 47:10 "For you have trusted in your wickedness; You have said, 'No one sees me'; Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; And you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'***

***Ezek 9:9 Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!'***

Atheistic convictions never lead to good works, quite the contrary, they lead to all manner of abomination *"The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good."*

For many years society understood this, that was one of the reasons that in courts of law men were made to swear a vow to uphold the truth before God. They knew that while we could not always catch men in a lie, that there was one who always saw and always knew, and that they must remind all men that it was to him that they would have to give an account. In the church courts of the PCA atheists are not allowed to give testimony in a trial, for if their conviction is that there is none who sees and to whom they answer, how on earth can they be trusted to tell the truth?

**B)** If we do not believe in God or if we distrust him, it is also inherent that we will not believe in his providence or his mercy.

As the people were led out of Egypt they were constantly revealing their doubt in God and his goodness: "And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." (Num. 21:5)

God showed them his goodness again and again, and yet because of the hardness of their hearts they still doubted: Psalm 78:15 He split the rocks in the wilderness, And gave them drink in abundance like the depths. 16 He also brought streams out of the rock, And caused waters to run down like rivers.

*17 But they sinned even more against Him By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.*

*18 And they tested God in their heart By asking for the food of their fancy.*

*19 Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"*

The unbeliever answers that final question with a resounding **NO!** And therefore it is his conclusion that he must provide for himself. And as Watson puts it so well: *"Therefore he is resolved he will spread a table for himself, but it shall be at other men's cost, and both first and second course shall be served in with stolen goods."*

You can contrast that directly with the trust of the believer in the goodness and provision of the Lord: *Psalm 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.*

**2) Covetousness or discontent** – Unbelief says *"There is no God who sees me and will take care of me. I can take whatever my heart desires."* Covetousness says *"There may be a God, but he has not provided for me as he should have. I should have what ever my heart desires."*

I am sometimes appalled at how much the modern political process plays on covetousness. It tells us that in the difference between the poor and the rich the problem is not the poverty, but the difference between them. That's not fair, the demagogues say. The difference must be eliminated. Then in the name of fairness they advocate taking from some and giving to others. In the name of fairness, they frankly encourage what often amounts to little more than institutionalized theft. And people as such are encouraged to vote to empty the pockets of some in order to fill their own.

This is very different from charity which is a Christian principle. Although this is a duty, it is still voluntary. When however my desire in voting is to obtain my neighbor's goods without his intentional consent and against his will because ultimately I desire them then that very desire makes me guilty at the very least of covetting. And while I may not be the one pulling out a gun and demanding he give me what he has in his wallet, or demanding a cut of his profits lest something in his store get broken, if the government is merely acting as my proxy we must ask ourselves, is this not a violation of the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment?

But do not think for a moment that it is only the poor who fall prey to covetousness. Far from it! The rich are just as prone to greediness and finding their source of delight in gain however it is achieved. We have learned that in spades from the recent spate of high profile cases of wealthy people doing corrupt things to make more money. And how many rulers will stop at nothing including impoverishing their people to enrich themselves.

For instance, Fidel Castro, has ruled over one of the most desperately poor nations on earth for almost 50 years. The average Cuban has a per capita income of \$1,500 a year. Yet is estimated that Fidel has amassed a personal net worth of 110 million dollars, the old fashioned way, by taking it or receiving it in the form of kickbacks, extortion, etc.

Whenever we have an immoderate desire to obtain something we become idolaters and that idolatry tends to snowball. Guard yourselves from this immoderate desire for wealth as Paul warned Timothy:

***"9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***

***10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6:9-10)***

Once again this too is a banquet at which those who eat are never filled. They always arise from the table discontent and desiring more and in the end it is they who are consumed.

What then is the antidote for this corrupt desire for wealth? Again Paul tells us:

***1 Tim. 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.***

***7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.***

***8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.***

A contemplation of the ultimate end of everything that we accumulate should be enough to lead us away from all desire to steal and if we consider that there is one who always sees and to whom we will give an account should also restrain us.

But without godliness and contentment this sin will never be overcome, therefore our primary endeavors must be aimed not at accumulating wealth here on earth but in laying up treasures in heaven and pursuing real treasure. What do I mean by that, well let me let Peter explain, turn if you would to 1 Peter 1:

***1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,***

*4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,*

*5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

*6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,*

*7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*

*8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,*

*9 receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of your souls.*

Is this not a treasure that puts everything material that you can accumulate in this world to shame? What would you really rather have Castro's millions or the eternal inheritance Peter speaks of? ***And is that your final answer?***

This salvation cannot be stolen, it doesn't perish, and it is bought for you and obtained freely. If you have this you are richer than the wealthiest ruler, the mightiest earthly conquerer, and without it, ultimately you will be poorer than the lowliest Christian beggar.