

“YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, I”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 42

Scripture Texts: Exodus 20:15; Leviticus 19:11-13

Introduction.

In our evening sermon series on the Ten Commandments we come tonight to the first of two sermons on the Eighth Commandment, You Shall Not Take Other People’s Stuff.

I have here in my pocket eight daily reminders that I live in a sinful fallen world and that I am a sinful fallen man. Every time that I have to lock or unlock something I get another reminder of the fall and the universal effects of the fall. It’s constant and it’s around us all the time.

There won’t be any keys in heaven. Jesus doesn’t have a huge set of master keys for all the doors in heaven. No keys, no locks, no codes and passwords.

I have about fifty on-line accounts that all have to be protected with user names, passwords and security questions. Identity theft is the new stealing and it is huge. Every password I enter is another reminder that I am a sinner and everyone around me is a sinner.

Four simple words, easy to understand, but not as easy to do as we might think. The Eighth Commandment is a huge deal. We are never far from it.

God cares not just about our life (murder) and our purity (adultery, sexual immorality), but also about our possessions. God has something to say about them, positive and negative.

Many sermons on the Eighth Commandment start out with either a bunch of crime statistics or a bunch of news reports of robberies, business fraud, or corporate crime.

Rather than bore you with a bunch of statistics, I am going to start out with one statistic, the only statistic that matters. We are all thieves. Everyone steals. Every last one of us, and yes that means you and me. I know we think we are pretty clean on this commandment because we don’t steal from stores or rob our neighbors, but the point of HC Question 110 is to show that when the net is cast it catches all of us.

So now comes the unpleasant part of the sermon. I have to show you how I know that we are all thieves, that we have all sinned against God in this and we are guilty. No one gets off the hook tonight.

First of all, we are by nature thieves. It’s in us from birth to lie, cheat and steal. Satan is the father of our sin nature and he is a known liar, cheater, robber and destroyer.

Our first sin in paradise was to steal, to take something we were told not to take. As a result of Adam's theft, we are all now born in his likeness. We have all seen it at a very early age in our children and we all as children at a very early age stole something that wasn't ours. I have an early memory from about second grade in a hardware store in Toledo, OR. The lesson stuck because dad marched me right back down there to confess. Very effective. We all have those stories.

There are lots of kinds of stealing.

Not all stealing is breaking into homes at night.

Taking possessions.

Toys from the nursery, tools from work, fruit from the produce stand.

Downloading music or videos without paying is stealing. Sharing streaming passwords.

Shoplifting is stealing. A significant part of the cost of just about everything we buy is for theft prevention and stop loss.

A good friend of mine was the General Manager of the Best Buy store in OK. He paid two full time salaries of guys whose job is just to keep stuff from walking out the door, and a big part of their problem was the employees.

Borrowing something and not returning it is stealing. Do you have anything in your possession that doesn't belong to you? Return it this week.

Stealing is coveting, wanting something that isn't ours, and taking it. Achan coveted the spoils of war in Jericho and took them. Judas coveted the money in the money bag and stole it.

Stealing is a great injustice to the owner and an expression of contempt (like looting).

Respecting what another has, is showing respect to them.

Taking advantage.

Whether it's unjust scales, false measures, taking advantage of the poor or the naïve, ponzi schemes or pyramid schemes, exploiting others, making false promises, not fulfilling commitments and contracts and business transactions, when we bait and switch, when we cheat customers or a business partner, it's all stealing.

Riding a bus or train without paying. Cheating on tax returns. Grazing your livestock on someone else's land.

What do you do if you are under-charged for something or given too much change? Do we ever over charge or over price?

The Eighth Commandment forbids neglecting to repay debts. Even in cases of bankruptcy while we may be granted legal protection from creditors, we still have a moral obligation to repay when we are able. If we become able to and don't, that is stealing.

While I was in high school in Wichita, KS there was a well-known business man who built a construction empire by going bankrupt two or three times. He was wealthy because the creditors upon whose backs he built himself up were poor.

Don't postpone paying someone back when you can.

Scripture has much to say to both employers and employees. Employers are not to take advantage of their employees. They are to pay them fairly and promptly.

Employees are not to be lazy and wasteful. When we slack off or waste time at work, doing personal things on the computer, using the company supplies for personal purposes, padding the expense reports, borrowing from petty cash, fudging our hours, stretching coffee breaks, and lunch breaks, we are stealing from our employer what we owe him.

Laziness is stealing when we don't work as hard or do good works God requires.

Corruption and bribery are stealing. They are forms of injustice that rob others of what is right or fair. Communism, Marxism, socialism, to the extent they deny ownership of private property are forms of theft and breaking of God's commandment.

I have seen firsthand the effects of corruption and bribery in Albania, China and India. It is telling that the most corrupt nations in the world are the ones that are the most secular, communist and atheistic countries, and Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim countries. Most of the least corrupt countries are protestant countries whose cultures were most shaped and influenced by the Bible.

The Bible is the only force in history to change not just hearts, but nations and free them from corruption. Von Golder has said many times about Albania, the only hope for changing that brutally corrupt nation is the Gospel.

Taking ideas.

Taking credit for someone else's work or ideas, whether it's plagiarism in a school paper or journalism article or for a sermon is stealing.

There is a saying, cutting and pasting from one source it's plagiarism, but from two sources it's research. Wrong, it's stealing twice.

Taking reputation.

We can steal someone's reputation or good name with malicious gossip, rumor spreading.

You steal someone's purity through sexual immorality, pre-marital sex, looking at naked images, and it doesn't matter if they are consenting. If they are not your spouse then you took something that didn't belong to you.

Taking with your heart.

Can you steal in your heart? Jesus says anger is murder and lust is adultery. We steal in our heart when we have greed, envy and covetousness. When we desire things that aren't ours, when we want things that we can't afford, when we are not content with what we have, we are mental robbers.

Thou shalt not steal thy neighbor's stuff and thou shalt not desire thy neighbor's stuff.

The love of money and the love of things are spiritually dangerous, they put our souls in serious jeopardy.

I Timothy 6:9 Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. **10** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

The desire to have what we don't have or can't get by working and earning is the motivation behind gambling and the lottery which are a plague, a blight on our land. Who doesn't dream of winning the lottery, of winning big, of being set for life and free from all the financial burdens of life. It's greed, pure and simple.

Finally, Spiritual Stealing.

All of this stealing pales in comparison to the greatest kind of stealing, a stealing that when you think about it is bold and arrogant. It is stealing from the living God and creator of all that is.

God has given and given. He is generous beyond measure. His grace is overwhelming, He has done so much for us. We owe Him a huge debt, yet we have ignored Him, neglected Him, withheld the love and obedience; worship and praise that is due to Him, that is His. We have stolen what is His.

Then He sends His Son to repay and forgive our debt and we ignore and neglect Him too. We rob God by living a hypocritical life, by saying we are Christians but doing the opposite, and when we live for ourselves and have no interest in Him or His Word or will or ways.

We rob God of His day when we use the Sabbath for ourselves and our own pleasures. We rob God of His tithes which belong to His church.

Malachi 3:8-10 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. **9** You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. **10** Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Proverbs 3:9 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; **10** then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

There is a stealing the truth from souls through heresy, lies, deception, false doctrine, man-made doctrines, covering up of the truths of Scripture with our words or our silence.

Stealing profanes the name of the Lord.

Why does stealing make God's top ten list? Why is it such a big deal? Why does it matter so much to God?

Leviticus 19:11 "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. **12** You shall not swear by my name falsely, *and so profane the name of your God*: I am the Lord. **13** "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning.

Proverbs 30:8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, **9** lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and *steal and profane the name of my God*.

According to Leviticus and Proverbs stealing profanes the name of the Lord. How does stealing profane the name of the Lord? Stealing anything is saying what I have isn't enough and I can't trust God to provide what I need or want, so I have to take matters into my own hands.

To steal is to say that God won't provide so we must go to Satan for help. Stealing is unbelief, lack of faith and trust in God and in His provision and in His providence. Stealing says I trust riches or money or things more than I trust God and His provision.

Never undertake any action over which you cannot pray and ask God's blessing and favor.

"Lord bless me as I embezzle this money. Lord, bless me as I cheat this man. Lord, bless me as I keep this that is not mine. Lord, bless me as I change these numbers. Lord, bless me as I keep back some of your tithe."

If you can't pray it, don't do it.

The psalmist asked in **Psalm 78:19** "*Can God spread a table in the wilderness?* **20** [Moses] struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?"

Can God provide? Will God provide?
Will it be enough? Will it be what I need?

Stealing profanes the name of our God because it is at its root, unbelief and lack of trust.

Principle of restitution.

Let's be honest. As I have shown how far reaching this commandment is and as all of us have been caught in its net, what thoughts and reminders have been stirred up in you? Has the Holy Spirit been convicting you of anything?

If so, God calls you to do two things as a Biblical response to theft. **First, repent**, confess it, call it what it is, agree with God about it, that it's sin and you want His power to turn from it.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. The only difference between the two, is one repented and was redeemed.

Second, God wants you to make **restitution**, to put things right, to return or restore or repay or ask forgiveness as the case may be.

But notice in Scripture that restitution always goes above and beyond. Going above and beyond shows how repentant our hearts really are, that we care more about making things right than we do about whatever it costs us.

Zacchaeus showed his repentance was real by repaying fourfold all that he had taken.

Exodus 22:1 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. ... **4** If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.

Exodus 22 mentions paying four times and five times. The minimum is at least double, he losses an amount equal to what he had hoped to gain. This is God's justice.

Numbers 5:5 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **6** "Speak to the people of Israel, When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person realizes his guilt, **7** he shall confess his sin that he has committed. And **he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it** and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong.

In Ireland during the Belfast Revival of 1922-1923, the converted shipyard workers brought back so many stolen tools, they had to build new storage sheds just to hold them! The shipping companies finally had to make an announcement: "Please stop bringing back stolen goods; we have no more room for them!" Now that's a sign of true repentance!

Repentance and restitution are signs of heart religion, being a true doer of the Word.

Conclusion.

The point of all of this is to show that we are thieves by nature and the better we know ourselves and our souls the better we will pray and guard our hearts and flee from temptation.

Rather than deceive ourselves, we are honest and therefore more vigilant. We must always seek refuge for our souls in God.

We must plead with God to deliver us from the deceitfulness of riches and of our own hearts, and to set us free from the temptations that constantly surround us.