

## **“YOU SHALL WORK AND BE CONTENT”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 42**

**Scripture Texts: Exodus 20:15; Ephesians 4:28; I Peter 1:3-5**

### **Introduction.**

In the Ten Commandments God makes a series of claims in which show He has claim to all our lives. He is God, He is our maker and creator, our sustainer and provider. He loves us with a very great love. He has declared Himself to be our God and we His people. He has a claim on us.

He has a claim on our undivided loyalty and affections, He has a claim on our worship. He has a claim on our time. He has a claim on our common life in community, on our family life and our relationships with each other. He has a claim on our intimate lives, a claim on our bodies. He has a claim on our economic lives and even on our property and possessions, on how we acquire them, how we distribute them and how we use them.

God in Christ has a claim on us and all that we have. Jesus is King, He is Lord, He is ruler and president. He is in charge around here and what He says goes. Jesus has full and absolute authority to tell us what to do, when to do it, where to do it.

I said this claim on us extends to all of our stuff, all our property and possessions. God cares about physical things, after all He created all of them. He gives them to us as blessings. He cares enough about private property and personal possessions to make rules about them and set up guidelines and structures for their use and transfer.

God respects private property and personal possessions, and He commands us to respect private property. God values ownership and knows the benefits of it, so He set up careful laws for land and inheritance and protecting inheritances and families.

God created wealth and property. God means for us to acquire, possess, buy, sell and trade. God means for us to have diverse gifts, talents, abilities, and skills and to use them to acquire possessions.

Paul wrote a verse of Scripture that is a commentary on the Eighth Commandment, it helps us interpret and apply this commandment.

**Ephesians 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.

This text helps us understand the reasons not to steal and what we must do to avoid the temptation to steal. Starting with this text and then from two others, I want to give us four reasons not to steal. We are looking at the other side of this commandment, the positive side. This is what the commandment tells us to do rather than what we are not to do.

We have already considered the command not to steal. If that is all we do, we have not done enough, we have not shown ourselves obedient to this command. God raises the bar.

### ***Work, work hard.***

What is stealing? It's an attempt to get something for nothing, to get something without having to work for it or earn it or spend our own money for it. The opposite of stealing is to acquire by legitimate means. Like the old commercial, "We make money the old fashion way, we earn it."

God created us to work and to find value and worth in work. We are wired to work. God gave Adam and Eve work to do in the garden before the fall. Work was not a curse. After the fall work was cursed, but work itself wasn't the curse.

And there will be work in heaven, meaningful activity and service. It will not be burdensome, boring or stressful. It will be enjoyable and rewarding. He will tend God's universal garden for His glory.

Idleness is the devil's workshop. The idle person is the easily tempted person.

Work is what we are created to do and what we must do to avoid the temptations of the flesh.

But here is the radical nature of God's commands. If you work and earn your money and make a living and save, and that is all you do, then you still have not fulfilled the heart of this command.

If you just don't steal, you miss the mark, you must work.

If you just work, you miss the mark. There is something more.

### ***Share, be generous.***

The law of love transforms the law of do not steal. What is the law of love? Love God and your neighbor. What does that look like?

Most of us think this commandment is written for robbers, burglars, embezzlers, petty thieves, kids in the neighborhood who steal stuff, people who break and enter. We may even think of certain white collar crimes, business fraud, cheating, price gouging.

This commandment is not just for crooks and criminals and people who do unethical, illegal, immoral things.

There is another half to this commandment. The opposite of do not steal, is not to not steal, but to share with those in need. If we don't share we are actually breaking this commandment. In God's eyes the poor have a claim on what we have because God has blessed us to be a blessing to them, He has been generous with us so we can be generous with others who are in need.

Selfishness is a form of stealing. Selfishness steals what God means for me to share. The opposite of greed is generosity. The opposite of stealing is sharing.

As God cares for and provides for our well being and everything necessary for life, so we should care about and if able provide for and bless others with what they need. We are God's instrument in meeting the needs of those around us.

We don't own what we have as our own, it is from God and belongs to God. It is not ours to keep all to ourselves, it is given to be shared. We are only stewards with an obligation to use what He has entrusted us with for His glory and the good of others.

**Psalm 24:1** The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.

We resent the poor and their claim on us. Rich nations look down on and despise poor nations and we come up with all kinds of reasons why they are poor and deserve to be poor. They brought it on themselves.

Why is it that rich nations and rich people are always telling poor nations and poor people how many children they should have? The Bible never finds fault with having children and it never says how many is too many. But the Bible regularly finds fault with the rich who don't share, who put their trust their riches rather than God.

**Exodus 22:21-27** You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. **22** You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. **23** If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, ...

**26** If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, **27** for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

What this is saying is God lays on us a duty to the less fortunate and more vulnerable members of society. It is an offense to God if we mistreat, abuse or take advantage of the poor.

God shows the level of His concern and compassion by speaking even to very specific needs. If someone has to ask for a loan in order to live, you are to lend to them but not as a creditor to a debtor, but as a brother in need. So you don't profit off their poverty by taking interest, or by keeping their only coat as collateral overnight. Give it back at night and then take it back in the morning. Compassion trumps collateral.

Our God is a generous God. He has been generous to us, far more than we deserve.

He calls us to be like Him, to be generous.

I Timothy summarizes this point:

**I Timothy 6:17-19** As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. **18** They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, **19** thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

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.

We must beg and implore 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 to be selfish.

So working through this text, first don't steal, then work and work hard, then share and share generously. But there is one more step with regard to our relationship to earthly possessions and our acquisition of stuff.

***Be content.***

**Hebrews 13:5-6** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." **6** So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

A way both to avoid the temptation to steal and to kill even the desire to steal and be selfish is to be content with what we have. That is the definition of contentment: wanting what you have.

Contentment is believing your condition and situation is the best God has for you.

This commandment is a radical call to trust God for all our needs and to be content with what He provides. If He takes care of the birds and the lilies of the valley, He will take care of us.

What we have we will not have for very long anyway so if we have enough, it's sufficient. Contentment loosens our grasp on our stuff. It is from God and it is for God.

**Philippians 4:11-13** I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12** I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Cultivate contentment by being thankful for what you already have.

**I Thess. 5:18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

*Look forward to a far greater inheritance.*

Jesus wants to transform how we view and understand this commandment. He wants to change what we treasure. Private property is good but it's only good on earth and lasts for only as long as we do, which is a very short time. When we treasure earthly treasures we are tempted to covet and even steal. We are short-sighted.

Store up treasures in heaven where no thief can break in and steal. The only way to truly multiply our treasures is not to steal but to store them up in heaven.

True treasures can only be stored up in eternity. Jesus is the true treasure, the lasting inheritance, the pearl of great price and He Himself comes to earth to establish His kingdom with its kingdom riches that we might have a share in the inheritance.

**Matthew 6:19** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**I Peter 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

As Peter declares our eternal inheritance is far better because nothing can happen to it, nothing can touch it, not the government through taxes, not the economy through recession, not armies through war, not relatives through greed, not thieves through stealing. It is even beyond the grasp of Satan. It's imperishable, undefiled, unfading.

This inheritance comes to us with a down payment or a deposit, a first installment, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

This is not an IOU or a promissory note, this is actual cash, a first check.

This gift is the presence of Jesus Christ with us and in us. It isn't just stuff, it's Christ Himself, that we may be in Him and He in us. "You don't have to steal, you have something better, you have me."

Our inheritance is all the more secure because not only is He our inheritance, but we are His inheritance.

**John 10:27-29** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

We are His personal property, He has bought full rights of ownership to us.

What is the greatest gift ever given? Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! Eternal life in His Son Jesus Christ. What is the greatest right, the greatest privilege that could ever be given has been given to us?

**I John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Do not steal, but rather work and not just for yourself but so that you have give and give as you have generously received. Be content with what you have because in God's providence it is sufficient and furthermore, be content because your inheritance is secure in heaven, it is Jesus Himself and all that the Father has given to Him.

**Prayer:** Father, show us how to honor the one who gave up all His wealth for us. Give us freedom, so we can know the His joy in selfless generosity. Give us grace and love to so fulfill this commandment that our neighbors and our enemies will know that we are disciples of Jesus and not disciples of the devil and this world.