

The Eighth Commandment

by A.W. Pink

The eighth commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal,' requires us to preserve and further our own estate, provide for our families, and secure a competency through diligence and industry, while also being honest and upright in dealings with others.

Scripture: Exodus 20:15, Proverbs 30:8

Topics: "Stewardship", "Theft"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of the Eighth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal,' highlighting that theft originates from discontent and covetousness. He explains that this commandment governs not only our actions but also our hearts, urging us to respect both our own and our neighbor's property. Pink illustrates the various forms of theft, including dishonesty in business, idleness, and even spiritual theft against God. He encourages believers to engage in honest labor, promote the welfare of others, and cultivate contentment to avoid the pitfalls of theft. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of stewardship and the importance of restitution for wrongs committed.

Transcript

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

"Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15). The root from which theft proceeds is discontent with the portion God has allotted, and therefrom a coveting of what He has withheld from us and bestowed upon others. With his usual accuracy Calvin hit the nail on the head when he wrote, "This law is ordained for our hearts as much as for our hands, in order that men may study both to protect the property and to promote the interests of others." Like the preceding one, this precept also respects the government of our affections, by the setting of due bounds to our desires after worldly things, that they may not exceed what the good providence of God has appointed us.

Hence the suitability of that prayer, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8, 9). "Thou shalt not steal." The positive duty here enjoined us this: thou shalt by all proper means preserve and further both thine own and thy neighbor's estate. This commandment requires proper diligence and industry so as to secure a

competency for ourselves and families, that we may not through our own default expose ourselves and them to those straits which are the consequence of sloth and neglect.

Thus we are to "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17). But even more, this commandment is the law of love with respect to our neighbor's estate. It requires honesty and uprightness in our dealings one with another, being founded upon that first practical principle of all human conduct: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12). Thus this commandment places a sacred enclosure around property which none can lawfully enter without the proprietor's consent.

The solemn and striking fact deserves pointing out that the first sin committed by the human species entailed theft: Eve took of (stole) the forbidden fruit. So, too, the first recorded sin against Israel after they entered the land of Canaan was that of theft: Achan stole from among the spoils (Joshua 7:21). In like manner the first sin which defiled the primitive Christian church was theft: Ananias and Sapphira "kept back part of the price" (Acts 5:2) How often this is the first sin committed outwardly by children!

And therefore this Divine precept should be taught to them from earliest infancy. Years ago we visited a home, and our hostess related how she had that day secretly observed her daughter (about four years old) enter a room in which was a large bunch of grapes. The little tot eyed them longingly, went up to the table and then said, "Get thee hence, Satan. It is written, 'Thou shalt not steal,' " and rushed out of the room. "Thou shalt not steal." The highest form of this sin is where it is committed against God, which is sacrilege.

Of old He charged Israel with this crime: "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation" (Mal. 3:8,9). But there are other ways in which this wickedness may be committed besides that of refusing to financially support the maintenance of God's cause on earth. God is robbed when we withhold from Him the glory which is His due, and we are spiritual thieves when we arrogate to ourselves the honor and praise which belong to Him alone.

Arminians are great offenders here, by ascribing to free will what is produced by free grace. "Ye have not chosen Me," said Christ, "but I have chosen you (John 15:16). "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" (1 John 4:10). Another way in which we rob God is by an unfaithful discharge of our stewardship. That which God has entrusted to us may be just as really outraged by our mismanagement as if we interfered with another's trust or plundered our neighbor's goods.

This commandment then requires from us that we administer our worldly estate, be it large or small, with such industry as to provide for ourselves and those dependent upon us. Idleness is a species of theft. It is playing the part of the drone and compelling the rest of the hive to support us. So prodigality is also a form of theft, since extravagance and wastefulness are a spending of that substance which God has divided to us in riotous living." He who remains in secular employment that requires him to work on the Lord's Day is robbing God of the time which ought to be devoted to His worship.

Before passing on it should be pointed out that one who obtrudes himself into the Gospel ministry without being called of God in order to obtain an easy and comfortable living is "a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). God has ordained that men should earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and with that portion which we thus honestly obtain, we must be satisfied. But some are slothful and refuse to labor, while others are covetous and crave a larger portion. Hence many are led to resort to the use of force or fraud in order to

gain possession of that to which they have no right.

Theft, in general, is an unjust taking or keeping to ourselves what is lawfully another's. He is a thief who withholds what ought to be in his neighbor's possession just as much as one who takes his neighbor's property from him. Hence this commandment is grossly violated both by management and labor. If in the past the poor have been wronged by inadequate wages, the scales have now turned in the opposite direction, when employees often demand a wage that industry cannot afford to pay them.

If on the one hand it is right that a fair day's work should receive a fair day's pay, it holds equally true that a fair day's pay is entitled to a fair day's work. But where loafing obtains it does not receive it. "Thou shalt not steal." Lying advertisements are a breach of this commandment. Tradesmen are guilty when they adulterate or misrepresent their goods, and also when they deliberately give short weight or short change to their customers. Profiteering is another form of theft.

The Apostle Paul admonishes "that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter" (1 Thess. 4:6). The contracting of debts to support luxury and vanity is theft, as also is the failure to pay debts incurred in procuring necessities. A man is a thief in the sight of God who transfers property to his wife just before he becomes bankrupt, and so also is any bankrupt who later on prospers financially and then fails to pay his creditors to the full. That man or woman is a thief who borrows and returns not.

This commandment is broken by tenants who heedlessly damage the property and furniture of the owner. Evasion in paying taxes is another form of theft; Christ has set us a better example (Matthew 17:24). Gambling is still another form of theft, for by it men obtain money for which they have done no honest work. This old saying is true. "Whatever is gotten over the Devil's back goes under the Devil's belly." Certain it is that God sends a curse upon what is obtained by force or fraud: it is put into a bag with holes and under Providence soon wastes away.

God, by His righteous judgment, often makes one sin the punisher of another and what is gained by theft is lost by intemperance and a shortened life. Therefore it is written, "The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them" (Prov. 21:7); and again, "As the partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool" (Jer. 17:11). Many times God raises up those who deal with them as they have dealt with others.

The fearful increase of this crime in modern society is due to failure to impose adequate punishment. If the reader is conscious of having wronged others in the past, it is not sufficient to confess this sin to God. At least a twofold restitution must be made (Luke 19:8 and 2 Sam. 12:6) --if the owner is dead, then to his descendants; if he has none, then to some public charity. Here are a few suggested helps and aids to the avoidance of the sins prohibited and to the performance of those duties inculcated by this eighth commandment. (1) Engage in honest labor, or if a person of means, in some honorable calling, seeking to promote the public good.

It is idle people who are most tempted to mischief. (2) Strive against the spirit of selfishness by seeking the welfare of others. (3) Counter the lust of covetousness by giving liberally to those in need. (4) If your Savior was crucified between two thieves that the gift of salvation might be yours, bring no reproach upon His name by any act of dishonesty. (5) Cultivate the grace of contentment. In order thereto, consider frequently the vanity of all things temporal, practice submission to Divine providence, meditate much on the Divine promises (such as Heb. 13:5, 6), be temperate in all things, set your affections on things above, and remind yourself daily of the earthly lot of Christ.

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