

“The Eighth Commandment”

(Part 2)

Exodus 20:15

Sunday 17th February 2019 – Glenvista Baptist Church

32nd Message in The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:15 (ESV) “¹⁵ You shall not steal.”

Introduction.

- a) As we come today for the second time to the Eighth Commandment, I want to start by pointing out to you how closely for instance the 6th, 7th and 8th commandments are linked to each other. This ought to give us a bigger picture of the omniscience and omnipotence of our God. Only an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise Sovereign Creator could do it this way. Only our God could so lovingly steer His people with commandments in which the one is not only dependent on the other but in which the one complements the other as well. This ought to leave the student of the law to stand in awe of the greatness of God displayed in such lovingkindness and grace.
- b) **The Sixth Commandment prohibits murder. The Seventh Commandment prohibits adultery. The Eighth Commandment prohibits theft.** We’ve learnt that murder implies treating our neighbor in any ways that does not put our neighbor first. Any harm I deliberately cause my neighbor, any form of hatred I display towards him equals murder. Therefore, taking my neighbor’s wife is murder, because it harms him and many others. But not only is it murder, it clearly also is theft. So, one act, namely adultery, can be seen as the violation of commandments 6, 7, and 8. Because in the act of adultery, the offender is guilty both of murder and theft whilst adultery is playing itself off. Can you see how they are linked together? That’s why breaking the law in one aspect makes you guilty of breaking all of God’s law. And such guilt is punishable by death. I trust that highlights for you how serious each and every sin is in the sight of God.
- c) So, when it then comes specifically to the Eighth Commandment we need to recognize, in light of what we have already learnt last Lord’s Day that, this commandment is violated when someone takes advantage of his neighbor in any sort of way that violates his neighbor’s privacy and leads to any sort of loss for him. Martin Luther in his Large Catechism states that, “a person steals not only when he robs a man’s safe or his pocket, but also when he takes advantage of his neighbor at the market, in a grocery shop, butcher stall, wine-and-beer-cellar, work-shop, and in short, wherever business is transacted, and money is exchanged for goods or labor”. ¹
- d) In similar fashion the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes the evangelical interpretation of the Eighth Commandment: “God forbids not only those theft and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate, but He comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices

¹ Luther’s Larger Catechism

whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor; whether it be by force, or under the appearance of our right, as by unjust weights and measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all waste and abuse of His gifts.”²

- e) In our first exposition we considered the fact that the Eighth Commandment presupposes the right to private property. We also saw that the Eighth Commandment implies the principle of stewardship as a profound reminder that we own nothing, but that everything has been entrusted to us by God as a gracious gift of His love. And then we also saw that the Eighth Commandment explains very clearly why it is wrong to steal. I seek therefore to build upon that today by specifically considering the vast spectrum that is covered by the scope of this command, by asking in which ways it is possible for us to violate the prohibition contained in the Eighth Commandment.

Point 1 – “What kinds of Theft does the Eighth Commandment Prohibit?” (v15)

Exodus 20:15 (ESV) “¹⁵ You shall not steal.”

- a) The prohibition against theft goes deep and it goes wide. I want to consider with you just how very wide its scope is. There is such a thing as theft by direct stealing, or we could call it outright theft; then we need to consider theft by deceitful dealing; theft by means of delayed payment; theft by dishonest charging; theft by laziness and waste and even theft by means of the state. I want to consider each of these to some extent and then after that we need to consider what we ought to do to avoid the violation of the Eighth Commandment. Come with me as we consider each of these and seek to apply each of these to our own lives as well. And I think you will clearly see, as I warned last Lord’s Day that this sin is far more pervasive than we may currently believe.
- b) **Theft by direct stealing//outright theft:** Now this first item may sound like the most obvious, but don’t be fooled. For the great challenge is that human nature has the tremendous ability to condemn sin in others whilst we justify that very same sin in ourselves. Seeing the spec in our brother’s eye whilst ignoring the log in our own, right? (Matthew 7:3). In this context, we could list items like high-jacking, house burglary, bank robberies, stealing a hand bag from a trolley in the supermarket, child trafficking, shoplifting and so on. And I warned last week that the great temptation that exists is that we want to pat ourselves on the shoulder in recognition that at least we are not that bad. I assume no one in this sanctuary has robbed a bank, or stolen a car by force, or taken a handbag? Right?? But, if we stop there, the spirit of Pharisaism lurks at the door. ***Can I tell you though in which ways many of us are guilty of direct theft, but we are just not willing to admit to it? You see as Christians we are sometimes not far behind the world in the ways in which we steal, but our religiosity so blinds us that we sinfully justify the ends by its sinful means.***
- What about having software on your computer without a valid license from Microsoft? *Isn’t that nothing but theft as well?*
 - What about churches that sing songs without paying its yearly license fees to the appropriate authorities? *Isn’t that nothing but theft as well?*
 - What about the musician who plays his instrument from sheet music for which he has not paid the copyright? *Isn’t that nothing but theft as well?*

² Heidelberg Catechism

- What about all those CD's in your car that has been copied from the original a friend had loaned you? *Isn't that nothing but theft as well?*
- What about the three television sets in your home for which you are not paying your yearly license fee to the SABC? *Isn't that nothing but theft as well?*
- What about your attempt to not declare all your income to SARS on a yearly basis? Do you justify some of those other forms of income without declaration? *Isn't that nothing but theft as well?*
- What about the fact that you aren't even registered as a taxpayer? *Isn't that nothing but theft as well?*
- Here's a tough one; what about using e-tolls without a registered e-tag? *Isn't that nothing but theft as well?*
- What about the businessman who "over-promises" just to get the deal, and then once having obtained the deal, "under-provides"? *Isn't that nothing but theft as well?*

Shall I rather stop there?

c) **Theft by deceitful dealing:** God commands in **Romans 13:7** - **"⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."** Theft by deceitful dealing includes anything which involves some form of dishonesty or withholding of what is owed. This could refer to corporate dishonesty, false advertising, cooking the books, withholding valuable and truthful information, not being VAT registered if you own your own company, adjusting things just a wee bit or conveniently forgetting about something just to make things looks better or perhaps above board, and tax evasion, to but mention a few. Allow me to use an example perhaps a little closer to home. You are on vacation at the beach. The kids want ice cream. An ice cream costs R 4.50, and you ask for four cones. Total cost should be R 18.00. You pay with a R 20.00 note and as you walk out the shop you note that the lady behind the teller, instead of giving you R 2.00 change, issued you with R 3.00. You reason, R 1.00, what's the difference? Do you go back and return the R 1.00, or do you respond that it's just your lucky day? Your response to this matter tells us the condition of your heart. If you don't go back and return the R 1.00 you are thief, and if you cannot be trusted with R 1.00 you cannot be trusted with R 1 000 or even more. Or one more example: you buy two face cloths at your local shop, and when you get home, you see you were only charged for the one item. Do you reason that its just way too much trouble to go back for the one item, or are you above board and do you stay away from deceit and go back all the way to go pay for the one item you were not charged for? Here, I trust you can see both the way it happens at larger scale, and shall I say at more sophisticated scale in dishonest measures in our lives.

d) **Theft by means of delayed payment:** We are all used to contracts and payment agreements when purchasing certain items, like for instance a car and a house. Those contracts include what is called terms of payment. The bank lends you the money and you agree to the terms and the conditions of paying back the money within an agreed period of time. We have contracts in terms of our cell phone bills, our water and our lights, our children's school fees, our insurance policies and our health care. Now it's one thing if a family suddenly faces unemployment or retrenchment and can for that reason not pay their bills on times, but it's quite another when we deliberately withhold payment and pay our accounts late. Friends, this is construed as theft. Waiting until the institution has to send you a final reminder threatening legal action when you have the means to

pay is nothing but dishonest, scrupulous and sinful. You see for a believer the principle in light of neighborly love, always has to be: **PAY AS YOU WOULD BE PAID**. The apostle Paul writes in **Romans 13:8-9**, “⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The implications here are that paying our dues and paying them on time is our biblical responsibility towards fellow men. When we do not do so the principle of neighborly love is not high on our agenda. Nonpayment can so harm our neighbor that he may not be able to pay the dues of his own business and so land up in trouble or even face possible foreclosure. I trust you can see that such theft is most certainly not the way of love.

- e) **Theft by dishonest charging:** Here we are dealing with the issue of fair pricing, and it applies to all regardless of whether we are a consumer or a supplier. As Christians, especially when we are supplying something or selling something, we should most seriously consider the fact that an item is not necessarily always worth what the market is willing to pay. Just because everyone else is charging such exorbitant fees on almost everything does not necessarily give the Christian the right to follow suit. Christian integrity, fair balances, honest scales and fair rates is what is really at stake here. A Christian business man should therefore be able to lay his head to rest each night knowing he has dealt fairly with each customer, not having charged more than he should or could, earning an honest and fair living without crippling the one he is serving. In **Proverbs 16:11** we are told, “¹¹ Honest weights and scales are the Lord’s; All the weights in the bag are His work.” In other words, our God is pleased with just measurement, fair pricing, honest deliberations, fair rates, scales that balance; for such indeed bring Him glory. So, friends a believer may never sell something on a social platform like OLX or Gumtree for example, and quickly paint over all the rust just before you sell it; or promote the item as something fantastic when it's actually a piece of junk that is falling apart; or promoting it as being in perfect working condition, when in actual fact the product does not even start up. We must be different from the world in this regard and we must be honest and above board in each of our dealings.
- f) **Theft by laziness and waste:** The moment we view work as a necessary evil, we miss the fact that work has a creation mandate as given by God at creation. Fair enough, the fall of man in **Genesis 3** has indeed made work cumbersome and often complicated with many burdens, but work is never a necessary evil. God's calling that He gave Adam pertaining a work ethic comes before the Fall as we saw last week as in **Genesis 2:15-17**. The fall only comes after this creation mandate. That means man must find pleasure in his work. Every occupation ought to be seen as a calling. To differentiate between “Christian work” and “secular work” is to totally miss the point. A Christian must work as a Christian regardless of his work. A Christian must work as a Christian, regardless of whether he or she is a mechanic, or an accountant, or a nurse, or a teacher or a preacher of the Gospel or a full time missionary. Every occupation must be for the believer the continuous opportunity to live our lives in a way that would please our Sovereign King and Lord. Our desire ought always to be to live in accordance with the truth in **1 Corinthians 10:31** - “³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” That means coming late for work regularly is stealing from your employer. Lying about not being at work, is stealing from the one who pays our salary. Doing only the bare minimum just to get by, is not the way a Christian employee serves Christ. Going the extra way by ensuring our attitude is always godly and positive, making sure we put

in the hours we are paid for, doing everything we possibly can to make sure we live up to the contract we have signed; these are the things that need to mark a true believer in the workplace. For the believer there ought never to be room for laziness and waste. We are therefore to work sparingly within reason with that which is entrusted to us. We need to be good stewards so that our example may stand out above the example of the average employee. Therefore, taking longer lunch breaks than we are allowed is nothing but theft. Using office equipment without permission, such as the office phone, or paper or ink or whatever is prohibited is theft; it speaks of a heart that is not in tune with God's grace, and calls for repentance.

- g) **Theft by means of the state:** This perhaps is the one that will anger us all most. When hard working honest citizens honor the Lord as per the instructions in **Romans 13**, by paying our taxes in full, being good and honest state citizens, and the state wastes and squanders and steals and under-delivers, then all, good, honest, God-honoring, tax paying citizens have the right to feel a sense of dissatisfaction, injustice and anger. The burden placed on tax payers in most parts of the world has become so burdensome that it drives the average household into poverty. The state is instituted by God to preserve order, to maintain public services and defense, and to direct justice. Although the state is authorized to exact taxes, it has no right to steal from taxpayers and abuse monies being paid. Sadly, however, in our own country and in many others, the major beneficiaries, instead are the employees of the government itself. Tax payer's money is therefore used for selfish gain. Those who are given the responsibility to manage the affairs of the state for the benefit of the underprivileged, are sinfully themselves becoming the overprivileged. In other words, we can conclude by saying that taxes collected for one purpose (*the alleviation of poverty and suffering*) are actually used for another (*the self-perpetuation of a well-paid bureaucracy*). This, we can call theft on a national scale.
- h) And these, dear friends, are but some of the types of theft that can be pointed out. Through this we see the Scriptures are very clear on both the right to private property as well as the duty of stewardship.

Point 2 – “What to do to Avoid Violation of the Eighth Commandment?” (v15)

Exodus 20:15 (ESV) “¹⁵ You shall not steal.”

- a) Now, secondly, I want to complement all that we have seen thus far, by asking what we ought to do to avoid the violation of the Eighth Commandment. What must we do to avoid stealing? I seek to show you that the Scriptures give us three clear and practical answers to this issue.
- b) **Live within a calling.** We have seen very clearly in this exposition that a Christian ought always to view his occupation as a calling. Regardless of the occupation God has put us in, Christ ought to be served fervently in industry, in the home, the school and in the church. Wherever we are, our light should shine in such a way that the glory of God can be seen in and through us. When we are rejoicing in our calling and working for a livable income, there ought to be no temptation to theft. In **Ephesians 4:28** we see the apostle Paul presenting the remedy to this problem of theft. **Ephesians 4:28** - “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.” But now, someone may ask, what about the man that does not work? To this the Word of God again speaks clearly. There are two categories we need to distinguish between here. Firstly, to the man that does not want to work, to him the

Scriptures say, **“¹⁰ If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”** (2 Thessalonians 3:10). To the man however that desperately wants to work but cannot find employment, something so very prevalent in our own country at present, to this scenario the Scriptures speak of the early church in the book of Acts for example - **Acts 2:44-45 – “⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”** We learn from this first church in Jerusalem that the believers had such great love and concern for another that they went the extra mile to ensure that all had what they needed, even it meant some needed to sell of the abundance they already had. Secondly the Old Testament also speaks to the issue of the brother who cannot find employment. A mechanism designed of God to provide for the needs of the poor was built into the Mosaic Law in the form of regulations governing the reaping and the gleaning of fields: **Leviticus 19:9-10 – “⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.”** From both these principles in the Old Testament and the New Testament we learn valuable principles as to the concern we ought to have for the needy in our midst. So then, as we live and rejoice within our calling, God has so determined that such a calling also provides for our needs and in turn guards us against any form of theft.

- c) **Be content with what you have.** The apostle Paul teaches that godliness with contentment is great gain **(1 Tim 6:6)**. Being content with what you have means you are resting in the sovereign providence of a God who is called Jehovah Jireh – the God who provides. And because He is sovereign, He also determines how much He allots unto each man. Therefore, some have plenty and others have less. The key is what you do with that. For some their discontent is so great that it will lead to coveting and stealing. Others rest in the joy of knowing that a faithful God will meet the needs of His people and will never leave them nor forsake them. In **Hebrews 13:5** we have this warning, **“⁵ 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.”** This verse has a warning that teaches the danger of loving money, it has an admonition to be content with what we have, and it has a comforting reminder that God promises to never leave nor forsake us. A spirit of Christian contentment is a trusted safeguard against violation of the Eighth Commandment.
- d) **Love the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart.** The summary of the law points us to the fulfillment of the law. Jesus fulfilled the law, but Jesus is also the summary of the law. When Jesus summarized the law, He presented it in two complimentary parts. **Mark 12:30-31 – “³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”** Now if this is the summary of the law, then it means that each part to this summary applies to all of the remaining commandments. And the way it applies the Eighth Commandment is like this: if you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, you will see you no need for harming your neighbor by stealing from him, as loving your neighbor is a direct expression of your love for God. That’s how these two go together and that is how us loving God safeguards us from harming our neighbor.
- e) So, in summary, three protective measures and blessings God has provided for us in and through His Word as means by which we can ensure that we remain free from violating the Eighth Commandment- rejoice within your calling, be content with what you have, and love the Lord with every fiber of your heart, mind, soul and strength.

Conclusion:

- a) So, friends, Lord willing next Lord's Day I want to consider one other area of stealing namely, stealing from the Lord. May God prepare our hearts in anticipation once again of hearing from Him.
- b) In conclusion then this morning dear friends, this study may have to a large extent exposed us this morning to an aspect of the Eighth Commandment we may never have known of before. That may be very painful as God has perhaps done some deep invasive heart surgery this morning. It makes us realize how very sinful we are, does it not? It makes us realize that our hearts are desperately tainted by remaining sin, even as believers. And yet again we are also reminded that the blood of the Lamb can cleanse even the vilest of hearts. The heart most stained by sin, can be washed clean and spotless all on account of the righteous sacrifice of Christ our King. Isaiah the prophet so wonderfully reminds of the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb - **Isaiah 1:18 - "18 Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."**
- c) May God make us a people that rest in the bounty of His provision. May He make us a people that trust His sovereign providences and the dispensing thereof. May we rejoice in what He does and how he chooses to do so. May He make us content, may He direct our hearts to our worship of Him. May He guard us against all manner of vice. May He protect us from the devil's snare.
- d) And may we know that in the Gospel through Christ there is forgiveness for the thief that pleads for mercy.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria (For God's Glory Alone)

Glenvista Baptist Church – 17 February 2019