

“The Eighth Commandment”

(Part 3)

Exodus 20:15

Sunday 24th February 2019 – Glenvista Baptist Church

33rd Message in The Ten Commandments

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

Introduction.

- a) As we come today for the third time to the Eighth Commandment, there remains one important subject we have not yet touched that requires our fullest attention. One element that cannot be left untouched. One element that is significantly important to incorporate in our understanding pertaining the prohibition of the Eighth Commandment.
- b) And it is an aspect to which the Scriptures speak clearly in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is an aspect I mentioned in conclusion last Lord's Day and one that needs to be taught on today in this exposition. It is the matter of **Stealing from God**, a matter on which the Word of God speaks forthrightly and clear. My task therefore is to define what stealing from God is and in which ways it would be possible for God's people to steal from Him. What constitutes stealing from God? What does it look like? And what measures has God put in place to safeguard us from violating the Eighth Commandment by means of robbing Him? These are some of the questions we would need to answer in the two remaining expositions pertaining the Eighth Commandment.
- c) Now we've looked at various aspects and ways in which the Eighth Commandment can be violated. A man may not perhaps be guilty of violating the Eighth Commandment in terms of its presupposition regarding private property; a man may truly honor God in terms of the principle of stewardship as implied in the Eighth Commandment; a man may know very well in his heart why it is wrong to steal; a man may in every possible way guard against covetousness and violence; a man may even uphold the principle of brotherly love as much as he possibly can; a man may never have been guilty of outright theft; he may perhaps not have wronged a brother by means of deliberate delayed payment; he may not be guilty of theft by deceitful dealing; perhaps he has never been guilty of dishonest charging; and perhaps it may even be true that a man has not violated the Eighth Commandment in any obvious manner; **yet such a man may be guilty of robbing God and in so doing of violation of the Eighth Commandment.**
- d) That's a frightful reality dear friends. That I can largely be innocent of most aspects of the violation of the Eighth Commandment, yet be guilty of stealing from God, and outside of Christ that is enough reason for Christ to punish me forever in hell for this sin. If that be the case, then stealing from God cannot be considered lightly. May God therefore grant us much grace in these two expositions to have our hearts searched by

Him in light of His holiness and may we in all things know, that the truth, when biblically appropriated by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, always sets us free. May we therefore find freedom this morning in the law of our God. May our hearts be directed towards love for the Lord and may our hearts be guarded against even the remotest possibility of robbing God.

Point 1 – “The Old Testament Perspective” (v15)

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

- a) I want to focus exclusively this morning on what the Old Testament teaches pertaining this important subject and then balance that Lord willing next Lord's Day with what the New Testament speaks to this topic. Throughout Scripture it is evidently clear that God has in His sovereign wisdom so determined that the propagation of the Gospel, whether it be through means of the Old Testament Temple or through the New Testament Church, is to be funded through God's people's generous giving unto God. For this God has given clear guidelines, stipulations and decrees to guide such a process of giving.
- b) Giving is a matter of the heart, and if this principle is approached as per an external code, then we miss everything about the internal intent that shines spotlights on the hearts of the Lord's people. If we approach this subject merely as a duty it will be reflected in the way we give, but if we approach this subject as a joyous part of worship then the Lord will be pleased as **“God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7)**. And we will see particularly when we come to the New testament on this matter, that when we give begrudgingly unto the Lord, we are not pleasing Him, and we are robbing God of that which He has commanded that we give.
- c) Any study in the Old Testament on giving unto God, has to begin with a passage in Malachi that is of great significance today. The wider context of this passage in Malachi is found in the books of Haggai and Nehemiah and I will refer to those passages as well, so as to get a proper understanding of the context of this exhortation. For now, hear what the Word of the Lord teaches in Malachi: **“⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ ⁸ 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.” (Malachi 3:7-10)**
- d) The historical context of what is unfolding in Malachi is that approximately five hundred years before Christ, through the decree of Cyrus, king of the Medio-Persian Empire, the Jews had returned from exile and had commenced rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem. But it was not long however before the work came to a halt and there were two reasons for that: firstly, because the people feared for their lives as a result of the threat of their enemies, and secondly because of their own selfishness, for they found it safer and more comfortable to get on with the extensions and alterations at their own homes than bother with the work of God. Nehemiah captures the history of this event: **“⁸ And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. ⁹ Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. ¹⁰ I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. ¹¹**

So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations." (Nehemiah 13:8-11) Nehemiah in other words speaks to the abuse of the house of God, as it was being used for selfish gain and not for God's glory; each man focusing on his own needs and not on what God had stipulated. They had so focused on their own needs that the house of God was being forsaken.

- e) The prophet Haggai enters the scene and whips the people back to work by his uncompromising preaching of the Word of God. When the first wave of Jewish exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem in 538 b.c., they began to rebuild the temple but soon gave up. Inspired by the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, they finally completed the task in 516. Haggai rebuked the people for living in *"paneled houses"* while the house of God remained in ruins (1:4). He warned that, despite their best efforts, their wealth would never suffice, because the Lord was not pleased with their neglect of his temple (see Lev. 26:2-20). He called them to repent and renew their covenant with the God of their fathers. He assured them that God would achieve His purposes for His people and for all other nations. The rebuilding of the temple symbolized God's restored presence among His people. We read in Haggai 1 –*"¹ In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ² "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." ³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. ⁷ "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁸ Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. ⁹ You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."* (Haggai 1:1-11)
- f) Even though Haggai in uncompromised fashion called God's people back to the rebuilding of the temple it was not long afterwards, even though they now had a brand-new temple, that their spiritual activity became slothful and careless. It was then after this that the Lord calls the prophet Malachi to this state of affairs to address His people once again. And in the passage in **Malachi 3** we see that he focuses on four things primarily. Firstly, he points out their ***inferior sacrifices***; they chose the worst possible animals amongst the flock and used those as sacrifices unto the Lord. Secondly, we see him addressing their ***inferior lives***; they were quite frankly just not living like the people of God. Thirdly, he drew attention to their ***inferior leaders***; they were simply not setting the right example to the people and they were willing to say whatever the people wanted to hear. But fourthly, then, we need to see, that Malachi complained of their ***inferior giving***; for they were holding back the tithes.
- g) And so, in his discourse Malachi highlights pertinently in **verse 8** that it was in their tithes that God's people were robbing God. *"⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions."* (Mal 3:8). **From this text therefore, we learn clearly that to fail to give God what He expects us to give is to "rob God", and that no doubt is a direct violation of the Eighth Commandment.**

- h) **Tithes in the Old Testament:** So then with that as a means of laying a foundation let us now consider the important aspect of tithes as described in the Old Testament. The word tithe obviously has a connotation of a tenth or a 10% figure. But that's not always helpful when we consider the Old Testament tithe. The Old Testament pattern for giving was not quite as straightforward as that.
- i) The first reference of a tithe is with reference to Abraham and Melchizedek as found in **Genesis 14:18-20** – “¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything...” Abraham brings a tithe to Melchizedek, who was a true priest of the Most High God. Abraham is quite simply fulfilling a command God gave pertaining the support of the Levite priests even though this command was only given to the Israelites 400 years after Abraham. We read in **Numbers 18:21**, “²¹ To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting...” In **Leviticus 27:30-32** Israel was reminded that, “³⁰ Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. ³¹ If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. ³² And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the Lord.” In other words, we learn clearly from this that a tithe of everything belonged to the Lord, and to no one else.
- j) But friends this was not the sum total of the tithe, for you see, Old Testament laws pertaining giving did not end there. God's people were required, for instance to pay a poll-tax yearly at the time of the national census (**Ex 30:11-16**) and in **Deuteronomy 12:6** and **Exodus 23:19** we learn that sacrifices, special gifts, vows, first fruits, redemption of the first-born, and many sorts of free-will offerings were all in addition to the tithe. We see though for example in the New Testament that the Pharisees used this instruction for yet another opportunity to be legalistic in their approach to these matters. They became so legalistic in their approach that they literally would count every small seed, ensuring that they gave God their tenth – and not more – and in **Matthew 23:23** we read that Christ did not condemn them for their care of the tithe – but for being so fastidious about it that they in the process neglected the weightier matters of the law.
- k) The New Testament of course interprets the law for us, and though I intend focusing largely on the New Testament next Lord's Day, let me though just highlight a few important truths this morning. If one reads passages in the New Testament that speak to giving, one gets a wonderful sense of what the Lord intends for His people to do. Passages like **2 Corinthians 8**, **2 Corinthians 9**, **1 Corinthians 16**, and **Mark 6**, presents a list of magnificent words that describe Christian giving, words such as: *sacrificially, joyfully, willingly, spontaneously, proportionately, abundantly, secretly, humbly, regularly, trustfully* and all of these words with the emphasis that none of these can be exercised if not bathed in **grace**. Now friends here is what I need you to see this morning. If someone were to ask that one presents a measure whereby our giving ought to be assessed, then we can say, taking both the Old Testament and the New Testament into account, that the Old Testament tithe gives us our **pattern**, but to insist upon an exact percentage would be wrong and would be a legalistic approach. Rather it ought to be balanced with the New Testament perspective that encourages generosity and freewill offerings that honor the Lord due to the motive of the heart from which such giving takes place.

- l) Now, I want to point your attention to a very positive approach of one of the most significant Old Testament revivals recorded in **2 Chronicles 31**. It is during the reign of King Hezekiah about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. A spiritual revival was brought about by God **that affected the worship of the nation** and **its evangelistic fervor**. God's people were concerned about holiness and pleasing God. **But it is interesting that whenever a revival takes place, and God's people long with all their hearts, souls and minds to worship their God, that this in turn always has another significant effect on their lives.** We read, that "the people of Israel returned to their cities, every man to his possession" (2 Chron 31:1). Then we see in verse 4 that King Hezekiah "commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the Law of the Lord." And it then follows in verse 5-12 - **"As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything."** And the people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been dedicated to the Lord their God, and laid them in heaps. ⁷ In the third month they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. ⁸ When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and his people Israel. ⁹ And Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps. ¹⁰ Azariah the chief priest, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, "Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the Lord, we have eaten and had enough and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed his people, so that we have this large amount left. ¹¹ **Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare chambers in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them.** ¹² **And they faithfully brought in the contributions, the tithes, and the dedicated things."** Can you see what happened as God's people truly sought to honor God? They gave and they gave, and they brought, and they brought, so much so, that there was so much that they had no place to keep it anymore and they needed to build storehouses for all the abundance that was joyfully, sacrificially, abundantly, proportionately, passionately, lovingly, obediently, humbly and regularly brought in as their service of the Lord. **And the people knew that they were not giving to a temple or to the priests but that they were giving unto God in obedience to His commands.** And I think the most significant principle we learn here is that even though the law called for a tithe, it was grace that drove God's people to give more and more and more.
- m) Therefore, it is true to say that when a man is converted God not only saves him, but God also converts his approach to giving. Because, you see, the true believer knows that everything He has is a gift of God. He knows that he owns nothing, but that God has merely made him a steward of all that has been entrusted unto Him, and that His giving to God is part of his responsibility in biblical stewardship.
- n) And you see, dear friends the big issue in the time of Haggai was that the people had the wrong attitude towards their own property, *precisely because they considered it to be their own*. They had money, yet precisely because they spent it all on themselves it was like putting it in **"a purse with holes in it"** (Haggai 1:6). Therefore, Haggai cautions, **"You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes."** So, it is because their first concern was always for self, and not for God and His kingdom, that Haggai states they never have enough for themselves.
- o) One of the saddest accounts pertaining giving to God in the New Testament is found in **Acts 5**, where Ananias and Sapphira, a husband and a wife, lied to the Holy Spirit about their giving to God. Their biggest problem is that they wanted to serve God and money at the same time, and this we know cannot happen. That is why Jesus warns in **Matthew**

6:24, ^{“24} No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a sufficient illustration that a strong grip on serving God **and** loving money is not possible. It's always one or the other. And friends, in light of the Eighth Commandment we learn, that when we have a strong love for money, it will reflect itself in that our love for God will grow cold and we will not give to God as He requires. And such an attitude is a direct violation of the Eighth Commandment. You see, when the Holy Spirit fills a man at conversion, he also touches that man's pocket. And when our pockets are not in line with the revealed will of God, then we are guilty of stealing and that of course violates God's express intention in the Eighth Commandment.

- p) You see friends, the way you and I give tells us whether our hearts are consumed with the here and the now or whether we are concentrating on eternity. Thus far in our expositions of the Ten Commandments we have seen clearly for instance that one of the barometers of the spiritual health of God's people always was how they kept the Sabbath. Today God's Word is highlighting for us another barometer to measure our spiritual health. **Whether we give to God what belongs to Him is always the second way in which we can measure to what extent we are faithfully walking with God.**
- a) Friend what does your giving say of the condition of your heart?

Conclusion:

- a) In conclusion then this morning dear friends, next Lord's Day Lord willing we will consider some key principles about giving as stipulated in the New Testament and so then conclude our study of the Eighth Commandment.
- b) **Allow me to conclude this morning this message with a word of thanks.** This congregation has for many years had very lean years financially. Things have been very tough; there just wasn't money for anything for a long time. As a result of that our building needs attention and so does our property. Certain things simply could not happen, because we just haven't had the means. But what a blessing to be able to stand here today and thank this congregation for its faithful giving. To be able to give glory to God that He has so worked in the hearts of the saints, that a consistent and faithful pattern of giving can be traced for at least the last two years is just so encouraging. God's people at Glenvista Baptist Church no doubt are giving *sacrificially, joyfully, willingly, spontaneously, proportionately, abundantly, secretly, humbly, regularly, trustfully*. And as a result of it by God's grace we have been able to do much together for His glory. Thank you loved ones. May I this morning as your pastor express to you my heartfelt thanks for giving to God what is His due.
- c) **And may I in the same breath encourage us all to continue excel at the grace of giving sacrificially and abundantly unto the Lord.** May there be such an abundance in the storehouses of our God that this congregation can be used for the spread of God's Word wherever God leads us. May many come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the ministry of this congregation. May the faithful giving of God's people at Glenvista Baptist Church be to the glory of God's Name. May our God be praised, and may we more and more align our giving in line with God's clear, specific, revealed will.
- d) **May our attitude in giving be the very attitude of our Savior when He gave Himself sacrificially for us.** *Philippians 2:5-11 - ^{“5} Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being*

found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- e) And may it never be true of us, that it could be said – *but they robbed of God*. Rather may there be an abundance as we faithfully continue submitting ourselves to God in the area of giving, as an expression of our love, worship and adoration of our God.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria (For God's Glory Alone)

Glenvista Baptist Church – 24 February 2019