

TEN: Free to Obey

A Christian Looks at the Ten Commandments

ROLL UP THE BARBED WIRE

Exodus 20:15

INTRODUCTION: For those of you who are new with us today, let me explain that I have been preaching on the Ten Commandments from the perspective of the New Testament. Today we are on number eight. **Exodus 20:15 NKJV** “You shall not steal.”

Here is a commandment with which most people agree. Nobody likes having things stolen from them, even if the theft is small. Years ago, we lived in a house that backed on an isolated dirt road. We didn't have a fence, but we did have a thick patch of bamboo behind our house, many of the plants towering 30 feet in the air and in places so thick that you could not walk a straight line, you had to go around. We had a small storage area built into a carport.

One morning I went out to get in my car only to discover the lock had been destroyed on the storage area and someone had strewn things about in an obvious robbery. Actually, I think the thieves left with tremendous disappointment. I could not determine that a single thing had been stolen. I guess they decided that I did not have anything worth stealing!

Nevertheless, I was incensed! I was so angry that someone would dare come open up my little storage shed and feel free to take what they wanted, even if they couldn't find anything they wanted. I was still angry, far, far more angry than I should have been.

But I'm just being honest. I went to work, to my church, where I went about my godly business of being a pastor. And after work I went to the Home Depot. I bought a new lock and a roll of barbed wire. And I went back home, installed the new lock to protect the stuff nobody wanted, and proceeded to uncoil the barbed wire amongst all the bamboo stalks, sticking and cutting my hands in spite of the gloves I was wearing, so that I could keep anybody from just walking in from that back road onto my property and to my shed full of worthless treasures.

I hope I have grown in the Lord since then, and I believe I have gained a more biblical perspective. That does not mean I would not still be unhappy about being robbed, but I hope I would not feel such a level of rage. I hope this because the New Testament, and specifically the Lord Jesus, while affirming the commandment itself that we should not steal, also tells us not to be so protective of our personal property.

In fact, Jesus specifically said,

Luke 6:29 NKJV ...from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.

There is something going on here in the mind of our Lord that is very different than just the protection of personal property rights. That's what I want us to get at this morning. I want us to come away with a truly Christ-like perspective of the eighth commandment, not just in our minds, but in our hearts!

So let's begin with the first of the three questions we have been asking about each of the Ten Commandments.

1) What does the eighth commandment reveal about God?

The foundation for the eighth commandment is the truth ...

- **As the Creator, God owns everything in the universe.**

Genesis 1:1 NKJV In the beginning **God created** the heavens and the earth.

Psalms 24:1 NKJV **The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness**, The world and those who dwell therein.

Haggai 2:8 NKJV 'The **silver is Mine**, and the **gold is Mine**,' says the LORD of hosts.

Psalms 50:10 NKJV For **every beast of the forest is Mine**, And the cattle on a thousand hills.

- **God has given the human race the role of stewards or caretakers of His property.**

This has been true since the first day man existed.

Genesis 2:15 NKJV Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **tend** and **keep** it.

- To tend and keep means to put it in order and watch over it.

Genesis 1:28 NKJV Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; **fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

- God told man that God wanted people to fill the earth and rule over it. Both subdue and dominion are words with military applications.

- **When God apportions property, He allots it to a person as a steward of that property, never as the ultimate owner.**

- God never abdicates the throne!
- As Job testified, “The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”
- **We are stewards (managers) of property, real and personal. God is the owner.**

And this is true for every person on the face of the earth.

- Everyone is not saved. Only those who trust in Christ.
- Everyone is not a child of God. Only those who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- But everyone is a steward of the Creator of the Universe.
- By virtue of being human, each of us are the managers of God’s creation.
- God said to His people,

Deuteronomy 8:11–18 NKJV “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God ...

17 ... you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ 18 “And you shall remember the LORD your God, for **it is He who gives you power to get wealth, ...**

- **It is God who gives us the strength, health, ability, talent, skill, and intellect with which we may become financially blessed and prosperous.**
- To say that what we possess, we do so as stewards, does not negate that we had a hand in the earning of it.
- But it is to say that it was not our hand alone that produced the blessings, but first and the most, the hand of Almighty God.

Out of these foundational truths, God says, “You shall not steal.”

- **Stealing is taking for oneself that which God has given to another.**
 - It is saying to the Almighty, “You made a mistake.”
 - It is saying, “That should be mine, but God You erroneously gave it to him.”
 - It is a grand expression of discontent. “God, You did not entrust enough to my care, so I must take for myself what You entrusted to someone else.”

- **On the one hand, understanding that God owns everything, makes stealing all the more serious.**

I have told this story before, but it is so much to this point that I cannot help repeating it. Most of you won't remember anyway. I was unexpectedly invited by the Ghana Baptist Convention to present an Acts 1:8 Conference during their annual meeting a few years ago. I was thrilled with the opportunity, but I already had a mission trip planned in Brazil just before the convention, and it was much too late to cancel or postpone the work we were doing there with our partners.

But I looked and found an African airline that I could fly from São Paulo to Benin, Togo and then take a small commuter plane from Benin to Accra, where the convention would meet. So I did this, my first trip to Benin.

Normally, when you fly internationally, if you are only catching a connection in a country's airport, you do not have to go through immigration or customs. But in the Benin airport, three customs officials had set up a table just between security and the only gate at the airport, two men and a woman, all in uniform.

One of the men made me put the money I had in my pockets on their table. Most of it was Brazilian money, and it looked like a lot because the exchange rate at that time was about 3 to 1. They looked at all those Brazilian reais and the man said, give me something. He was demanding a bribe to let me through customs! I picked up a R\$ 20 bill (worth about \$7.00) and gave it to him. He said, "Now something for each of them," nodding at the other two custom officials. So I gave each of them R\$ 20.

As I was walking through their exit gate, the female custom officer asked, "What do you do?" thinking I was probably a rich American in the oil business. I said, "I am a pastor doing mission work in Africa, and you just stole money from God."

She said, "You should have told us you were a pastor. We don't take money from pastors." I said, "Then give it back." She did. And then she went to the other two men and took their R\$ 20 bills and brought them back to me.

For most people, it is one thing to steal from another person. It is something else to steal from God. The fact of the matter is, if we steal anything from anyone, we have stolen from God. Because God owns it all. And anything that another person has, he or she has only as a steward. God remains the owner! And because God is the owner, stealing is a more serious offence.

- **On the other hand, understanding that what we have, we possess only as stewards, makes the personal offence against us much smaller.**

Did it bother me that the customs officials were stealing money from me? Sure it did, but I felt nowhere near the anger at them as I did the thieves so many years before. I knew they were taking God's money, and I was confident that He could handle the situation if He wanted to. And indeed He did! Far faster than I expected!

2) How does God want this portion of His character to show in our lives?

- **God wants us to live knowing and believing that everything belongs to Him.**
 - Certainly, knowing and believing this truth will keep us from stealing!
 - Knowing that even those things we have gained by the sweat of our brow or the labor of our minds, ultimately He owns it all because it is by His goodness to enable us to work that we earn anything.
 - Recognizing this produces gratitude in us.
 - It also encourages faith and reminds us to call upon the Lord in prayer.
- **Knowing that what we possess, we have as stewards of God, also helps us use what God has entrusted to us more wisely and in accord with His desires.**
- Quite honestly, it makes it easier to give back to the Lord, because we know it's His anyway, we're just giving God back some of His own money, and He is letting us continue to use the rest for the things we need.

3) What does the New Testament say that helps us understand this commandment better or how to live it out day to day?

- **The New Testament tells us to hold our possessions loosely, with open hands, believing God will entrust to us what we need.**

Matthew 6:25–33 NKJV 25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

28 “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

- **Jesus said not to store up treasures on earth but in heaven so that the things of God would be more precious to us than worldly things.**

Matthew 6:19–21 NKJV 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.

- **The New Testament says that we are to consider ourselves stewards of all God has entrusted to us.** Not just money, but our talents, our giftedness, our time, our energy, everything we have.

1 Corinthians 4:1–2 NKJV 1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

Conclusion: Folks, if we really begin to live out the principles that everything belongs to God and we are simply stewards of what He entrusts to us, we will obey the eighth commandment and we won't cut ourselves rolling out the barbed wire to be sure everybody else obeys it also.