

The Gift of Treasures

Մեզի Շնորհուած Գանձերը

Exodus 20: 15

Malachiah 3:8-10

Welcome back to the Ten Commandments or the Ten Words.

We arrived to the eighth one:

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

Like murder, this commandment is universally accepted by all cultures and nations that stealing is bad and has consequences.

The way Jesus summarized the Ten Words is: Love God and love your neighbor.

Loving our neighbor requires holding sacred not only his **life** (6th Word) and his **marriage** (7th Word), but also his **properties** (8th Word)¹

The simple definition of the word **steal** is: “To take (another person's property) without permission or legal right and without intending to return it.”²

The Hebrew word for stealing (*ganaf*) literally means to carry something away as if by stealth. To give a more technical definition, to steal is to appropriate someone else’s property unlawfully.³

Badveli, this commandment is for the robbers and thieves. Why are we studying it this morning?

“In a survey taken by Barna Group seven years ago, 86 percent of adults claimed that they completely satisfied God’s requirement of abstinence from stealing.”⁴

Illustration: Have you seen the painting by Norman Rockwell where the butcher and young lady in the shop facing a scale? Two of them are facing each other and their faces looking up to the scale. If you look carefully, the lady who is buying the turkey is pushing the scale up with her forefinger to make the measurement lighter, and butcher on the other hand is pressing the scale down with his forefinger to make the measurement heavier. **Who is robbing who?** Both seem happy not knowing they are robbed. I don’t think either one likes to be called a robber, or a thief. If someone gave the butcher a bad check, he would call the authorities. let the bank know. If the woman was cheated by buying expired

meat, she would report the authorities. How strange, neither saw that their small deception was and act of stealing.

What are we talking about?

Do we break the eighth commandment? Let me give you examples:

-People steal from churches, e.g. pencils, masks, Bibles, hymnals, books...

-People steal from hotels, bath robes, towels, Bibles, kitchen stuff...

-People steal from the government, cheating on income taxes, making false claims from Social Security, pretending you don't have an income yet you have a bank account in someone else's name.

-People steal at the workplace; employees fill false timesheets; during work they misuse the time by doing other things unrelated to work...

On the other hand, **employers** steal by not paying fair wages, demanding more hours of work without overtime payments, misusing people who so not have proper documentation to work...

-Corporations, factories can steal by using **false advertisements**, convincing people to buy their product with false claims.

-People steal by **misusing the credit cards**, and do not pay them.

-People steal by **charging extremely high interests** for the money that has been borrowed.

-Opportunists steal during crises, during war, or during natural crises, people steal by **raising prices of the goods** when there is shortage.

-People steal by plagiarism, by using the intellectual property without permission, or claiming it is theirs.

-People steal when they rob God, which means when they don't give their best to God. The leftover is not giving...it is stealing. We will discuss later.

And many more...

Those are serious issues. The church faces those issues. It is sad that many of those became so natural for so many even for Christians, that we don't consider those as breaking the Eighth Commandment.

Why do we steal?

Greed? "I want more?" "I'll be happy if I have this or that..."

I have seen people who get pleasure in accumulating things. In fact, they spend more than they can afford...

We steal, “because fallen man always, instinctively, wants more than he has at present and more than others have.”⁵ We have **discontented greed**. J.I. Packer would say.

The best biblical example comes from **Genesis. The story of Jacob**. Before even his birth, God ordained him to receive the blessing and to be the leader.

Yet...

Jacob was an expert in doing things his way, and not necessarily God’s way, and created problems.

-First, he stole the birthright from his brother Esau.

-Second, he deceived his father by receiving the blessing.

“Brother Jacob, why do you steal when God had ordained the blessings?”⁶ Says Jen Wilkin.

Why don’t we wait for the Lord?

Jacob learned his lesson much later when finally, he surrendered to God in his wrestling. He learned to trust God instead of **his shrewd ways** (*jarbig* in Armenian).

-God Does Provide: the gift of treasures

Stealing is **morally** wrong.

Let us discuss why stealing **theologically** wrong.

-Stealing is a sin against God.

“Every theft is a failure to trust God and his provision.”⁷

When we steal something that does not belong to us, we are denying that God does not know our needs.

Q. Do you trust that God is your provider?

-“Every theft is also an assault on God’s providence for others.”⁸

Every time we steal, we are robbing the portion that God provided to that person. This is a sin against God. It is not right to take anything from someone when it was given by God to that person in the first place.

How do you feel about owning anything?

Illustration: My first ownership was an expensive synthesizer, Yamaha DX7. I was young, 27 years old. I could not believe that I owned a DX7. I owned and it was mine, only mine.

“Behind the Eighth Commandment lies the Bible's view of property-- namely the ownership is stewardship.”⁹

When God gives us something, it should remind you that it belongs to God. My sermon title is **the Gift of Treasures**. God entrusted us “treasures.” God entrusted us “talents.” Our ownership is not for possessing only. They are given so that we use them, we share them, to reach out with them, and use them for the Glory of God.

So, the Eighth Commandment is not just about stealing; it is also about stewardship.

-Stewardship means God entrusted us things, gifts, talents, properties; we should use them wisely, not wastefully.

Illustration: During Covid days we had a committee of people who helped us to buy new cameras and equipment to broadcast our service online. I was happy that our committee worked hard to not waste money on things we don't need. I was tempted to buy things I like. But we helped each other checking our priorities and put them in action. Here we are, for more than a year our worship service is online. Thanks for you donors, and thanks for all the volunteers who make this possible.

-Stewardship also means to work hard and not be lazy.

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. (Ephesians 4:28 NIV11)

Do you see these verses about working hard, and also how whatever we have is not just for our needs, but for the needs of the others?

Jerry Bridges has observed that there are three basic attitudes we can take toward possessions.

The first says, “What's yours is mine; I'll take it.” This is the attitude of the thief.

The second says, “What's mine is mine; I'll keep it.” Most people will use this attitude.

The third attitude—the Godly attitude—says “What's mine is God's; I'll share it.”¹⁰

Every time I give, I am telling my money: “YOU don't CONTROL ME.”

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and everything else God will provide...

The only long-term investment is when we invest in the Kingdom of God.

Application:

I mentioned above areas where we can fall in the temptation of stealing. (My sermons are online, please review those items).

What hit me was robbing God.

Prophet Malachi warned the Israelites:

Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (Malachi 3:8-10 NIV11)

Practical point:

1. We steal from God when we are not generous in giving. Tithing or 10% was the OT requirement. If you carefully read the entire Bible, giving should be from the heart, proportionally; you cannot stop saying I have done 10%. Everything we have, our treasures are a gift from Him. Don't be stingy with God...
2. We steal from God when we give our leftovers, and not the best. (Time and property).
3. We steal from God when we do not obey His commandments. "The real theft is that every sin we commit dishonors God and thus steals the glory that our lives ought to give him."¹¹

Where is the Good News in this message?

I cannot keep the commandments without Jesus. The gospel of the Good News, Avedis. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to save us; he died for us sinners, like me and you.

Matthew 27 we see Jesus was crucified with two robbers, thieves.

"But as far as God's justice was concerned, there were really three thieves on the cross that day: two who died for their own crimes and one who took our sins upon himself."¹²

Do you know what this means?

Jesus died for robbers, thieves, so that every thief can turn to Him and be saved. (*mathanoia*).

4. My fourth application is **repent**... yes, see in which areas of your life you rob God.

Pray and surrender to him, and like Zacchaeus, if you can pay back things that do not belong to you. Act on it with the Grace of God.

Take all your shame and guilt to Jesus. He will wash you.

Amen

1. J.I. Packer, *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, p 89
2. https://www.google.com/search?q=steal+defenation&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS900US900&oq=steal+defenation&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i13i5j0i13i30i4.4071j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8
3. Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in the Stone*, p 170
4. Kevin DeYoung, *The 10 Commandments*, p 125
5. J.I. Packer, *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, p 90
6. Jen Wilkin, *Ten Words to Live By*, p 114
7. Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in the Stone*, p 174
8. *ibid* p 174
9. J.I. Packer, *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, p 89
10. Jerry Bridges, *the Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* p88 from the book Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in the Stone*, p 176
11. Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in the Stone*, p 181
12. *ibid* p 182

Have you ever been robbed?

It happened 2019 in Prague. Sevan, Azad and I were visiting Prague in the Czech Republic. We arrived on a train, and the first thing we needed was money exchange. I was in line at the train station to do that exchange. Behind me was another man. After I exchanged the money and the person behind me suggested that he could help me turn the big bills into smaller ones. I thought that would be a good idea. Instead of carrying larger bills, smaller ones would be easier. So I accepted his offer. We were hungry. and went to a restaurant. We ordered food and had fun. It was time to pay the bill. I gave the money that was given by that man. The waiter said, "This is not money they use in this country, in fact this money is not in use at all." Wow, I felt so bad. Thank God he accepted dollar bills. We paid, but don't ask me how I was feeling that day!!!!!!