

The Eighth Commandment

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Wednesday, 14 October 2015 16:06

You shall not steal

Exodus 20:15, NIV

Introduction

It is a sin to steal. It is self-destructive and it also destroys relationships. If widespread, it will destroy a nation. Honesty (not stealing and not lying) is part of the moral foundation of a nation. Motives for stealing range from need to greed. Covetousness is a seed sin that can lead to stealing.

Stealing People

Stealing people includes kidnapping, slavery and prostitution.

Moses taught that kidnapping was wrong. People generally kidnap other people for money. Today, kidnapping is primarily used for ransom. In the past, kidnapping was primarily to enslave people. Money was made by using the slaves or selling them. Moses taught that kidnappers must be executed:

Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.

Exodus 21:16, NIV

If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brother Israelites and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 24:7, NIV).

Paul taught that Kidnapping was wrong. In Paul's day, slavery was still practiced. People who enslaved other people for a profit, or who were slave traders were condemned by Paul:

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for *slave traders*

[*italics mine*] and liars and perjurers—and for whatever is else is contrary to the sound doctrine that confirms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

1 Timothy 1:8-11, NIV

The Eighth Commandment

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While sweatshops and factories run by child labor are technically not operated by slaves, the principle of slavery is involved. Those who buy items from manufacturers who use children in such a fashion share in the guilt.

Today, we do not have slaves as such, but people are sometimes in bondage to employers. People who must work for low wages in order to survive can easily be exploited by unscrupulous employers.

Oppressive governments can gradually legislate freedoms away until the citizens are in bondage. (See Frederic Bastiat's *The Law*.)

Prostitution can be a form of slavery. The pimp can control his prostitutes by intimidation and can be a *de facto* slave owner. In this sense, he is stealing money from "his" prostitutes. This is a double evil.

Stealing Material Goods

The proper attitude toward material possessions is that everything belongs to God and we are his stewards for a short time.

God is our security—not material wealth.

However, God wants to bless us with material things. More important, he wants to bless us with real wealth—eternal life, his love, and a new relationship with himself.

People are more important than things. People are to be respected, not used. Material things can be used.

Moses required restitution. Moses required that stolen goods be returned with interest:

The Eighth Commandment

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If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.

If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed. A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—he must pay back double, Exodus 22:1-4, NIV

Solomon affirms Moses' teaching of restitution:

Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house.
(Proverbs 6:30-31)

If an owner killed a robber at night, he was not prosecuted. However, if the owner killed a robber after sunrise, he was prosecuted (See Exodus 22:2 above).

Culpability varies. Certain people have diminished culpability. Those who are mentally retarded may not fully understand the concept of stealing. Likewise children. Kleptomaniacs may receive justice tempered with mercy.

On the other hand, those who understand what they are doing, must be held accountable.

Stealth stealing is wrong. Some stealing is obvious. Other stealing is more subtle and may not be recognized as stealing.

Income tax evasion is the deliberate "padding" of expenses or failure to report some income. It may include not filing a form when a form should be filed.

Income tax avoidance is an ethical and legal way to reduce taxes.

Avoiding customs duty is also wrong.

The Eighth Commandment

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Jesus taught that we should pay taxes:

Keeping a close watch on him, they [religious leaders] sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

He saw through their duplicity and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Luke 20:20-25, NIV

Jesus was also a good example. Even though he was the Son of God and could have exempted himself, Jesus paid tax:

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"

"Yes, he does," he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak.

"What do you think, Simon?" he asked "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own sons or from others?"

"From others," Peter answered.

"Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

Matthew 17:24-27, NIV

The Robin Hood mentality permeates our society. It is *wrong* to steal from the rich and give to the poor. Socialists and communists believe that the rich should be taxed heavily and some taxes should be given the poor. Likewise, excessive lawsuit awards result in stealing from insurance companies or large corporations. In the case of patients suing doctors for unreasonable amounts, the higher insurance premiums are passed on to patients: a few patients steal from many other patients.

On the other hand, those who have material goods should *voluntarily* help those in real need.

Failing to work because of laziness is stealing. The lazy steal from those who work—the workers

The Eighth Commandment

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pay taxes, some of which are used to provide food for the lazy.

Paul taught industriousness and modeled the role:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, NIV

Paul was a tentmaker by trade. Apparently, he was referring to his working as a tentmaker to support himself, even when he was a missionary to the church at Thessalonica. Paul had every right to receive a living from those to whom he ministered. Paul wrote Timothy,

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

1 Timothy 5:17-18, NIV

Stealing from an employer.

Many times this is not obvious. Both employer and employee have a moral obligation to be fair with each other.

The employee can steal time by "goofing off"—time is money for the employer.

The employee can steal through purposeful *Low production*. When I was a laborer in the construction industry, I was told to slow down—that I was working too fast. Also, I learned that bricklayers were expected to lay only a certain number of bricks per day. While it is possible for an employee to work too hard, it seldom happens! A rule of thumb is to produce more than the employer expects. Another principle to follow is to think ahead and take the initiative in doing work before your supervisor asks you to.

The Eighth Commandment

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Theft of small items is common, but wrong. The writer is ashamed to admit that he ate candy bars without paying for them when working in a grocery store as a teen ager.

Requiring wages that are too high is a form of extortion. At an earlier time before unions, employers took advantage of employees. Now, the pendulum seems to have swung the other way.

Wasting company materials is another way of stealing from an employer. This could be breakage through carelessness, inefficient use of energy, etc.

Stealing form an employee

Employers can steal from their employees. What are some ways this is done?

Low wages is probably the most obvious. If an employer takes advantage of people this way, it is a form of slavery. This is especially true in third world countries. Many times, employees will hire children, work them long hours and pay them a small wage. American companies who knowingly buy products from such manufacturers are themselves guilty of supporting stealing.

"Laying off" older workers before retirement age to get cheaper, more productive people is stealing. The older worker is exploited in his youth. Then, he is turned loose in a marketplace that doesn't want to hire him. In reality, older people have great value to society because of their wealth of experience and training.

Reducing people from full time to part time in order to avoid paying benefits is stealing. This places employees in danger of not having hospitalization, retirement, etc.

Robbing God

The Eighth Commandment

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God owns everything. How can someone rob God? Malachi answers,

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, `How do we rob you?'

"In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the store-house, 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 you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi 3:8-12, NIV

Jesus confirmed Malachi when he taught that we should

. . . give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Luke 20:25, NIV

We should be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit to give as he directs. God knows the people who have needs and by giving to them as he leads, we are giving to God.

Government theft from its citizens

Frederic Bastiat in his book, *The Law*, warned about a government gone bad and stealing from its citizens. Excessive taxation is a form of stealing.

Some see the way the federal government has spent Social Security money as a Ponzi scheme. Charles Ponzi originated the scheme in 1920. He recruited "investors" and used the money from new "investors" to pay off the old "investors." Since there was no product or service to add income, the pyramid eventually collapsed. The beginners made money, but the last recruits lost money.

Government-run gambling is theft. Lotteries are illegal for citizens, but government has changed the rules for itself. There is no product or service in gambling.

The Eighth Commandment

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Someone asked a criminal who owned a gambling establishment, "Do you gamble?" He replied, "No." He had a sure thing. The odds are set for the house. *Why should he gamble? Why should anyone gamble?*

Computer theft

The old style of stealing money from banks by an armed robber has given way to a cracker transferring funds with a few keystrokes on a computer. Cellular telephone numbers are stolen and sold for up to 1500 dollars with the aid of computers.

Misuse of bankrupt laws

I had the unpleasant experience of going through chapter 7 bankruptcy, due to business mistakes and illness. Financial and other stress resulted in my going to the hospital.

Years ago, there were debtors' prisons where people were placed who could not pay their debts. Bankruptcy laws were established to protect people who could not pay their debts. Like any other good laws, they can be misused, which would be a form of stealing.

Various scams

The Federal Trade Commission warns against the following scams (partial list): Land Sales; Automatic Debit; Art Fraud; Modeling Agency; Water Testing; Work at Home Schemes; Canadian Gemstone; car title loan and Advance-Fee Loan.

There are good Multi-Level Marketing businesses such as AMWAY and Watkins. However, there are a host of pyramid schemes that call themselves MLM businesses. Chain letters are usually not legal.

The Eighth Commandment

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There are two questions one should ask concerning any business: (1) "Is there a good product involved?" or (2) "Is there a ethical service involved?"

The illegal or unethical use of another's money to make money for oneself is stealing.

Excessive profits

Sometimes this category is hard to define. What is an excessive profit? Some say that whatever people pay for a product or service defines its worth. If there is a high profit, then it is ok.

On the other hand, if a pharmaceutical company has a monopoly on a "wonder drug" and charges excessively, this is stealing.

Charging high interest is stealing. Twenty years ago, 20 percent was considered loansharking. Now it is commonplace. God commanded through Moses,

"If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest."

Exodus 22:25, NIV

"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God."

Leviticus 25:35-38, NIV **Stealing Non-Tangibles**

Theft of innocence

The Eighth Commandment

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Leading other people into sin steals their character.

The *Pornography* industry steals money by selling immoral multimedia that encourages promiscuity. Promiscuity wrecks lives, ruins relationships between husbands and wives and transmits STDs. Ted Bundy, a serial killer-rapist stated that pornography had a part in his heinous crimes.

According to an FBI study, serial killers are involved in pornography.

Pedophiles use pornography.

Homosexuals gravitate to younger sex objects, thereby reproducing themselves and perpetuating a perverse sex practice. Males who are seduced into becoming homosexuals are robbed of 44 percent of their lives.

Those who seduce children will answer to the Lord:

"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Matthew 18:5-6, NIV

Theft of reputation

Malicious gossip can "murder" a person's reputation. Slander can rob a person of his good name.

He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Proverbs 10:18-19, NIV

The slanderer would not slander if he did not have a willing audience. Bad and immoral stories

The Eighth Commandment

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appeal to fallen human nature. Not only is the bearer of bad news guilty, but the one who listens shares in the wrongdoing:

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.
Proverb 18:8, NIV

An exception would be if the listener is part of the solution and not part of the problem. A counselor or someone who is genuinely interested in restoring a fallen person is part of the solution. And part of the therapy is listening.

Someone will protest, "If something bad comes to mind, I may as well speak it out as to think it. I don't want to be a hypocrite!" A hypocrite is someone who is evil and acts like a good person for his own ends. Speaking bad words is like dumping a basket of feathers out of a two story house. As all the feathers cannot be picked up, so the words cannot be recalled. A chain reaction is started that will continue damaging people's character. Character assassination can be result. Family and friends also suffer emotionally.

Another may protest, "But what I said is true!" Suppose God has forgiven the person in question. If we hold unforgiveness in our hearts, we align ourselves against God. Jesus said that we *must* forgive others in order for God to forgive us:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."
Mark 11:24-25, NIV

The saying is true,

If you can't say anything good about someone,
Don't say anything!

William Shakespeare penned these words,

The Eighth Commandment

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He that filches from me
my good name
robs me of that
which not enriches him
and makes me poor indeed.

Good mental health requires the exercise of faith in God and positive thinking. It is unhealthy to think about bad things. Paul teaches,

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8, NIV

The answer to gossip is to exercise the love of God that He has given us. Paul writes,

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NIV

Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, *is ever ready to believe the best of every person* [italics mine], its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances and it endures everything [without weakening].

1 Corinthians 13:7, AMP **Other Forms of Stealing**

Withholding good

James writes,

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

James 4:17, NIV

John writes,

The Eighth Commandment

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If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:17, NIV

If we are able to help someone in need and refuse to do so, we are withholding what is in our power to do—we are stealing. How would we feel if Jonas Salk had withheld his vaccine from polio victims?

Paul places this principle in a more important context, the spiritual:

I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Romans 1:14-16, KJV

Refusing to share Christ with a lost person is robbing him of the opportunity to experience the new birth and the abundant life.

Not paying debts on time

Paul teaches,

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.

Romans 13:8, NIV

Some small businessmen have gone out of business because people did not pay their debts. Some debtors have taken the attitude, "I'd rather owe you for a lifetime than to beat you out of it!" Employers are to pay their employees on time. Moses taught,

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise, he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

The Eighth Commandment

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Deuteronomy 24:14-15, NIV

"Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight."

Deuteronomy 19:13, NIV

James confirms Moses' teaching:

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

James 5:4, NIV

In the United States of America, we have moved to the other extreme. We have taken the attitude that "I have a *right* to what I want!" We must move back to the attitude, "I will *earn* what I want!"

Charity for the needy is commanded and the one who cannot earn a living and receives help has not stolen.

Changing measurements

Moses quotes the LORD:

"Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah [a dry measure] and an honest hin [a wet measure]. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt."

Leviticus 19:35-36, NIV

Moses later restates this truth:

Do not have two differing weights in your bag—one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house—one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. For the LORD your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly.

Deuteronomy 25:13-16, NIV

The wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, affirms Moses:

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.

The Eighth Commandment

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Proverbs 11:1, NIV

The LORD detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him.

Proverb 20:23, NIV

The old trick of the butcher's thumb on the scale comes to mind. However, more sophisticated methods of stealing are now used. Gasoline pumps can be set to deliver less gasoline for the money. Also, if fuel is heated, it expands and less is pumped through the meter.

Gambling

Games and gambling devices are designed with the odds for the house. Simply put, gambling hosts do not gamble! And, in a final sense, gamblers do not gamble either—they give their money away!

Gambling establishments appeal to the customer's greed. The gambler wants to get something for nothing. The house (or the government) gets something for (almost) nothing.

The house (or the government) tempts the gambler to break the tenth commandment. The gambler does. Then, the house (or the government) breaks the Eighth Commandment.

Conclusion

There is an old saying, "Honesty is the best policy." Dr. Donald Howard reminds us that the biblical truth is,

Honesty is the only policy.

Jesus taught,

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It is more blessed to give than to receive

Acts 20:35

Chapter VIII of my ebook, *The Ten Commandments*. Download this book free at <http://BusterSoft.com/JRCM/>

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