

## Exodus 20:15

### Thou shalt not steal.

#### A STUDY ON STEALING

I want to introduce you to the Robinsons: Jack, his better half Julie, and their teenage son Justin. Jack's a regular guy who works at an ad agency. Things are looking up for him. Just the other day, after checking out Jack's newest design for a campaign, his boss couldn't help but say, "Man, Jack, you've got a knack for this! You can make people who've never even heard of a product feel like they need it. You've got a real talent for convincing people to spend their hard-earned cash." Jack couldn't help but grin. He was pretty proud of himself.

Thursday night, as the Robinsons were finishing supper, Julie said, "Guess what? Angela next door just loaned me a bunch of new computer programs and games. She said we can copy whatever we want onto our hard drive. There's some great new software that I think we'll both like, Jack. And Justin, you're going to love the games. Oh, and she also loaned me some movies and music to copy. All that stuff would cost us an arm and a leg if we had to buy it at the store."

Friday evening, the Robinsons were on the road, hoping to enjoy a weekend away from home. As they drove along, Julie patted her purse and said, "The Johnsons paid me today for painting their bedroom. I got paid in cash, as usual. That's another \$400 tax-free that the government will never know about."

The family stopped at a restaurant and enjoyed eating a fine meal. It tasted even better when Jack looked at the bill and noticed that they'd been undercharged by \$10. He giggled and said, "Well, if they don't know how to add, that's their problem, not mine." After eating, they drove to a motel, checked in, and Jack put the room charge on his company's expense account.

Saturday morning they decided to go to the amusement park. The sign at the entrance said that kids twelve and under got in for \$5 less than older kids. Justin looked a bit small for thirteen, so Julie told the person at the gate, "Tickets for two adults and one twelve-year-old, please."

So, there they were, standing in line, waiting to go on one of the rides, when suddenly Julie's purse was ripped from her hands. Julie whirled around and saw a man racing away. She began screaming for him to stop. Jack ran off after him, but the thief had a head start and disappeared around the corner of a building. By the time Jack got to the corner, the thief had blended into the crowd.

People were walking around as though nothing unusual had happened. Panting for breath, Jack ran back to his distraught wife and son. "I'm sorry honey, but the guy got away," "I can't believe this! Isn't there any place that's safe from crooks? The cops ought to catch people like that and lock them up and throw away the key." Julie and Justin agreed.

#### **Other People's Money**

In the Ten Commandments, God says, "Thou shalt not steal." Most of us would say "Amen" to that—at least when it comes to people who might steal from us. Nobody likes to get robbed, but many of us don't mind robbing other people. Even if we're not burglars or purse snatchers, we're still thieves. Like the fictional family I've

been talking about, we don't mind taking what isn't rightfully ours, but we're shocked and angry and sure throw a fit when someone rips us off.

It's okay to manipulate people to buy stuff they don't need. It's okay to copy software and videos we haven't paid for. It's okay to want to get rich quick on a something-for-nothing deal, to take cash income and not pay taxes on it, to keep the money when we're undercharged, to pad a company expense account, to cheat on the cost of admission for a child. That's all okay. But a purse snatcher? Now that's robbery! Cops have to get tougher on crime! Judges need to sentence thieves to more prison time!

When God says, "Thou shalt not steal," he's not just talking to somebody else. He's talking to you and me. You and I need to take a hard look in the mirror and at the values of the society we embrace. We may be guilty of a lot more stealing and freeloading than we'd like to admit.

We may be as eager as anyone to get rich without working for it, to get maximum income for minimum work. Just about all of us seriously oppose the ways others might steal from us, but we're much less upset about the ways we manage to grab other people's money.

Take Anthony, for example. According to news reports, Anthony walked into a New York bank with a gun and walked out with a bag full of cash. He left the bank and quickly blended in with the people walking on the sidewalk outside. But as Anthony was strolling along, someone brushed against him, grabbed the bag, and ran off with it. Anthony was furious. How dare someone steal the money he had just stolen for himself? He was so angry that he told the cops what had happened. The cops never caught the man who ran off

with the money, but they did arrest Anthony for armed bank robbery.

Now, we may laugh at Anthony, but is our own approach all that different? When we take from others, it's okay, but when someone steals from us, we're furious. Many of us try to grab what isn't ours in just about any way we can get away with, yet we gripe and complain about the evils of crime. We'd like nothing better than to get piles of other people's money without having to work for it, yet we will complain that people on welfare ought to learn what honest work is all about.

Sometimes we act in ways that seem a bit odd, right? It's like we're looking out for ourselves, but at the same time, we're trying to play by the rules and be good people. But let's be real, we don't always get it right. We get so caught up in what we want, that we don't see how it might look to others.

Here's the thing, though. We gotta remember to put ourselves in other people's shoes and play fair. That's what makes a community work. We gotta respect each other and do our part.

So, let's try to be more aware of what we're doing and how it affects others. Let's stick to the golden rule: treat others how you want to be treated. Because what goes around, comes around, right? If we're not fair, we might find ourselves on the other side of the coin one day.

Let's aim for a world where everyone gets what they deserve, and they've earned it fair and square. It's not just about staying out of trouble, but about creating a culture where we respect each other, understand each other, and play fair. That's the kind of world we want to live in, isn't it?

Stealing is rampant in our society. I'm not just talking about break-ins, holdups, carjackings, and so forth. Those are the kinds of stealing that make the evening news, but ordinary people also steal. Workers take tools home from a business or factory, figuring a big business won't really miss them. Businessmen pad their expense accounts, thinking they deserve a little something extra. Citizens don't report taxable income, thinking they already give too much to the government.

A person told how a shopkeeper explained business ethics to his son: "Suppose a customer buys something in a hurry. I give him change for ten dollars, but the minute he goes out, I see he's given me a hundred-dollar bill by mistake. Now here's the question of business ethics: should I tell my partner?"

The son, after a moment of thought, replied: "Dad, the real question of business ethics here is not whether you should tell your partner. It's whether you should run after the customer and return the extra money. Because in the end, our reputation for honesty could be worth more than ninety dollars."

#### **A Steal of a Deal**

So far we've been focusing on examples of theft that are pretty clear-cut. They're common, we often don't think they're all that serious, we might not like to call them stealing—but that's what they are, and we know it. We know we're ripping someone off. But besides these clear-cut rip-offs, there are other, more subtle forms of stealing.

In the fine art of deal-making, the seller often pretends an item is worth more than it really is, while the buyer pretends it's worth less than its true value. In Proverbs 20:14, the Bible describes the bargaining process: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but

when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.’ [when he’s haggling about the price]; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase.”

Isn’t that the truth? We like to brag when we get “a steal of a deal.” Buy low; sell high. “That’s not stealing,” we tell ourselves. “It’s just good business.” But what if getting “a steal of a deal” really is stealing? Not all haggling over price is dishonest. Not every good investment is evil. Not all dealing is stealing, but sometimes it is—and more often than we’d like to admit.

When we come to the world of business and stock exchanges and future markets and government contracts and all the rest, it gets more complicated. It’s not always easy to see where smart business ends and stealing begins. It’s almost impossible to make and apply exact guidelines that would cover all the particulars. But just because it’s complicated doesn’t mean we should think anything goes.

When a business wins a contract away from a competitor by pulling a few strings; when a company underpays its employees or overcharges its customers; when a corporation uses advertising to manipulate people into buying a useless product; when stock regulations and prices are manipulated for the advantage of insiders; when elected officials give inflated contracts to political contributors, or when government takes more of its citizens’ money in taxes than it returns to them in benefits and services—that is stealing.

Sad to say, even religion itself can become the domain of thieves. The Bible often condemned religious leaders for using their position to manipulate people for their own profit. Jesus himself declared that God’s temple had become a den of thieves. He grabbed

a whip and went on a rampage through the temple area, overturning tables and driving out the rip-off artists.

I've seen some people use religion to trick people out of their hard-earned money. I remember this one TV preacher who said that if you're struggling with money, all you gotta do is have more faith. And how do you show that faith? Well, according to him, you gotta scrape together \$150, even if you're barely making ends meet, and send it to him as a sign of your faith. He claimed that doing so would force God's hand to bless you with wealth for showing such incredible faith.

Can you believe that? He said all this without batting an eye. He was basically trying to swindle people who were already down on their luck, all in the name of Jesus—the same Jesus who kicked out the moneychangers. It's pretty hard for us preachers to say “Don't steal” when some are so quick to use religion as a means to line their own pockets.

#### **Grabbers Becoming Givers**

When God says, “Thou shalt not steal,” it's not just about not taking someone else's cash. It's about calling out the selfish, lazy, and greedy mindset that thinks it can get something for nothing. God wants us to earn our keep through hard work. But it doesn't stop there. The Bible tells us that the rule against stealing isn't just about how we make our money. It's also about how we spend it. So, it's not just about the hustle, it's about being responsible with what we've got.

**Ephesians 4:28 says, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”** God shows us that the opposite of stealing isn't not stealing; the opposite of stealing is

sharing. If you're in tune with God, you won't just be honest and hard-working; you'll also be generous. God calls us to not be grabbers but givers. A grabber's attitude is, "What's yours is mine." A giver's attitude is, "What's mine is yours." If you're able to make more money than you need, sharing isn't just an option. It's an obligation.

Maybe God has blessed you with the ability to be productive and make lots of money. If so, be thankful to God, and be generous with others. When God says, "Thou shalt not steal," he's telling me to make money honestly and not rip off other people's money. However, he's also telling me to "do whatever I can for my neighbor's good, that I treat him as I would like others to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need".

God encourages us to use our resources to make a positive impact in the world. This could mean investing in businesses that provide jobs and contribute to the economy, supporting charities and causes that align with our values, or simply using our wealth to improve the lives of those around us.

The commandment "Thou shalt not steal," is a divine law that extends beyond the simple act of taking someone else's property without permission. It is a comprehensive ethical guideline that encompasses various aspects of human interactions and relationships.

It emphasizes the importance of respecting the **property rights** of others. This means not taking what doesn't belong to us, whether it's a physical object, an idea, or credit for someone else's work. It's about acknowledging that each individual has a right to their own possessions and respecting that right.



This commandment underscores the importance of **fairness and justice** in our dealings with others. This includes paying employees a fair wage for their labor. It's not just about giving them the minimum payment, but compensating them adequately for their time, effort, and skills. This aspect of the commandment promotes economic justice and discourages exploitation.

It encourages **honesty** in all our business transactions and dealings. This means not engaging in fraudulent activities, not lying about the quality or value of goods and services, and not deceiving others for personal gain. Honesty builds trust, which is essential for any successful business relationship.

The commandment warns against **exploitation** of others. This means not taking advantage of someone's vulnerability, not using others for our own benefit without giving something of equal value in return, and not manipulating situations to our advantage at the expense of others. This aspect of the commandment promotes respect for the dignity and worth of every individual.

The commandment to not steal is a call to uphold the values of respect, fairness, honesty, and dignity in all our interactions with others. It's about creating a society where everyone's rights are respected and everyone is treated with fairness and dignity.

It's a reminder that our actions have consequences, and that we have a responsibility to treat others as we would like to be treated. It's a call to live ethically and justly, not just in our personal lives, but also in our professional and social interactions. It's a call to build a world based on respect, fairness, honesty, and dignity. It's a call to make the world a better place.

And, the principle of treating others as we would like to be treated extends to our financial dealings as well. This means being fair and

honest in all our transactions, and being willing to help those in need when we have the means to do so. After all, the true measure of wealth is not how much we have, but how much we give.

Remember, **Acts 20:35** says **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”**. So, let’s use our blessings to bless others.

How do we measure up to God’s standard of sharing instead of stealing? Not very well, I’m afraid. We rob others in various ways, and when we think about what to do with our money, sharing is often the last thing that comes to mind. Our stealing may not be a big deal to us, but it is to God. In the Bible God says in **1 Corinthians 6:9** that **“neither thieves nor the greedy ... will inherit the kingdom of God”**. Stealing is sin, and people who remain in sin end up in hell.

In the Bible, God’s standard of sharing is often highlighted through the principle of generosity. As I said earlier in **Acts 20:35**, **it is said that “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** This underscores the importance of sharing and generosity in our lives.

However, as humans, we often fall short of this standard. Our natural inclination may be towards self-preservation and accumulation rather than generosity. This can lead us to act in ways that are selfish or even dishonest, such as stealing.

Stealing, as I mentioned earlier, is considered a sin in the Bible. It is a violation of the commandment “Thou shalt not steal”. But it’s not just about taking someone else’s property. It can also be about withholding what we should give. When we fail to share or give generously, we are, in a sense, robbing others of the blessings that could have been theirs.

The good news is that God offers forgiveness and transformation. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we can be forgiven of our sins,

including stealing and greed. Moreover, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to change us and make us more like Christ, who was the perfect example of generosity and selflessness.

So, while we may fall short of God's standard, there is hope for change and growth. We can strive to be more generous, to share more freely, and to value others above ourselves. In doing so, we can better align ourselves with God's standard and experience the joy and blessing that comes from giving.

Remember, it's not just about avoiding the negative consequences of sin, but also about pursuing the positive virtues that God values. As we grow in generosity and kindness, we reflect God's character and bring glory to Him. And that is the ultimate goal of every believer.

So how can we become right with God and leave stealing behind? Through a life-changing encounter with Jesus. The Bible tells the story of Zaccheus. He wasn't the kind of thief who got arrested and thrown in prison. He was a bureaucrat, a government tax collector in a corrupt system. He could overcharge people on their taxes and keep the extra for himself. Zaccheus had the power to take people's money and seize their property, and they couldn't do a thing about it. Zaccheus ripped people off. He got rich abusing the system. He was a thief but was never charged with any crime. Then he met Jesus.

Jesus came to Zaccheus's town and asked if he could come to his house. For some reason, Zaccheus was delighted, and he welcomed Jesus gladly. The people who saw this began griping. They wondered why Jesus would have anything to do with a rip-off artist like Zaccheus. They thought Zaccheus should be written off entirely. He was too wicked to be saved.

But we find in [Luke chapter 19](#) that Zaccheus stood up and said to the Lord, **“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.**

Jesus said to him, **“Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.**

Salvation came to Zaccheus’s house when Jesus came to his house. Jesus forgave his wicked, thieving past, and Zaccheus became a new man. The grabber became a giver.

If you look in the mirror and see a thief under God’s judgment, you need to do what Zaccheus did. Welcome Jesus into your life. Receive his forgiveness. With his help, start living a new life. Be a giver, not a grabber. Then Jesus will tell you what he told Zaccheus: “Today salvation has come to this house.”

The Eighth Commandment, as stated in the King James Version of the Bible, in [Exodus 20:15](#) reads: **“Thou shalt not steal”**. This commandment, simple in its phrasing, carries a profound depth of meaning that extends beyond the mere act of taking another’s property without permission.

Stealing, in its broadest sense, is a violation of trust, and an affront to the dignity of others. It undermines the fabric of community and the bonds of mutual respect that hold society together. When we steal, we not only harm others materially, but we also degrade their inherent worth and dignity.

You know, when someone steals, it’s like they’re letting their greed and selfishness take the wheel. It’s the complete opposite of the love and kindness that we’re supposed to show each other. Stealing is like saying “my wants are more important than your needs.” It

totally ignores what Jesus said in **Matthew 7:12**, “**Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them:**” That’s not cool, right? We gotta do better than that.

The Eighth Commandment also speaks to the importance of contentment and gratitude. In a world that often encourages us to desire more and more, this commandment reminds us to be content with what we have, and to appreciate the blessings that God has given us. As it is written in **Hebrews 13:5**, “**Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**”

Furthermore, this commandment calls us to a life of integrity and honesty. It challenges us to be truthful in all our dealings and to respect the rights and property of others. It is a call to live out the values of justice and fairness in our everyday lives.

## Closing

In conclusion, the Eighth Commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” is a powerful directive that guides us towards a life of love, respect, and integrity. It calls us to reject greed and selfishness, to embrace contentment and gratitude, and to uphold the dignity and rights of others. In a nutshell, the 8th commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” is about more than just not taking what isn’t yours. It’s a call to be honest, hardworking, and responsible. It’s about earning what we have and using it wisely.

It’s a reminder that everything we have is a gift, and we should respect that by not taking what isn’t ours and by being good stewards of what we’ve got. So, let’s keep it real, keep it honest, and keep it fair. That’s the heart of the 8th commandment. As we strive to live out this commandment, we not only honor God, but we also

contribute to the building of a just and compassionate society. Let us remember the words of **Proverbs 28:6**, “**Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.**” May we all strive to walk in uprightness, honoring God and respecting our fellow human beings.