

“THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT”

Text: Exodus 20:15

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INTRODUCTION:

1) Stealing is both a sin and a crime: I intentionally include both definitions of stealing into our study because stealing has both implications in spiritual terms as a sin, and in legal terms as a crime. The sin of stealing began very early in human history due to the corrupted nature of man. The crime of stealing stems from the legal system due to judgment and punishment of the act of stealing. Both sin and crime of stealing rooted from the evil nature of man: Greed. We want more and we want it for free, at the expense of others. Because stealing is from the evil nature of men, no one may claim he/she has never stolen anything from anyone in his/her life. A few acts of stealing may be committed unintentionally but great, great majority, over 99% of cases, were done intentionally: We know it is wrong but we did it anyway. Many of us make excuses that stealing little things isn't a big deal, and everybody is doing that. We like to justify our sins as a “normal practice of man”, so, no big deal, no problem.

2) Biblical teaching on not stealing: According to dictionary, there are over 100 listings on what constitutes stealing beside taking material things without paying for them. The Bible has so much to say about the nature of stealing:

a) Not to steal from customers: “Skimping the measure; boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales.” (Amos 8:5b)

b) Not to stealing from employers: “Teach servants to obey their masters in everything, and not to steal from them but to show that they can be fully trusted.” (Titus 2:9-10)

c) Not to steal in doing your job: “Servants, obey your masters and do it not only when their eye is on you to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence of the Lord.” (Colossians 3:23)

d) Not to delay making payments: “Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of your hired man overnight.” (Lev19:13)

e) Not to defraud paying your debts: “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.” (Psalm 37:21)

f) Not to cheat in paying taxes: “This is why you pay taxes, for the authority are God's servants who give their full time to governing.” (Romans 13:6)

g) Not to cheat with your power: “Zacchaeus 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 anyone of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” (Luke 19:8)

3) Common sense definitions of stealing: Here I like to include other things we see or do everyday that are also stealing: Using position to benefit self; taking company properties, big or small; infringe copy rights; cutting fair wages; skip paying fares on transportation; taking advantage of others; charging higher interest on loans; using cheap material on production; bribery and corruption; jacking up prices or price gouging, just to list a few. Men are very creative in looking for ways to cheat, steal and take what isn't theirs with all kinds of sinful intention.

Stealing isn't just limited to material things, but also includes freedom, dignity, opportunity, and rights of people. Taking away these from others is worse than just stealing their material possessions, it is to deprive their basic value of life. God condemned those who practiced this inhumane harm to the defenseless. (Isaiah 10:1-3)

BIBLICAL DANGERS ON STEALING:

1) God is watching what we do: In his Sermon on the Mountain preaching in Matthew 6, Jesus taught us that when we do good things like giving to the poor, prayer and fasting, we should do it in the secret place, not to show off to anyone, and God will see what we do in secret and he will reward us. (Matt 6:4, 6, 18) In same token, God will also watching us what we do wrong in secret like stealing from others and repay us with punishment. Most people think when they steal in secret, no one can see, but they forgot that God can always see whatever we do and judge us accordingly. Paul told us, “For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one must receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10) Yes, God is love, but he is also a just.

2) Stealing ruins your own life: This include taking advantage of others, using unethical ways to increase profit, power and benefits. People of this kind may think they are smart, clever or successful, but the end of their life is not exactly what they hope for. God will exercise justice on them like in Prov 21:6, “A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.” Again in 15:27, “A greedy man brings trouble to his won family, but he who hates bribe will live.” Stealing or cheating never pays. Those who do it and never repent will suffer terrible consequences God has promised.

3) Stealing ruins your children: We all know that our children are watching

how we live our life and they learn from us in the ways we may not imagine. We influence their life, their character and their future. The familiar saying: "Like the father like the son" is true in most cases. Why would anyone want to see their children learn from them the dishonest and dishonoring ways of life when they do all these things in the face of their children? God had given us encouragement to do right so our children will be blessed from our good examples: "The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him." (Prov 20:7) Many of us work so hard to create a family and a foundation for our children and their future. Nothing is more important than leading an honest and trustworthy life so our children can see us and follow.

4) Stealing destroys your character: In this election year in America, people are looking for someone with good character and are honest so we can trust him or her to bring our nation back to the right path. Besides those who will choose someone for their political benefits, most people with a right mind are going to elect someone with character and honesty. God has given us in his word, "If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with real riches?" (Luke 16:11) If one isn't honest with money, how can he/she be trusted with things million times more important than money, like honor and security of a country?

According to studies, the most important factor that contributed to the success of the 50 top companies is: They never cheated on their customers.

STOP THE TRAIN BEFORE IT WRECKS:

1) Seeing stealing as sinful: Many people don't see stealing, especially on small things, as sin or sinful as other serious sins, but Jesus has a different perspective in this. In Matt 15:19, when he talks about the evil of sins in our hearts, he includes stealing with other horrendous sins: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, stealing, false testimony and slander." It is sinful because it comes from our hearts. If we don't see stealing as a sin, we won't stop doing it.

2) Stop stealing here and now: This includes things big and small. It isn't just about the things we steal, it is also about the heart inside us that pushing us to steal, and that needs to be stopped. God's word says: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need." (Eph 4:28) Stop the habit and the vicious cycle, and do something honorable to make a living.

3) Pay back what you own if you can: This is exactly what Zacchaeus did

when he confessed his sin to the Lord, "If I have cheated anyone anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Taking steps to repay whatever we have stolen from others, all the debts we owe, be it material, emotional or any things else. Paying back is to show we are truly repentant and we mean what we say to make things right, even to admit wrong and suffer the shame.

4) Be content with what God has provided: Few people steal because he has to, but because he wants to. In most case it isn't about you can't survive without it, but you want more for nothing. God tells us to be content with what he has given us in this life, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we should be content with that." (1 Timothy 6:6-8) Greed is the powerful force that pushes many into cheating and stealing anyway they can to get the things they want, not they need. The Bible continues to describe the harm of greed, "People who want to get rich (or to have more) fall into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction." (6:9) Greed for more doesn't pay but destroy.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:

1) One brick at a time: In the famous scenic city of Hangzhou in Jjiang province of China, the West Lake is the most popular attraction for tourists. In the middle of the lake, there stands an ancient Buddhist pagoda called the The Thunder Pagoda. It was said the pagoda tourists see today is a rebuilt structure, because the original one collapsed in the middle of the night long time ago. The reason it collapsed was people believed the bricks at the foundation has the power of driving evil spirit away from their homes, business even farmland. So, many had come under the cover of night to chip away one brick at a time on the foundation under water, so no one may see. In time, when enough bricks were being chipped away, there wasn't enough foundation to hold the pagoda, and it collapsed into the lake. The collapse of character is almost like that: one little sin at a time, but when all little sins put together, everything collapses. Never under estimate the destructive power of little sins. They can bring you done someday if you don't stop it now.

2) Character is everything: Even in today's America that money and power is everything, people still treasure, respect and honor those who live by the rule of character even they themselves don't do that. As children of God and messengers of the gospel message, we need to focus much more on our character quality than material quantity the world mostly pursuits. We can't be the light of the world if we are over shadowed by our sinful life style.

