

## DO NOT STEAL

A burglar broke into a house and began to steal all of the valuables. At that moment he heard from the darkness a voice that said "Jesus is watching you." He was so scared he froze for a second. Not hearing anything else, he regained his composure and started stealing again, when the voice came louder, "Jesus is watching you." Again, he froze with fear. After regaining his composure, he began to steal again this time watching very intent around him when he heard the voice again. This time he realized that the voice was coming from the corner of the room. As he approached the corner the voice had come from he saw that there was a bird cage. In the darkness he saw that inside the birdcage there was a parrot. He laughed to himself. "What is your name?" he said to the bird. The parrot replied "Moses". The thief then said "Moses? What kind of person would name a parrot Moses"? The parrot replied "the same kind of person that named their Rottweiler Jesus".

Today we are continuing with our series on the 10 commandments and we come to the eighth commandment;

Exodus 20:15 You shall not steal.

A Sunday school teacher was teaching her class about the difference between right and wrong. "All right children, let's take another example," she said. "If I were to put my hand into a man's pocket and take his wallet with all his money, what would I be?" Little Johnny raises his hand, and with a confident smile, he blurts out, "You'd be his wife!"

Theft is a huge problem in the world today. Countless lives have been touched by it in our society. In the United States, stealing from department stores exceeds \$4 billion a year. One estimate said that 1 out of every 52 shopper's carries something out of a supermarket for which they haven't paid. That is an incredible statistic. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, over 4 million people are caught shoplifting every year. In addition to simply taking something from a store there are lots of different ways that people steal. The bible gives the following examples;

By deceiving customers

Amos 8:4-5 Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, 5 saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"-- skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales

Businesses steal from people when they overcharge their customers or offer substandard products. Have you ever seen this Norman Rockwell picture in the Saturday Evening Post? It is in a butcher shop. A woman shopper and a butcher face each other with a turkey on the scales between them. A careful look shows the butcher's heavy thumb on the scales, while the customer pushes up on them with a dainty forefinger.

By defrauding employers

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men

Whenever you take money from your employer that you have not earned, it is stealing.

I read about one young man who went to look for a job at a place where they really weren't looking to hire anyone. The Manager said to the young man: "I'm sorry I can't hire you, there just isn't enough work to keep you busy." The young man replied: "You'd be surprised how little it takes."

#### By defaulting on loans

Psalms 37:21 The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously  
Not repaying a loan is the same as stealing. You need to be very cautious when it comes to borrowing money or purchasing things on credit.

#### By deceiving the government

Romans 13:6-7 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

I know that this may be a sore point for some. It is easy to get mad at the government. However, it is important that we do not steal even from them.

#### By disobeying the Lord

Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings.

These are just a few ways that we steal from one another and from God. Today I want us to focus on the reasons that we should not steal. Let me give you 4 good reasons not to steal;

#### 1. God Sees You

Whether it is stealing a better grade by cheating on someone during a test or finding something laying on the ground and not seeking to return it, God sees you. People often steal because they think they can get away with it and they think that nobody will ever know about it.

Like the story I started with, you may not have a Rottweiler named Jesus but the truth is the God is watching us. When we lived in Kuwait, I would sometimes before or after a service lay my bible down on my chair because I was busy doing something. I had several bibles stolen. I would go back to my seat and my bible would be gone. I remember that once it was right before the service started and all my preaching notes were in my bible. I had to quickly run to my office during the worship time to reprint my sermon! What I would often wonder is why someone would do that? How could anyone think of stealing a Bible? If they take it then they obviously want it. How could anyone think that it is OK to steal the book and then be blessed by what is within it?

Job 34:21-22 His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. 22 There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide.

Nothing escapes God's view. I may fool other people. I may fool the government. I may fool the insurance company when I turn in a dishonest claim. But I'm not fooling God, He's the guy I've got to report to. One day I will stand before Him and give an account.

In New York City, there are eight million cats and eleven million dogs. New York City is basically just concrete and steel, so when your pet dies, you can't just go out in the back yard and bury it. The city would dispose of your dead pet, but charged \$50. So one lady had this great thought: I can get rid of dead pets for less than that! I'd be providing a service to people in the city and saving them money. She placed an ad in the newspaper saying that she would provide this service for just \$25 – half what the city charged. Her plan for disposal was brilliant. She would go to the Salvation Army and pay 2 bucks for an old suitcase. Then, she would pick up the dearly departed pet and put it in the suitcase. Then she would hop on the subway, put the suitcase down, and act like she wasn't watching it. Invariably a thief would think that she was not watching and would steal her suitcase. Not only did she save money for grieving pet owners, but she may have rehabilitated a thief or two!

Just because you think no one is watching you does not mean that stealing is OK. God sees you.

## 2. You Reap what you Sow

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

It does not say that we reap what we sow most of the time or some of the time, but always. Count on it. It is an inviolable law of the universe. If I plant corn seed, I'm going to harvest corn, not potatoes. If I plant apple seeds then they will grow an apple tree, not a peach tree. No matter how much I wish it were a peach tree it will be an apple tree.

Whatever you give out in life is what you're going to get back. If I cheat other people, I'm going to get cheated. God says it will happen, count on it. If I take advantage of other people, I will be taken advantage of. I will reap what I sow.

Proverbs 15:27 A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live.

The newspapers are full of stories like this. Men and women who not only personally suffer but also got their families in trouble because they were making a dishonest profit. Don't do it. You will reap what you sow.

In the Associated Press there was a story about a thief who decided to siphon gas from a motor home in Seattle. When the owner of the motor home heard the noises outside he investigated and discovered the thief curled upon the ground vomiting violently. Intending to suck up the contents of the gas tank the thief had put his hose into the wrong hole -- and had sucked up the contents of the sewage tank instead. The story ended saying that the thief, a boy 14 years old, will not be prosecuted. The owner and the police both agreed that he had already suffered enough.

## 3. Stealing Destroys your Character

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The Bible says that satan is a thief. On the other hand, God is always truthful, always honest, never dishonest. Every time I make a decision to steal, it doesn't matter how small or insignificant, I am choosing to side with the devil rather than with God.

The devil wants you to steal because every time you do it you become more like him. He is the thief, the father of thieves. Every time I'm making the decision: am I going to go the devil's way or God's way? Am I going to become more like satan or more like God?

Sometimes people try to justify their actions. They say "I am only stealing to support my family" or "I will only steal from people who have too much already and will not miss it." You don't do it because you have too little or they have too much. You don't steal because stealing is wrong!

Sometimes people think that they just cannot make it in the market place if they don't cheat. You're dead wrong! The fact is if you know anything about business, integrity pays. Customers want to return to where they trust the company. There was a study done of the 50 most profitable corporations in America. One thing they all had in common was they all had a moral code of ethics, every one of them. It was the one thing they had in common. When you have a reputation of "We don't rip people off. We give value for value, dollar for dollar. An honest day's work for an honest day's pay." People respect that and you have repeat customers.

A pastor by the name of F.E. Marsh preached on stealing. Afterwards a young man came to see him and said, "Pastor, you have put me into a bad fix. I've stolen from my employer, and I'm ashamed to tell him about it. You see, I'm a boat builder and the man I work for is lost. I have talked with him about Christ, but he only laughs at me. In my work, expensive copper nails are used because they won't rust in water. I've been taking some of them for a boat I'm building in my backyard. I'm afraid if I tell my boss what I've done and offer to pay for them, he'll think I'm a hypocrite, and I'll never be able to reach him for Christ." When the pastor saw him again the man was excited. He said. "Pastor, I've settled that matter and I'm so relieved." What happened?" asked the pastor. "Oh, he looked at me intently and said, 'George, I've always thought you were a hypocrite, but now I'm not so sure. Maybe there is something to your Christianity after all. Any religion that makes a man admit he's been stealing must be worth having.'"

#### 4. God Rewards Honesty

Proverbs 28:20 A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.

Honesty leads to a full, happy life. One of the reasons that this is true is because people who live with integrity don't have any skeletons in the closet.

If you are trying to get rich quickly, sooner or later you are going to fall into problems. Do not fall for get rich quick schemes. Don't be foolish! Someone once said that the lottery is really just a tax on the poor and foolish. Someone once calculated that if you drive a couple of miles to buy a lottery ticket that the odds are 5 times greater that you will die in a car accident on the way that win the lottery.

You get wealthy by adding little to little to proper investments, wise savings, honest work, good stewardship and investing in things that count and in people. Don't worry about schemes and dreams.

God is testing you right now. He's testing you three ways: through trials and problems; through temptation; through money. The Bible says God uses these three things to test your life, to see what's important to you, what's valuable to you. If I respond to those tests well, then in eternity I will get greater rewards and I will have greater responsibility. If I flunk those tests here on earth and I respond poorly to trials, temptations, and money then I will have fewer rewards and responsibilities.

Luke 16:10-11 Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

If you are unfaithful and cheat with worldly wealth, God will not trust you with true riches in eternity. It's a test.

What can you do if you have stolen something from someone?

A. Make restitution if possible

A good example of this is Zacchaeus in the Bible. Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector. In the Roman system, tax collectors were not paid, but they just got to skim off the top whatever they could collect. They were the wealthiest people in town and the most hated. They were usually the most dishonest. Jesus goes and has dinner with Zacchaeus. He realizes "I've been doing the wrong thing. I'm going to get my life right. I'm going to do what God wants." He says "I want to follow you Lord. If I cheated anyone I will pay him back four times as much." There's a guy who is putting his money where his mouth is.

Repentance involves recompense. It is not simply being sorry for what you have done but seeking to make up for it. Repentance often means that we have to be reconciled with the person we have wronged.

Maybe today there is someone that you have stolen from and you need to be reconciled with that person. Maybe you need to wrap up some stuff and mail it back to where it belongs.

A man who had cheated the IRS developed a guilty conscience. He wrote a check for \$500 dollars and enclosed a note that said, "I underpaid my taxes last year and I'm feeling guilty. Please accept the enclosed payment I owe you. And, if I don't feel any better after this, I'll send you the rest that I owe you."

You can't buy that kind of feeling of freedom and joy that comes from a clear conscience. Make restitution.

B. Give God your tithe

The fact is God says if I'm not tithing then I'm paying my bills with stolen money that belongs to God. If I'm not tithing, the money in my wallet is what I'm ripping off from God. One day I will give an account to Him for it. "Why didn't you do that?" It's very clear here. God says you're cheating Me.

If you're going to start tithing, don't delay it any more. Do it now.

A. W. Tozer said, "Money often comes between men and God. Someone has said that you can take two ten-cent pieces, just two dimes, and shut out the view of a panoramic landscape. Go to the mountain and hold just two coins closely in front of your eyes—the mountains are still there, but you cannot see them at all because there is a dime shutting off the vision in each eye." Such a small amount of money can come between ourselves and the Lord. The commitment is far more important than the amount.

### C. Make an honest living

Ephesians 4:28 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.

I would suggest that you begin to act as if God were your boss. Work as if you're working for the Lord, not whomever your employer happens to be. Make money honestly, so you can live with a clear conscience at night.

God is our provider. He has promised to provide for us the things we need, not the things we want. We can trust in Him to take care of us.

Back in 1990 there was a 24 year old man named Danny Simpson from Ottawa who was sentenced to 6 years in jail for bank robbery. Danny wanted money, so he took an old gun that his father had given him and went into a bank and stole \$6,000. He was arrested, convicted and went to prison for his crime. What he did not know was that the old gun his father had given him was worth a fortune. The Colt .45 was made by the Ross Rifle Company in Quebec City in 1918. It was one of the only 100 guns ever made in that factory. The pistol was worth up to \$60,000. If Danny Simpson had known what he had in his hands, he could have walked into any gun shop and sold the gun for 10 times what he stole from the bank. So many Christians live like this. They spend their lives searching for God's power and presence, not realizing it's already in their hands.