

The Big Ten: Oh, That's Stealing?

As a human you have basic rights, especially in a free country, you have the right to own things. There is actually a list of universal human rights that is widely accepted and it includes the right to own property, not just land, but property (things).

Even kids "own things", they have property. These things were probably bought for them or given to them, but they can look at it and say "mine". And besides siblings, the rest of the world can respect that, "oh, ok that's yours. I get it."

There is something about being able to say "this is mine". As long as it's within the confines of the law, you can do anything you want with it! Possession can give people a sense of satisfaction. If you have worked and saved for something, you know that feeling when you finally get it.

I can use the example in my own home. My daughter has been saving money for a car and in the meantime she has been driving my truck. So as she is driving it, she puts this sparkly air freshener in it, and a sparkly keychain on my keys, she's driving it daily like it's hers. But it's not, it's mine. If I need it I say, "hey where are my keys, I need my truck, you'll have to get a ride from a friend". I didn't have to ask if it was ok....why? Because it's mine. I'm letting her drive it but it's my possession, I have control over who gets it when, no matter the reason.

Recently she bought a car with cash she saved. Now it's hers. Now she put that sparkly air freshener in her car, the sparkly keychain on her keys, this thing has her name on it. She can drive it when she wants. The feeling of taking off in that car is so much greater for her because it's hers, and on top of it all, she worked hard to obtain it, it wasn't just given to her. But it's her car, I can't just say, "hey where are your keys, I need your car, you'll have to get a ride from a friend". If I needed it, I'd have to ask her if I could borrow it.

The point is, we have the right to own things in this country and it's really a basic right that we have. It's a right that is established in the bible even.

Exodus 20:1-2 (HCSB)

1 Then God spoke all these words:

2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

He began with the first four commandments to show us how to love Him and then transitioned to the last six that show us how to love people, which is an extension of loving Him. Have you ever thought about it that way. You show your love for God by loving people!

The eighth commandment is this:

Exodus 20:15 (HCSB)

15 Do not steal.

So again, not unlike the previous couple of commandments, this seems really simple when you take it at face value. So I looked up the Hebrew words because I wanted to be sure. I think you will be surprised....are you ready?

Do not - Hebrew word *lo* (low) - means not, no

Steal - Hebrew word *ganab* (ganav) - means steal

The Hebrew translation is this "No Steal".....I know, mind.....blown!

I mean, I don't know about you, but that really clears things up for me. "Do not steal" is kind of complex, but "No steal"? Clear as a bell.

So what does it mean to steal. It means the same thing in the Hebrew that it means in the English - to take the property of others without permission or right.

God supports the right to personal property. God is not a communist. Many people look to this verse in Acts 2 to say support the idea that we should all share everything we have:

Acts 2:44-45 (HCSB)

44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need.

There is a big difference in this example of the early church and communism. In the early church, full of real, genuine believers, out of their own good will began giving to each other who had needs. We don't know the extent of it, we don't know the prerequisites but I doubt they gave their donkey the guy that blew all his money on wine and gambling on casting lots. They used practical wisdom combined with a spirit filled heart to love one another and care for one another for a common goal, living for Jesus. They decided how much they give and to whom they would give.

In communism everyone gives everything they have not matter if they are rich or poor, hard worker or lazy, generous or stingy, full of love or full of hate. And then someone else gets to hand it out according to their standards of need. That's not the way God's Kingdom works.

God is for private property. There were strong penalties for stealing in the OT. If possible restitution was required, we see repayment of double, 4x, 5x, depending on what was taken and under what circumstances.

How would that affect our society today if you had to pay back that much for theft?

Exodus 20:15 (HCSB)

15 Do not steal.

The first way this commandment is broken is by what you take. This is theft at its most obvious, basic form....stealing other's possessions. This can range from more severe offenses like stealing a car, someone's identity, robbing a bank, to "less" severe things like using work resources or time for personal use, taking some towels from the hotel, or a glass from the restaurant.

When it comes to legal consequences there may be major or minor thefts but to a perfect, holy God, stealing is stealing. Just like lying is lying (there are not white lies).

This is the easy one, unless you are a kleptomaniac and need some professional treatment, don't take stuff that isn't yours. In regards to work, would your boss ok you taking those things or doing that on company time? If not, you need to stop. If you aren't sure, you need to ask, if you are afraid to ask it's probably because you already know the answer, so you should stop it!

There are other ways to break this commandment besides taking physical things. You can also break the command "No steal" by some things that you do.

- paying employees unfairly

James 5:4 (HCSB)

4 Look! The pay that you withheld from the workers who reaped your fields cries out, and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts.

If you are a business owner or manager, pay your people well, treat them right, if you don't you are stealing from them.....And the entire church busts out into Matt Mahr's "And All The People Said Amen".....but before you get too excited:

- not giving a good day's work for your pay,

Colossians 3:23-24 (HCSB)

23 Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.

You should do everything, including work, as though it's something you are doing for Jesus. Work hard, submit to authority, earn your pay, if you don't you are stealing, they don't owe it to you if you aren't doing the work they are paying you to do!

- Doing people wrong, customers, people you buy from, etc.

Proverbs 10:2 (HCSB)

2 Ill-gotten gains do not profit anyone,
but righteousness rescues from death.

This could include a business ripping people off, “looks like when we changed your oil, you also need spark plugs, air filter, new tires, and you should probably get this engine replaced soon, I can do all that today if you’d like” If that’s not all true, it’s stealing.

The same could be said on the customer’s end, if you get too much money back and don’t tell them, if you forgot about the bag of potatoes on the bottom of the cart when you checked out. That’s not blessing, that’s stealing.

- Gossip, slander

Proverbs 25:18 (HCSB)

18 A man giving false testimony against his neighbor
is like a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow.

When you speak against others, tearing them down, whether they “deserve it” or not, can be stealing. You see, you don’t know the whole story, you don’t know what they are going through, you may not know their intentions, maybe even you were a part of the problem. But when you start spreading this stuff to others, you can steal someone’s good name or reputation. Others who know nothing of the situation will begin to view the person as the bum or loser that you painted them to be. Thief!

- Time

Ephesians 5:15-17 (HCSB)

15 Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise— 16 **making the most of the time**, because the days are evil. 17 So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

Not only should you make the most of YOUR time, but also the time of others. Don’t waste people’s time, don’t make people wait on you, this is stealing. They only get 24 hours in a day. I tell people who I meet with for counseling, I have one rule: don’t lie to me, because if you do, you are wasting my time and yours. Don’t steal people’s time, make sure you make the most of yours and theirs.

- Innocence

Mark 9:42 (HCSB)

42 “But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

Jesus said this, and He’s not talking about actual children but true believers who have humbled themselves as little children. Do not cause their downfall by exposing them to something or talking them into doing or saying something they shouldn’t. People think stuff like this is funny, I used to do this before I was saved, but Jesus says it would be better if a bolder were hung around you neck and you were thrown into the sea. Don’t steal people’s innocence.

What you keep -

- taxes owed to the government

Romans 13:7 (HCSB)

7 Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

NO ONE likes taxes. And if you can claim stuff and lower your tax bill, do it! Work the system and claim what you can, pay as little tax as possible. But when it comes down to it, if you cheat or lie and violate the law to avoid paying taxes, you are stealing from the government. I know you worked hard for that money, but you owe it, it’s the law, don’t be a thief!

- Not tithing

Malachi 3:8-12 (HCSB)

8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!”

You ask: “How do we rob You?”

“By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions. 9 You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing Me. 10 Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way,” says the Lord of Hosts. “See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure. 11 I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit,” says the Lord of Hosts. 12 “Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land,” says the Lord of Hosts.

I don’t know who does and does not tithe, what I know is that I do, without fail not because I’m a pastor but because I believe in this biblical principle and I also believe I am a steward of God’s money not an owner of my money.

I don't know anyone that tithes and constantly struggles financially. Now maybe you do, if so I'd love to help you with a budget and a plan. But it's not from a lack of God's provision or blessing. I believe He gives us all that we need and then some, it's up to us to manage it properly.

It is our responsibility to sow into the work of God through His church. I have news for you, God COULD miraculously keep the lights on and water running, provide for church staffs by leaving manna from heaven. But He doesn't.....He uses You and Me.

Luke 16:10 (HCSB)

10 Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is unrighteous in very little is also unrighteous in much.

I believe in this, and that you will reap what you sow.

Psalms 24:1 (HCSB)

1 The earth and everything in it,
the world and its inhabitants,
belong to the Lord;

It may be wise, to give to the Lord what is rightfully His, because your reward will be so much greater.....this doesn't only include finances, but also time, talents, and our very lives.

Ephesians 4:28 (HCSB)

28 The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.

We are required to pursue a life of integrity

“Integrity is the state of being innocent, trustworthy, morally upright and free from dishonesty.”

People steal because they think they don't have enough, or they don't have something they “should” have. They want what they have not earned.

You can steal by taking things that are not yours. You can steal by the things you do. And you can steal by the things that you keep.

It is amazing how hard some people will work at being dishonest. Most people are takers....

WORSHIP TEAM

A taker has the heart of the enemy who steals people's joy, innocence, confidence, purity, clarity, effectiveness, focus, even your life.

A giver has the heart of God who restores joy, innocence, confidence, purity, clarity, effectiveness, focus and newness of life.

Jesus was a giver, gave His life in place of yours. You can't steal forgiveness or salvation, they are things He purchased and offers you free of charge.

I don't know what you've been stealing, or who you've been stealing from. But I know there is hope. I know that there is healing. I know that there is forgiveness and that today can be a new day in your life. Turn to Jesus. Maybe it's Him you've been stealing from by living for this world instead of His kingdom....

Today I ask you to commit to being a giver. Give your life to the one true God, Jesus Christ. The maker of everything that was made. The lover of your soul.