

The Ten Commandments: No Stealing

The 8th Commandment is such a brief, clear statement that everybody understands it, and often Christians think that it is one that they may not have a problem keeping.

It is: categorical – it addresses all/every sort of theft, and it is comprehensive – it is not limited to theft of money or material things, but extends into every area of our lives.

We gain some perspective on how we think about this commandment in a passage from St. Augustine's *Confessions* [read citation from Book 2, parts 4,6]. What we should see from Augustine's experience is that there is a lot more to stealing than the act itself.

Why Is Stealing a Sin Against God?

Philip Ryken helps us by suggesting two ways in which stealing is a sin against God:

1. **Because every theft is a failure to trust His provision for us.**

When we steal what is not ours, we deny God's Providence in our lives.

Part of loving God with all our heart-soul-mind is trusting that He is able to give us everything we need. Stealing is disbelieving God's particular provision for you.

2. **Because stealing robs what God has provided for someone else.**

Stealing violates God's Providence in our neighbor's life

And so, stealing violates both of the "great commandments" – to love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:36-39).

This also raises the very significant point that **the 8th Commandment assumes the legitimate right of private property**. Otherwise, the idea of stealing makes no sense.

Christian discipleship presses these principles a step further – that what God has given us is still His, and we care for them as His stewards; also, what God gives us is to be shared with others (Heidelberg Catechism Q.111). So the 8th Commandment is not just about stealing, but also about stewardship.

The Lies of Our Hearts

Stealing, as with all the Moral Law, is an issue of the heart.

Jesus taught us in Matt. 5-6 that true righteousness is a deep, inward righteousness of the heart, not merely religious externalism/legalism. Every matter of dishonest theft begins in the heart.

A solemn warning: Your heart can lie to you (Jer. 17:9,10). Some of those lies are:

- I'm only taking what I deserve, protecting my own interests
- Nobody will know, and it doesn't hurt anyone else ("victimless crime"?)
- It's just the way business is done; it's not my idea, but it is how I have to work

- It's not technically illegal
- I can compartmentalize this – it won't affect any other area of my life. I can handle it.

We should not think that, if we can sense these issues in our lives, we can simply get some counseling, go to church more, change some of our work habits, and really try hard to be a good person.

If we think that, we have totally missed the point of the 8th Commandment (and all the others).

The commandments are given to: show us an expression of God's perfect character and show us that we cannot live up to these standards – we are unable to keep them.

They are not there to "fix" us – they are there to show us that we can't fix ourselves.

Luke Ch.19 – re: Zaccheus, a notorious thief, extortioner, had become wealthy by his crime.

Sought to see Jesus; Jesus intentionally met with him at his home.

Zaccheus emerges talking about repentance, divesting his wealth, making restitution.

He acknowledged who Jesus was; who he was; trusted Jesus to make him a new man.

"Today salvation has come to this house" – he was transformed from the inside-out.

How could this happen?

Because Jesus continued to Jerusalem, and died on a cross for him – exchanged places with him. He took Zaccheus' sins on Himself and died for a thief (between two other thieves).

It's a picture of all of us – we are thieves, too (and a lot else).

Jesus was on the cross taking my sin, too – and gave me in exchange His righteousness and new life.

Jesus still comes to "seek and save those who are lost," and to transform lawbreakers.