

PM Exodus 20:1-21 "You shall not steal"

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[0 : 00] a moment ago in Exodus chapter 20, if you have your Bibles with you. Now as I say we're coming to look at this 8th commandment of God, 8 out of 10, and we have this 8th commandment in verse 15.

Let me just read these four words, these four simple words again to you. So God says through Moses to the people of God, you shall not steal.

You shall not steal. Now it's always a danger when a preacher makes a supposition from the platform. It could run the risk of somebody saying, well I don't agree with that.

But I think it would be fair to say that everyone knows that stealing is wrong. Even those who don't read the Bible know this.

They know that because every human being has been made in the image of God with a conscience.

[1 : 13] They may suppress that conscience. They may deny the existence of God. But the fact remains that they have been made in God's image with a conscience.

And they know that stealing is wrong. To steal is to take something that does not belong to you.

The Hebrew word used here means to carry something away by stealth. To give a more technical definition, to steal is to appropriate someone else's property unlawfully.

So this law as we're going to, this commandment as we're going to look at it, is all about respecting people's property.

Now by property, it's an old word. I don't mean the house only in which you live, but it does include that. But property is all the assets that you own under God's providence, that God has given to you.

[2 : 33] Everything that you own as an individual. The commandment on the face of it is very simple, isn't it?

Just four words, you shall not steal. But the prohibition and what it includes is very comprehensive in its reach.

Let me just give you at least just five things that it covers. And these are by no way comprehensive of what stealing is. To steal covers burglary.

Burglary is the breaking into somebody's premises to commit theft. It includes robbery.

Taking property from someone by using violence or force. It includes, thirdly, hijacking. Using force to take goods in transit.

[3 : 40] Or even people, as we shall see in a moment. It includes and encompasses shoplifting. Pickpocketing.

Purse snatching. In other words, taking items from somebody else without paying for them. The commandment covers that.

It includes and encompasses, fifthly, embezzlement or extortion. That is getting money from people by using threats or violence again.

Now as I say, most of those five items that I've outlined refer to things. Inanimate objects perhaps. But the commandment extends to people themselves.

We live in a society today where people are stolen. People are trafficked.

[4 : 48] People are kidnapped. From their houses. From their cities. And trafficked by criminal gangs or unscrupulous individuals.

People's liberty is stolen. Their lives are stolen. That's why we have modern slavery laws enshrined by various companies today to try to stop such things.

But people trafficking. People kidnapping. It's no new thing. Listen to the words of Exodus 21 and verse 16.

Envisage thousands of years ago. And listen to what God says about people stealing and people kidnapping. Such is the seriousness of stealing.

Of stealing people. Of taking their liberty away. Of taking people captive. God says anyone who's found doing that shall surely be put to death.

[6 : 23] People's identities are stolen. People's profiles are stolen. People's credit cards are stolen.

Their bank accounts are emptied. Their credit cards are forged. You may have been on the receiving end of some of that.

But it goes further, doesn't it? In our society. Companies steal from individuals. One thinks of a man called Robert Maxwell again in the news quite recently.

Where he seemed to help himself into people's pension funds. Companies steal from individuals. But employees also steal from companies.

Employees fill out their time cards. With false start times and end times. Some people call in sick on Monday.

[7 : 39] When they want a longer weekend than they are entitled. Monday-itis is the euphemism we use for employees stealing time.

Or perhaps they help themselves to company supplies. The list is endless actually.

Stealing is one of the sins that is most recognised as wrong by a great, the greatest number of people. You see, all societies have laws against stealing.

Because you know and I know that you cannot have a workable, peaceful and stable society when stealing is rife and stealing is tolerated.

Well, why is stealing so common we might ask the question? Well, simply because everyone appears to want something for nothing.

[8 : 54] People want to make a fast return. With minimum or no effort at all.

But what is wrong with stealing anyway? After all, it seems everybody is doing it.

People easily justify stealing. What's wrong with taking from a large multinational company is the argument.

Because they won't miss it. It's so small and trivial. Or why should that person be rich and this person be poor?

And so it's justified that we might steal from somebody who's richer than ourselves. And after all, they're making enormous profits.

[9 : 55] So I'm entitled to have some share of that. So why is stealing wrong? Well, like the rest of God's laws, the eighth commandment, thou shall not steal, has a deep spiritual significance.

You see, whenever we take something from somebody else, or whenever we take something that does not belong to us, however we do that, we sin not only against our neighbour, but we are actually sinning against God, as we shall see in a moment.

So let's talk firstly about the meaning of this command. Because it all centres, I submit to you, around two things.

Property and ownership. Property and ownership. Now when it comes to these two things, the Bible teaches what we call stewardship.

Stewardship. Let me explain. That's the first principle, that the Bible teaches what we call stewardship. What do I mean by that? Well, in the communist system of rule, where a communist state operates, the state owns all the property.

[11 : 35] In a capitalist system like we have in the United Kingdom, the individual owns property. You and I own property. We own assets.

The state doesn't own them as, perhaps, in Russia, as a communist state, or China, for example. But when we come to the Bible, the Bible, when it speaks about property and ownership, talks about stewardship.

What do I mean by that? Biblical stewardship means that God owns everything. And therefore, the state and the individual, you and I, are accountable to God for the use of what God has given to us. Or, as we might put it, God has loaned to us. Because everything we have, has been given to us, by God.

And God owns everything. Listen to what the psalmist says, Psalm 24, and verse 1, The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

[12 : 54] So the Bible presupposes that God owns it all. And we are all accountable to Him as to how we manage and control ourselves with what God has given to us.

our possessions. There was a Dutch theologian called Abraham Kuyper, and he says these words with regards to God owning everything.

He said these words, There's not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord of all, does not exclaim, mine.

There is nothing in this universe or in this world that God does not place His hand over and claim, it's mine.

And that leads us to the second principle underlying this commandment, which is that we are to respect other people's property.

[14:16] God owns everything, that is the first principle, and the second principle is that you and I as individuals are to respect other people's property.

God says in Isaiah 61 and verse 8, He says, For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery and iniquity. You see, respect for someone else's property when it comes to stealing means at least two things. It means for you and I, do not take what belongs to somebody else. But secondly, it means do not withhold what rightly belongs to somebody else.

You see, to steal or to thief is also really to fail to trust in God's providing for you.

[15:32] For you. Whenever we take something that does not belong to us, we actually deny that God has given us what we have or that he is able to give us everything that we need.

The Lord Jesus said these words, he says, your heavenly father, God in heaven, knows what you have need of.

he knows what you have need of. My father said to us as children, probably not original, maybe your mother or father or parents said these words to you, probably especially when it came to Christmas, when we were putting in our requests for our presents, my father would say, what you want and what you need are two very different things.

Quite a put down really, quite a put down. But true, what you want and what you need are two very different things.

So, keeping the eighth commandment is a practical exercise of our faith and trust in God and in his providences or his provision for us.

[17:15] And to steal is really, therefore, a slur on his name. So, to steal or to thief is to fail to trust in God's providing for you and I.

But secondly, to steal or to thief is to fail to acknowledge God's providing for others also, our neighbour. It robs them of what God has given them.

So, this commandment calls us to respect the right of private ownership. By saying, by commanding, you shall not steal is indicating that people, you and I, individuals, have a right to private property.

otherwise, the whole concept of stealing would fail to make sense, wouldn't it? Only something that belongs to someone can be stolen from them, but the reason that anything belongs to someone is because it all comes from God anyway.

And we need to respect that distribution of property and of that ownership in our neighbours.

[18:54] And it's when we disrespect people's right to private property and ownership that we steal. we show disrespect to individuals or companies when we steal.

Now, when we begin to understand the mechanics of stealing, when we begin to understand that, that the mechanics of stealing are really an output, it's a behaviour that we exhibit that springs again from our sinful hearts.

We saw that this morning in Commandment 7, didn't we? And it's the same verse that I'm going to point us to this evening, Matthew 15 and verse 19. And the Lord Jesus is speaking again and he says, you know, the real root problem or the real root cause, he does his analysis, in business we call it root cause analysis.

And the Lord Jesus says, the root cause of stealing is because we have a sinful heart. Listen to what he says, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander.

you see, we steal because we have an evil heart. We want more, we feel we are entitled to more than we have been given by a merciful God.

[20:51] We steal because we exhibit envy that's in our heart. what is envy? It is a feeling of discontent, a definition is this, a feeling of discontent or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions or qualities.

we see people, we see companies or individuals, and they have more than we have, and we become envious, and then we say to ourselves, we want what they have.

We are not content with what we have. and so stealing and theft and robbery and extortion and all of those things that we outlined at the front end of the sermon stem from our hearts.

We're envious, we're greedy, we want more than we have. We are not content, we are discontent, with our lot in life.

In contrast to that, the apostle Paul says these words, that godliness with contentment is great gain, is great gain.

[22 : 28] The Lord Jesus said these words, watch out, guard, your heart, guard yourselves against every form of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

sins. You know, the pursuit of wealth, and we all go in for it, don't we? Through any means, including stealing, it's actually like walking towards the horizon.

horizon. Have you ever walked towards the horizon? You see the horizon that's there, and you walk towards it, but you never get there.

It just recedes as you approach, or it's like those railway lines that you see converging away in the distance on the horizon, but actually as you walk along the line, the lines never actually come together.

It's delusional. It's illusional. You never actually arrive, and so it is with the pursuit of wealth, although it doesn't stop us all trying to get rich.

[23 : 56] There's a Scottish band by the name of Travis that has these words in one of its songs. Grass is always greener on the other side. Neighbours got a new car that you want to drive.

Time is running out, and you want to stay alive. You know, the grass is always greener, isn't it, on the other side. But as we approach, it is elusive.

As we gain these things, they never really satisfy us. As we steal, we want to steal more, and more, and more. And the antidote to that envious and greedy attitude that springs from our heart, is to pursue God.

Is to pursue God. It's the only thing that will bring contentment. You know, one essential key to maintaining contentment is to keep a thankful attitude for the good things that God has given us already.

So often when we crave everything, we don't have the time to resort to looking at the things that God has actually already given us.

[25 : 24] When we crave all the things that we don't have, we resort to stealing. And we overlook the blessings that God has given to us right in front of us.

But what does the Bible say then how we should positively respond? As Christians, the Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians said these words to a people who had been outside of Christ, who didn't believe in God, he says to them in chapter 4 and verse 28, he exhorts them, he commands them, he 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.

This is, as it were, the flip side of do not steal. He says, stop stealing, but live like this. And there are three important, positive applications that we can draw from this verse as relates to no longer stealing.

Firstly, the Apostle Paul says, do honest work for an honest wage. We are called, all of us, to work in one way or another.

Work is a good thing, according to the Bible. It's not a necessary evil. The big reason to work is not to get rich or to amass more and more possessions, as we shall see.

[27 : 24] But whether you work at home or at the office, working for a wage or working to maintain a home, we are all called to work hard and to do it to God's glory.

So do honest work. He says, he who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work. So work is a good thing.

Then he says, do something useful. Do something useful with his own hands. make sure, in other words, that the work that you do and that I do provide something good and beneficial and useful to society.

So you may think it's a trivial thing, but for example, you may work hard at supplying drugs to somebody, illegal drugs. You could work hard at that, but that wouldn't be useful.

So the apostle Paul says, you must work, but make sure the job that you do, the employment that you're in, is actually something useful and beneficial to society at large.

[28 : 53] But really, the overriding reason in this verse, to work and not to steal, is so that you may be able to share with others in need.

And so we're back to this idea of stewardship, that everything that we have, the money, the possessions, the assets, our house, our cars, should all be used in the service of God, where we can.

So we work so that we may be able to share what God has given to others who are in need.

Everything that you and I and we have been given, we are to use for God. So instead of refusing to work, for example, and then either stealing or relying on other people to help you with your needs, you should work hard to provide, to provide for your family and for the needs of others.

There may be times when you're unable to work or you're put out of work and I've been there myself and then you will perhaps need the help of others and that's where Christians should come to the fore.

[30 : 28] we should be there to help those in need. But as long as you're able, as long as I am able, we should work so that we may have something to share with those in need.

The bottom line then of this commandment is don't steal from others to take for yourself but rather work so that you may be able to give to others from yourself.

Christian writer Jerry Bridges says these words, three statements he says that are immensely different from one another with our attitude to what we have.

He says what's yours is mine I'll take it. That's the attitude of the thief. What's yours is mine I'll take it.

I'm going to have it. The second thing he says is what's mine is mine I'll keep it. that's the attitude of a selfish person and a selfish Christian.

[31 : 58] It's mine and I'm keeping it. It's the attitude if you think about it that we try to eradicate from our children isn't it when we tell our children if we have them or our grandchildren you need to learn to share but children say it's mine not giving you it's all different when we say what's mine is God's and I'll share it.

That's the attitude should be the attitude of the Christian. John Bunyan an old man from many years ago said these words there was a man we thought him mad the more he gave the more he had.

You know it's possible for us we've been thinking of physically taking things off other people or of companies or of employees or whatever but you know in conclusion I want to say that it's possible to rob God.

there is a whole book in the Old Testament called Malachi given over to the fact that even we as Christians those of us who are Christians we can rob God.

You see we steal when we steal we rob God. when we live selfish lives we rob God.

[33 : 40] We honour God when we steal no more when we work in order to distribute and share what he has given to us by means of the property and the possessions and the ownership that he has given to us.

God says if we give and he expects us to give he promises to bless us.

As Bunyan said there was a man we thought him mad the more he gave the more he had. It's interesting to note isn't it that when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross he died between two thieves two robbers one of those robbers recognised that he had lived a life that was full of sin and he asked for forgiveness perhaps if you're like me you have stolen you've maybe stolen from your employer you've maybe stolen from somebody else perhaps you still thief you justify it you think you have a right to it a bit like the man in the Bible called

Zacchaeus who just kept lots of the tax money that he had and he stole from people the Bible just says stop it steal no more and we need to turn from that if we are in that activity and seek forgiveness and ask Christ to help us he's promised that he will forgive us and that forgiveness can all be all of ours this evening and it's a gift that he offers to us if we will turn from our sin and accept him as God's gift may God help us to be honourable and true and godly and hard working and be known as people who don't steal or thief may it be so for his name's sake we're going to close our service by singing from from to