

OpenTheo

8th Commandment (Part 1)



Ten Commandments - Steve Gregg

This discussion by Steve Gregg delves into the importance of contentment and the dangers of covetousness in relation to the eighth commandment, which pertains to theft. Gregg explains that theft can take many forms, including tax evasion and fraudulent dealings in business, and that small acts of theft should not be taken lightly. He emphasizes the need to trust in God's provision and warns against exploitation of the poor. Overall, the discussion emphasizes the importance of obeying God's commandments and promoting honesty and integrity in all aspects of life.

Transcript

We're getting very near the end of this series, as you can tell. And this commandment is found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 15. Only four words, the very shortest commandment in terms of number of words, but not short on significance or on application to our lives.

The commandment says, Thou shalt not steal. Now, most of us can remember times when we were children that we stole something or another. There's not very many gross sins that I remember getting involved in because I was raised in a Christian home and I found the Lord as a child.

And besides that, I was pretty sheltered and I didn't get involved in a lot of things that my peers got involved with. But even so, I can remember times when I stole a few things. Of course, there weren't very many times, but I remember times when I saw something that I wanted and being a child, not having money and wanting to get it, I decided that I had the right just to take it.

I was quite sure that it wouldn't hurt the store owners any to lose it. I don't know where I thought they got their merchandise. I figured they just made it or something.

I don't know what children think about stores. You know how children are. They say, Boy, I wish we owned a grocery store so that we could eat all that food.

You know, as though grocery stores just grow the food or something. But it never

occurred to me that I was really taking something that was injuring another party. And by the providence and grace of God, I always was caught so that I never made a profession or a career of stealing.

But it did happen a couple of times. And it was embarrassing enough when I got caught that I didn't get any further into it. But unfortunately, some people have not been so blessed to have been caught and have developed little patterns, little habits of embezzlement, of stealing, of taking whatever their eyes want.

And this is basically what the first sin in the Garden of Eden involved. There was only one thing that didn't belong to Adam and Eve, and that was the tree, the fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Everything else in the garden belonged to them.

But that tree belonged only to God. It was the only thing they were told they couldn't have. And yet, Eve, we're told in Genesis chapter 3, saw that the fruit was good to be eaten, that it was to be desired to make one wise, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and she took it.

And she ate it and gave it to her husband with her, and he ate it. And that was the beginning of all of our problems. Taking what one thought was theirs.

You know, we are so self-centered that our consciences find it easy to justify taking a little bit of this or that that belongs to someone else, as long as we want it, and as long as we're sure it won't hurt them very much. And I suppose with that kind of rationale, we can go into bank robbery because banks really won't suffer much by it, they're insured. And we could justify just about any kind of theft there is.

Burglary, anything, because we're quite sure that no one will be hurt by it. But what we fail to realize is that the person being hurt by it is us because we're putting ourselves on the judgment side of God's dealings. And God has said that He's going to judge theft.

Now, most of us probably have never robbed a bank, and probably the majority of you have never been burglars in the sense that some of my friends have been burglars who broke into houses and stole things for a living. And yet there are many ways in which we are tempted to, and often do, become guilty of stealing. This is one of the ten things that God said that we are not to do, and that is to steal.

The very command implies the validity of the principle of personal property, doesn't it? You know, we live in a sort of a communal fashion here at the community. We don't have a common purse as some communities do, but more or less we try to have a communal spirit. Nonetheless, regardless of what Christians do in terms of wanting to live communally and share what they have, there is no violation of the principle that the Bible establishes in terms of personal ownership, or as Christians would understand it, personal stewardship.

That in the Old Testament, if you took what was not yours, you were wrong because you were taking what belonged to another person, implying that it was right for that person to own things that were not yours. Now, it's true that in the early church, the people, the Christians, sold all their possessions, laid the money at the apostles' feet, and the distribution was made according as every had need, and so that none lacked anything. And those who had gathered much had no extra, and those who gathered little had no lack.

And it was a beautiful situation, I'm sure. And I've seen other communal situations like that. But even so, these acts of giving what they had to the communal common purse were always voluntary because they did not violate the principle of personal property.

To define theft the way that the civil courts define it, stealing is the laying on of hands, ultimately, of things that belong to others in an unjust way. That is, laying hands unjustly on another person's property, or their rights, really, invading another person's rights, usually by the use of force or fraud. And there are many ways in which we may do this without thinking ourselves to be thieves.

And I'd like to examine tonight from the Scripture and just show that the Scriptures give a great variety of ways in which a person may become guilty of thievery or of stealing. And yet, many people do these things and don't think very often about themselves as thieves. But before we talk about the examples of ways that we steal, I'd like to talk about what the cause of theft is, what's really at the root of it.

The Apostle Paul said, the love of money is the root of all evil. The love of money is the root of all evil. That is, covetousness, greed.

All evil can be traced back to covetousness in one way or another. Now, that doesn't mean that every incidence of evil, that every evil act was motivated by covetousness. For instance, not every act of murder was motivated by covetousness.

It might have been, in some cases, revenge or rage or some other thing. Nonetheless, covetousness has sometimes led to murder. Therefore, it is at the root of that kind of evil, too.

Not every act of adultery has had anything to do with covetousness as its motive. Many times, it's just raw lust. Nonetheless, there are times when love of money has led people into adultery, prostitution and such, so that the love of money can be at the root of that kind of evil also.

In fact, just about any commandment you want to name can be violated by the love of money, as we'll see when we get to the 10th commandment, thou shalt not covet. But covetousness, that is, greed, is at the root of stealing, desiring what you don't have. It's the absence of contentment.

It says in the 13th chapter of Hebrews that we are to be content with such things as we have. And the reason for that is that we have God with us, as it says, it goes on in the same passage, say, because God has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Therefore, we may confidently say the Lord is my helper and I shall not fear what men shall do unto me.

We can be content with what we have because we have the Lord. And if we had nothing else, we would be the most privileged and wealthy people in the world just by having him. And the person who has a billion dollars is poor if he doesn't have Jesus.

And therefore, we can be content with the things that we have. It may be that we don't have a lot of material things, but we are not justified in being discontent or coveting what is not ours. And covetousness is always at the root of stealing.

Obviously, it's the desire to possess something that you don't have and apparently don't deserve to have, something for which you have not worked or paid and which was not given to you out of the generosity of its former owner. That's what stealing is. And so you can see that covetousness is at the root of it.

There is a man in the Old Testament named Achan. He's mentioned in the book of Joshua, the seventh chapter. When Joshua and the children of Israel broke into Jericho, actually the walls tumbled down of their own accord and the armies raced over them and conquered the city.

God had made a command that none of the possessions of the people of Jericho were to be taken by the Jews, that they were to be left, that they were to be set aside, consecrated to the Lord. But a man named Achan, who is one of the soldiers who went into Jericho, he saw there a certain garment that was very expensive from Babylon. And he saw also a wedge of gold in one of the houses.

And he lusted after those things. He coveted them and he took them and he hid them in his tent. And because of that, the next time the Jews went to battle, they lost.

Thirty-six people were killed. And they couldn't figure out why, because God had promised to be with them. And they couldn't figure out why they lost that battle.

When Joshua sought the Lord, he said, it's because there's sin in the camp. And through divine guidance, the man Achan's sin was brought to the light. And the man himself was put to death for his action.

But it's because of covetousness that he came into this state. He saw something that was not his. It was rightly the Lord's.

It was to be consecrated unto God, but he took it anyway. And his covetousness became his doom. There's a man, another man in the scripture.

Who wrote the 30th chapter of Proverbs. Not all of the Proverbs were written by Solomon. Chapter 30 was written by a man named Agur.

And this man, Agur, said this in Proverbs 30, verses 7 through 9. He said, two things have I required of thee. Deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies and give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food convenient for me. Lest I be full and deny thee and say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain. Now, this man didn't have control over his covetousness.

That's obvious. He said he didn't want to be rich or poor because if he were rich, he might tend to think himself independent of God. He might say, well, who is the Lord? Who needs God? I've got money.

On the other hand, he said, if I were poor, I might be tempted to steal. And if I would do that, I would be taking the name of my God in vain. And he means by that, that because the name of the Lord was associated with the Jews, that if a Jew did something that dishonored the Lord, it would be taking his name in vain because the Lord's name was upon them.

Just like the Lord's name is upon us as Christians, we bear the name of Christ upon us. And when we do not act like Christ or like Christians, we are taking that name empty or in vain. And he's saying, if I would be poor, I might steal and take the name of the Lord, my God, in vain.

Now, you might say, well, that man was very wise. That man was very generous not to want to be rich or to be poor. But in fact, he was a big he had a big problem.

And that was a problem with not being able to handle his covetousness. A righteous man, even if he's poor, won't steal. But a man who has trouble with covetousness will steal when he's poor and sometimes will even steal when he's rich.

Some people steal when they don't need anything. They're kleptomaniacs and psychiatrists would call that a sickness. The Bible calls that sin.

And while a psychiatrist might take a lot of money from you to tell you how to get over your kleptomania, I can do it for free. Repent. Because stealing is a sin.

And if you can't stop, you need to ask God for the grace, because the Bible says there is no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. And God is faithful who with the temptation provide a means of escape that you might be able to endure it. So if you're a Christian, there is no excuse for stealing, even though psychiatrists often try to make excuses for all kinds of aberrant immoral behavior.

The Bible makes no excuses. It's sin. It must be repented of.

Covetousness is the problem. This man, Agger, said, if I'm rich, I can't handle it. If I'm poor, I can't handle it.

Therefore, just make me middle class. How different he was from the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians chapter 3 or chapter 4, he said, I have learned whatsoever state I'm in therewith to be content.

I can be full or I can be empty. He said, I can be abased or I can abound. I'm content in any case.

He could be rich without saying, oh, who's the Lord? Who needs God? He could be poor without stealing because his heart was under control. He wasn't covetous. And theft always has covetousness at its root.

And Christians, covetousness is one of your greatest enemies. Covetousness is the desire to possess. And I'll tell you something.

Our society instills it in us. If you were born in India or some other country where food was hard to come by and any other luxuries were, you might still be covetous. Poor people can be covetous just like rich people can be.

However, I suppose that a person in those countries would not tend to entertain covetousness because of the impossibility of satisfying it. However, in our country, we make covetousness a way of life because most of us have ways of satisfying it. If we see a new car that's beyond our power to purchase or a new house or a new gadget of some kind that appeals to our eye, new furniture, and we can't really afford it.

Nonetheless, because of our affluent society, we can arrange something. We can get a loan. We can we can work out terms.

We can do something and we can live beyond our means. And this ability has encouraged us to desire things that we don't have because we can actually get them so often. And it's a dangerous thing.

Jesus said in Luke chapter 12, take heed and beware of covetousness for a man's life consists, if not in the abundance of the things that he possesses. And to desire what you do not have is to sin. Do you know that that's coveting? It's the violation of the 10th commandment.

It's also the thing that Jesus said to beware of. Now, it's a different story if your car is falling apart and you have enough money to buy a new car and you feel like God wants you to have a better car. You can serve him better in a new car and go out and buy it.

But that's something other than covetousness motivating you. That's whatsoever you do

in word or deed, you're supposed to do all to the glory of God. That includes buying shoes, buying food, buying homes.

Whatever you do, you're supposed to do it for the glory of God, not just to satisfy an ego thing. Keeping up with the Joneses and not just to satisfy the itch of covetousness which torments us in our society. Do you know our society teaches us to be covetous? I won't ask for a show of hands, but I'll bet most of you have a television set.

And the reason that television sets are available and exist, and the reason there's programming is to inspire covetousness. Now you might say, what an irresponsible, simplistic statement that is. But that's the truth.

The reason television exists is to inspire covetousness. Because the purpose of television programming is to keep you watching between commercials. The commercials are there to make you dissatisfied with what you have so that you'll buy what the advertiser wants you to buy.

And they use every kind of psychological device they can imagine and they have all kinds of professional psychologists on their advertising committees to find out what'll make you lust after something you don't have. And the whole reason television exists is because of commercials. And commercials exist to make you covetous.

So when you watch television, you are inviting temptation toward covetousness. Now maybe you can handle it. Some people can, some can't.

But I'm simply saying that we live in a society that encourages us to be covetous. And some of the household things that we have that we don't even think twice about, we don't even consider them sinister in any way, they are there to make sure that the root of all evil is firmly planted and grounded in our lives and in our homes. And when covetousness is there, then some form or another of stealing is likely to arise.

Not necessarily overt theft of, you know, walking into someone else's house and taking their jewelry or their silverware. But other little ways, and we'll talk about some of those. But covetousness is certainly at the root of all stealing.

There's something else that's at the root of stealing so often, and that is distrust for God's providence. A man who steals because he's poor is not trusting God to provide for him. Now I'm not saying that if he trusted God he wouldn't be poor.

Jesus trusted God and Jesus was poor. The apostles trusted God, they were all poor. I trust God and I'm poor.

And trusting God doesn't mean you won't be poor, but it means you won't starve. David said, I have been young and now I'm old, but I have not yet seen the righteous forsaken, neither his seed begging bread. The Bible says, the young lions do lack and suffer

hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

Paul said in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 19 or 17, he said, and my God shall supply all thy need. I think it's actually verse 9, come to think of it. My God shall supply all thy need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

God will not allow the righteous to be forsaken or his seed to be left begging bread. Yet it's lack of trust in God's provision that leads people to fudge on their income tax. We can't really afford to pay this much.

We can find ways to justify this little cut here or there. And because we don't really believe God can meet all our needs, we find ways of dishonestly providing for ourselves. And generally speaking, besides covetousness, distrust of God is at the root of stealing.

And a third thing is involved in stealing, of course, and that's the devil. Seduction from the enemy. There's something attractive about that which is not ours.

It's such a cliché that it's almost silly to even repeat it, but everyone's heard the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. And yet that's the very principle. The Bible puts it a different way.

In the ninth chapter of Proverbs, in verse 17, it says stolen waters are sweet. And bread eaten in secret. Is pleasant.

Now, in that case, it's talking specifically about illicit sex, but the principle is what the devil says. Basically, in that proverb, it's a quotation from the harlot trying to seduce a man to come in, saying stolen waters are sweet. What's she saying? She's saying there's something desirable about that which is not legal.

There's something appealing about that which we've been denied. That's why Adam and Eve sinned. They didn't lack food.

There was no shortage of variety of fruit in the Garden of Eden. What was so attractive about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that it was forbidden. And the devil took advantage of that.

He knows that stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. And so he seduces. It says concerning Ananias and Sapphira.

You remember them in Acts, chapter five, when all the Christians were selling their possessions and bringing them the prophets to the apostles to distribute among the poor. There was a couple, a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira, and they sold some property like everyone else did. But instead of bringing all the proceeds to the apostles feet, they brought some of them and pretended they were bringing it all.

But some of it they held aside for themselves. And Peter said to them, because he knew

by the Holy Spirit what had happened in Acts, five, three, Peter said, Ananias, why have Satan filled by heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to hold back part of the proceeds of your land? This act of theft, he said, was due to the fact that Satan had filled the man's heart. It's a frightening thing.

The Bible says that Judas was a thief. It also says that Satan entered into him. It's very clear that theft, besides being motivated by evil desires, covetousness, by distrust of God, it's also an invitation or a means of cooperating with the devil.

The devil offers us what is not ours. He seduces us. He draws us.

He tempts us. When we succumb, we, like Judas, invite the devil in. The devil is the author of theft.

Jesus said that. Jesus said in John chapter eight and verse forty four, the devil was a thief from the beginning, a thief and a murderer. And so you can see that the devil is behind it, too.

So you and the devil work together whenever there's sin, it says in James chapter one. Let no man say when he is tempted, I'm tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed.

Then when lust have conceived, it bringeth forth sin and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. A man is tempted when he's drawn away by his own lusts. The lust of the eyes is covetousness and he's enticed.

That means there's someone enticing him. The devil is holding out some bait, enticing that man and his own flesh, his own lusts, his own covetousness reaches out and accepts that. And that is what's at the root.

That's the cause of stealing, covetousness, distrust for God's providence and the seduction of the devil. Those things are all involved. Now, one thing we want to know from the beginning, or I suppose would be well advised to know, is that God has committed himself to judge thefts.

God has made it very clear that he will judge thefts. If you'd like to look at Zechariah, which is one of the last books in the Old Testament, second to the last. And chapter five, the first three verses.

It's one of the strange visions that Zechariah had. He had ten of them in one night, a rather bad night. Didn't get much sleep.

A good night in another sense, but the visions were a bit hard to understand, as you'll see. But this one is in Zechariah five, verses one through three, says, Then I turned and

looked up mine eyes, lifted up mine eyes and looked and behold a flying roll or a scroll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll.

The length thereof is 20 cubits and the breadth of it 10 cubits. That means it was 15 feet by 30 feet long flying through the air. Big roll.

And it says, Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth. For everyone that stealeth shall be cut off. As on this side, according to it, and everyone that swears shall be cut off on that side, according to it.

Now, I won't say that's easy to understand. But one thing is very easy to understand from this is that there is a curse that God has promised to put upon those who steal. Everyone that steal it.

This curse will enter into his house, as it says in verse four, I will bring it forth, sayeth the Lord of hosts. And it shall enter into the house of the thief and into the house of him that swear falsely by my name. And it shall remain in the midst of his house and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

So there's destruction declared and judgment upon theft. You know, in the Old Testament, we have various penalties. Described that must be given to a person who is a thief.

And you can learn a lot about God's attitude towards something by the penalties that he subscribes to be inflicted upon those who commit those things. And there were different situations. Sometimes, of course, a thief after he'd stolen would feel bad about it and want to bring back what he'd taken.

And he wouldn't be caught, but he just want to give it back. And there was a law about that. He couldn't just give it back.

There was a penalty as well. But it was a very different penalty than if he was caught without having repented. And we can take a look at the scriptures just a little bit here to see exactly what the different penalties were in Leviticus, chapter six.

We have, first of all, a listing of different kinds of ways in which theft can be committed. And then it tells what the penalty is to a person who steals and wants to give it back. It says in Leviticus six, one through five.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, if a soul sin and commit a trespass against the Lord and lie unto his neighbor in that which was delivered to him to keep. That is, if something was left in his charge and he steals it and lies about it and says it was stolen, but keeps it himself or in fellowship or in a thing taken away by violence or has deceived his neighbor or have found that which was lost and lieth concerning it and sweareth falsely. And any of that of all these that a man doeth sin if they're in, then it shall be

because he has sinned and is guilty that he shall restore that which he took violently away or the thing which he has deceitfully gotten or that which was delivered to him to keep or the last thing which he found or all that about or all that about which he has sworn falsely.

He shall even restore it in the principle and add 20 percent more thereto or a fifth part and give it unto him to whom it appertained in the day of his trespass offering. Now, that is when this thief repents and he says, OK, I don't want to be a thief. He comes to the temple and offers an offering to cover his sin, but he also has to give back what he took.

Of course, he can't just keep it and say, well, I repent, but keep the goods. He had to give it back, but he had to give 20 percent interest to. Which is fairly steep, but not as bad as if he was caught, as you'll see if you look at Exodus chapter 22.

If a thief was caught and he hadn't brought the thing back himself, it cost him a great deal more than 20 percent penalty. It says in chapter 22 of Exodus. Verses one through four, if a man shall steal an ox or a sheep and kill it or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

If a thief be found breaking in and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. That is, he won't be avenged if he's killed breaking into the house. That is, during the nighttime.

But if the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him, for he should make full restitution if he have nothing. Then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be an ox or an ass or a sheep, he shall restore double.

Now, you can see that much of the thieving that went on in those days was of livestock because that was a man's principal wealth. There weren't many people who had stereos in those days and big cars and things of value like that. And the average person didn't have a lot of jewelry or valuables of that kind.

A man's wealth was usually his land and his livestock. And that was about it. And since someone couldn't steal the land very easily, they would more often steal livestock.

Now, by the way, I say they couldn't steal land easily, but it was possible to steal land. And the law made provision or commanded that that not be done to the land. The law said, do not move the ancient landmarks.

And what that means is when Joshua brought the people of Israel into into Palestine, every family got their own division of land and certain landmarks were put up. And God made a severe law saying, do not move the ancient landmarks. Cursed be anyone that moves the ancient landmarks, meaning, you know, if you take the landmark and move it over a little bit so you get more land and your neighbor gets less.

So it was possible even to steal your neighbor's land because they didn't have the sophisticated ways of surveying property. It might never be discovered if you'd done that. But stealing livestock is the example that's given if a man stole an ox or a sheep and he was caught.

But by this time it had died or had been stolen from him or somehow he was unable to restore it. He had to restore four or five times as much. Now, that's really steep penalty.

Four or five times as much. However, if he was caught and the thing was still alive, he was better off. If he stole and if he was going to get caught, he better pray that it didn't die first, because if he got caught with it alive, he'd have to restore it and one other like it.

Restore double. But if the thing was dead, he'd have to restore four or five times as much. So you can see the penalties were pretty stiff.

There is one kind of theft for which the penalty was death. But only one kind that I know of in the scripture that's found in Exodus 21. In verse 16, it says he that stealeth a man and selleth him or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

Kidnapping, stealing a human being was a capital crime. In Deuteronomy, chapter 24 and verse seven, it says, if a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel and make of merchandise of him or sell of him, then that thief shall die and thou shalt put the evil away from among you. The penalty for kidnapping or man stealing was death.

Now, it might seem a little bit archaic and a little bit out of touch with our society to talk about stealing a person and selling them, because we don't have slavery here. In those days, they did. And so a person could actually kidnap someone from a city and take them to another city and sell them for a slave to make money.

Again, covetousness would be the motive. We don't have that happening very much. We don't have slavery or do we? I was reading an article in the recent issue of Cornerstone recently about the missing children, how that between one and a half and two million children are reported missing, just disappear every year in this country, of which over 50,000 are never found or accounted for.

Little children who are just stolen. And, of course, a lot of these children are used sexually by their abductors, some of them, actually the smaller percentage of them. Ransoms are required for them.

Many of them, the parents never hear anything, no ransom note or anything. The children are often sold to porno producers. And so man stealing is really something that still goes on in our society.

It's little people they steal. And the capital punishment of the Old Testament is just as just today as it ever was. You know, in our country, there wasn't even capital punishment for kidnapping until, was it Lindbergh's son was kidnapped? The guy who flew the Spirit of St. Louis.

I believe in our country there wasn't capital punishment for kidnapping until his son was kidnapped. And I believe he paid a ransom and his son was killed anyway. But at that point, I guess the nation was in an uproar and they passed capital punishment for kidnapping.

I don't know if it stopped it from happening anymore because capital punishment doesn't always deter. But it is a just penalty for kidnapping. And God is infuriated at this kind of action.

But all stealing is sin and all of it is going to come under the curse and judgment of God. In the book of Revelation, in chapter nine, a description of the great evils that God sends his judgment on the earth for is given. And in chapter nine, it's that chapter that tells about the locusts coming out of the bottomless pit with the tails like scorpions and their sting.

And they torment the people on the earth and so forth. And then it talks about other great judgments and plagues that God sends because of men's sins. And yet it says in chapter 20, chapter nine, verses 20 and 21.

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils and idols of gold and silver and brass and stone and of wood, neither which can neither see nor hear nor walk. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts. These five things are clearly the things that enraged God sufficiently to send these horrible plagues.

Five things, idolatry mentioned in verse 20 and then the other four in verse 21, murders, sorceries, fornication and thefts. It's interesting that theft would be listed with those things. In some people's mind, theft seems so much less.

If you committed adultery, you'd feel pretty bad or murder, you'd feel horrible. But we often are guilty of theft in small ways without feeling the slightest tinge of conscience. And that's why we need to examine it closely so that we might know when we are guilty of doing this.

Let me talk a little bit about the various ways in which stealing can be done. I'm not going to tell you how to do it. I'm going to tell you basically the ways that it is being done, often by Christians.

One way that stealing is done is through embezzling. There's a lot of embezzling. Usually

this is done by employees taking things from their employer.

It can be done in a sophisticated manner, manipulating computers or by a bookkeeper hoping that his books will never be audited. Or it may be done by the average employee who just kind of takes what isn't his. Takes extra pencils and paperclips and things home with him.

Small things, things that of course don't matter, so he thinks. Yet things which he would have to purchase for himself if he didn't take them home from the office. So therefore it is technically stealing.

It's something that the boss is going to have to buy more of because you took some home. And it is stealing. It's just as much a violation of the commandment as a larger theft is.

Petty theft is a name that the courts give it if it's a small enough amount. But there's no such thing as petty theft as far as God is concerned. All theft is a violation of the commandment.

It says in James chapter 2, Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. Because he that said thou shalt not kill said also thou shalt not commit adultery. Now if thou commit no adultery and yet if thou kill thou become a transgressor of the law, James says.

That if you keep all the law and yet break in the smallest point, you break the whole law. Because you're violating God. You're not just violating man, you're violating God.

And to violate God is not a small matter even if you do it in a small way. The very fact that you do it at all means that you are willing to fly in the face of God's decreed laws. And of his principles of justice.

And stealing, of course, flies in the face of God's character of his justice. Because it is always unjust to take what someone else owns and what they have earned or what they have bought. Or perhaps even what they've stolen.

In the story of, in that old story about the 40 thieves. Alibaba and the 40 thieves was it? He found the stolen treasure of these 40 thieves. And he justified his stealing it from them because they had stolen it from someone else.

But it's just as much a theft to take stolen goods. After all, if they're thieves, once you've impoverished them, they'll have to go out and steal some more to satisfy their lusts. You're just contributing to it.

If you receive stolen property, you're an accomplice. If you buy something that you know is stolen. Or accept something from the hand of someone that you know is stolen.

That's being involved. It's encouraging them, it's giving them a reason to keep doing it. And therefore, it's being an accessory to the crime.

Embezzling though takes place in very small ways, but constantly by employees. And you can embezzle your boss's time too. After all, he's paying you by the hour so often.

A lot of people aren't paid by the hour, but many people are. And before the days of labor unions, I guess it was common for employers to exploit employees. To not give them a fair day's wage for a hard day's work.

But thanks to labor unions, this isn't permitted anymore. But now, it's very rare for an employer to get a fair day's work for a fair day's wage. My father-in-law is an employer.

And he says that he hasn't had an employee in many years that's put in six hours of work in an eight hour day. Because they always find ways to spend more time at the coffee break or to sit around the desk and tap their pencil on the top of the desk. And act like they're thinking about something or to involve themselves in conversation.

Or find another reason to walk to the bathroom or some other reason to avoid putting in a full day's work. And this is stealing. This is embezzling.

If you're being paid by the hour, then you need to put in an hour's work as you would for the Lord. Colossians talks about that in Colossians chapter 3. And it's definitely not permitted among Christians. Christians, by the way, should be the best workers on the job.

They should be the ones that the boss wishes there were more of. I've known Christians, actually, who thought they were being spiritual by taking extended coffee breaks to read their Bibles. But, of course, it's more spiritual to be obedient.

It's better to obey than to sacrifice. Spiritual, I should say, religious things like Bible reading during work time is not necessarily spiritual. If you're violating the commands of God.

And that's exactly what you're doing if you're taking time or possessions from your employer that don't belong to you. It's embezzling. Writing to servants, which in a certain measure correspond to modern employees.

In Colossians chapter 3 and verse 22 and following, Paul says, Servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done.

And there is no respect of persons. Now, this is saying that if you're a servant of someone else, if you're an employee under someone else's pay. Then you should serve them not with eye service, but out of a fear of God.

Eye service means when they're looking. When the boss is looking, you always try to look busy. When you work at these fast food restaurants, you know, there's rush periods and there's slow periods.

And it's always I know I used to work at one when I was younger, and it's always kind of nerve wracking during a slow period when the boss is around because it's so hard to look busy. And, you know, you always kind of just walk across the room and act like you're doing something because you don't want to look like you're just standing around collecting money. Collecting paycheck for just standing around.

I suppose the employer understands that during slow times, there's not as much to do. But I've known employees in situations like that who always found something productive really to do something that really needed done. Going out cleaning the bathroom or washing the windows or doing something like that, which I would have never thought of doing, to tell you the truth.

But because they were industrious people and because they were drawing pay for every minute that they were there, they wanted to use every minute in a way that was fair to their employer. And that's a wise thing, but many of the employees would just sit around drinking Coca-Cola until the boss came in and then they'd start looking busy. That's what eye service is.

Paul says, don't serve with eye service, pleasing men, but do it fearing God, knowing that you are serving the Lord, not serving your boss. Do it heartily as unto the Lord, whatever you do. Because, of course, the Lord's always watching and He's the one that you're going to answer to.

And if He puts you in a certain employment, it's because He wants you to work there. And He wants you to be a just person and not involve yourself in the compromises that worldly people do, which really amount to theft. A violation of the Eighth Commandment.

And many Christians have been guilty, I suppose I've been guilty too, of embezzling minutes or hours from an employer. I've never embezzled money directly out of a till, but I can look back and see times when I wasn't busy, when there were things that I could have been doing, but the reason was it was convenient not to be at the time. And that's very often, well, our laziness inclines us to find every excuse not to be doing some work.

But if we're drawing a paycheck from someone, we should be giving them the kind of work that we would want them to give us if we were paying them. That's what Jesus said, remember? So embezzling is one form of stealing that goes on a great deal in our

society. There is another way in which stealing can be done, and that's through dishonest business practices, including false advertising.

In Leviticus chapter 19, I think it is. Leviticus chapter 19, verses 35 and 36. It says, you shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meat or in weight or in measure.

Just balances, just weights, a just ephah and a just hin shall ye have. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Now, what's that talking about? A just ephah, a just hin, a just weight, a just balance.

What he's talking about there is a hin and an ephah were measurements. In the marketplace, before they had coins of specific value, they would weigh money. They'd weigh, you know, a certain weight of gold or silver in exchange for merchandise.

So the merchant would have scales, he'd have balances, and he would have weights. And so he'd say, OK, this bag of grain costs this certain amount. An ephah of, let's say, well, barter, an ephah of oats I'll give you for a hin of oil or something like that.

Those were measurements. But he would have corrupt. He would have corrupt.

He would have wrong measurements. He'd have two sets of weights. He'd have one set of weights that was true, just in case he was being checked out by an officer.

But he'd have another set of weights that were lighter. And whenever he wanted to take advantage of someone and he was weighing out something for them, he put his lighter weights on. It would be like the guy working at the butcher shop today who puts his finger on the scale when he's weighing your meat, you know, so that you think you're getting more than you really are.

And so he would say, you know, in this passage, you must have a just. That means a fair and a true measure and a true weight, which essentially is just saying you must not have any unjust business practices or ways of getting or giving people less than they think they're getting. And that's why I said that false advertising falls under this category, because false advertising is the attempt to make people think they're getting what they're not getting.

In the Proverbs, it says, it is nothing. It is nothing, saith the buyer. And what's that talking about? It's talking about when you go to the flea market.

And you're haggling over the price of something, you're saying, oh, that thing, that's not worth anything. I'll give you you want ten dollars for it. Forget it's not worth two.

OK, I'll give you three, you know, and you say it's nothing. You talk about how it's worthless because you want to pay little for it. But it says that when he goes his way, he boasts about the deal he got, you know.

And the idea here is that the buyer can sometimes be in the position of misrepresenting the value of a thing, too. The buyer or the seller can have the unjust balance, the unjust weight, the deception on his part. And the Bible indicates that we should be very just people.

If someone says they'll give you something or, you know, if you're selling something or buying something, you should be willing to pay a fair price and not try to cause someone to go down below what they're asking, unless you know for sure that they're not firm on their price. But, you know, we can often get people to go down on a price, even though they really need the price they were asking. But they're so desperate for money, they'll take less, but it'll hurt them.

And I believe that if we see something to be worth something, we should pay what it's worth. And you might say, well, the seller doesn't need the money. He's rich.

Well, maybe in many cases they are. But the point is, it won't hurt you to do the just thing. It'll hurt you a lot more to do the unjust thing.

Only covetousness would make you try to get a better deal than you need to get, in the sense that, you know, selling something for more than it's worth or trying to buy something for less than it's really worth. Now, some people call that good stewardship. But that's just a justification for covetousness and for unjust dealings.

Now, if someone offers something at less value than it's worth, and you let them know that it's worth more, and they sell it to you for that. Anyway, my father is a comic book collector. He collects rare comic books.

And he'll go to a garage sale, and there'll be people there who have, you know, 50 old comic books laying around. They'll sell the whole lot for \$2. He'll look through, and some of the individual comic books, if they're original Superman number twos or something like that, are worth lots of money.

And he can get the whole batch for \$2. And there's been times when he's actually bought hundreds of dollars worth of comic books, as far as the book value of them, for just a pittance in something like a garage sale. But he always, I believe, tells the person who signs, these books are worth more than you're asking.

This book here is worth, you know, so much in itself. But a lot of times the seller doesn't care. I mean, they're not planning to sell it through the comic book market, so they're willing to take what they're asking.

And there's nothing wrong with getting a good deal if the seller knows what's happening. But it's when you're trying to misrepresent a situation, where you're trying to fraudulently get something that's really worth more. And you're really taking advantage of the ignorance of the seller.

That is stealing too. So unjust business practices. And there are many sophisticated unjust business practices in big business today.

But I don't know what they are because I've never been involved in big business. Any of you who may be involved know exactly what they are. I don't.

I hope to never learn. But the fact is that a great deal of stealing goes on in the name of business, and usually just through fraudulent dealings. Another way that stealing is done in our society is through usury.

Usury in modern English means charging exorbitant interest on a loan. In the Bible, the word usury simply meant interest. All interest was usury.

In the Bible, the Jews were forbidden to charge usury on a loan to their brethren. And there's many passages that make reference to it. You might want to look them up on your own.

I don't have time to look at them all. Leviticus 25, verses 35 through 38 is one of them. Another one of them is Deuteronomy 23, 20.

And there are others. But in Proverbs 28, 8, usury is referred to as unjust gain. Which, of course, is another word for stealing.

To gain something unjustly is stealing. But in Proverbs 28, 8, it says, He that by usury, which means charging interest, and unjust gain, increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor. And what that means is the man who uses unjust means of getting rich, God will turn it around and give that money.

He'll take it from that man and give it to someone else who will show generosity to the poor. But it does say there, it equates usury with unjust gain. That is, it's not a just or a fair way of making money.

Using money to make money is just man's device to try to get around the effects of the curse. Because man stole in the Garden of Eden, he stole fruit that didn't belong to him. God said from now on, you're going to have to eat what you work for.

In the sweat of your face, you'll have to toil the ground to eat your bread. In other words, you won't be able to steal anymore. You won't have time.

You'll be occupied too much trying to make your own living. You're going to have to work for your living now. And that was the curse that God put on man, because man couldn't afford to have enough luxury to wander through the Garden, being tempted by things that weren't his.

He didn't have enough self-control. So God gave him something he needed, a productive way to use his time, to keep his hands busy in a productive way. And so God ordained

work to provide for man's needs.

And since the time of Adam to the present day, people have been looking for all kinds of ways to avoid the effects of that curse, to not work and still eat. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3, those who don't work should not eat. So Paul was indicating that the curse still is binding upon Christians.

Christians still have to work if they want to eat, Paul said. So they have to work. But charging interest is a way of making money without working.

It's making money work for you. Those who have money can make money, they say. And so they take money and they lend it and they get back interest.

And if they have enough money, they can put it in a T-bill or in 10 T-bills or however much money they have, then they never have to work again. They can just live on usury because the bank pays them usury, pays them interest. And they can't do anything else.

Now, I might want to qualify this because some people get singed a little by this statement. And I want to qualify it so that you understand what I think the Bible teaches about this. I'm not sure that all interest in all cases is bad in all degrees.

The Bible forbids the giving of loans at interest to the poor because it was the tendency of the rich to exploit the poor that way. The poor would be in a desperate situation. So the rich man would come out and say, oh, I'll help you out.

I'll give you so much money, but you have to pay me back twice as much. And it was just a way of keeping the poor poor. And I don't know of any case in the Bible where usury is talked about, where it's talking about anything other than that.

Usury was a way that the rich used to exploit the poor. Now, it's true that when the bank pays you interest or when people invest money for business reasons or something, it's not usually anything related with exploiting poor people. In fact, if anything, the banks are more than willing to pay you interest because they charge more interest when they loan your money out to someone else.

So maybe and I'm just saying maybe some of the principles that were involved in the forbidding of usury in the Old Testament don't apply to every case of usury, because there are some different situations that are where the principles are different. But the point remains that God desires for us not to try to make money work for us, but to work for our money. And that's why He says, those who work for their money, those who don't work should not eat.

And it's not wrong to wisely invest money. In fact, in the parable of the talents, Jesus said that the man who invested the 10 talents and gained 10 more talents for his master, that was good and faithful. And the same with the man who invested five talents and got

five more back.

And there was one man who had only one talent, the Bible says, and he buried that instead of investing it. And he only had the one talent to give back. And the Lord said, you could have at least put it in the bank so it could have drawn interest.

Now, of course, that's not saying that Jesus is in favor of interest. What he was saying is essentially that when God gives us something and we're stewards of it, we should use it in some way to bring back some kind of a return for Him. Now, whether that's money or time or some other thing, talents, skills, opportunities, whatever we have, God has given us and we're stewards of those things and we're supposed to use them.

If he's given you money, maybe he does want you to use money to bring more increase for him. If you have your money is dedicated to the Lord and you say, well, I've got ten thousand dollars, but I want to give the Lord fifty thousand. And I know that by putting the ten thousand here in three or four months, I'll have this much because it's a good investment.

I'm not sure that I'd frown on that or that the Bible does, even though that might involve usury. It's not a matter of exploiting the poor and it's just something that you'd have to decide between you and God. But the fact is, many people have used interest as a means of taking advantage of people, people who needed money and had to accept a loan, you would think.

But the person loaning would put strong penalties upon it in terms of interest, and that is stealing also. And I wouldn't want to be a Christian banker, although I know there are such things, there are Christian bankers, but I wouldn't want to be one because it just would be hard for my conscience working in an institution that lived on usury when the Bible doesn't have anything good to say about usury. But as I said, not all usury may be wrong.

It depends on certain situations, perhaps. But certainly some of it is, in fact, unjust gain and therefore would fall in the category of stealing that which doesn't belong to you. If you lend somebody something and they give it back, they've given you what belongs to you.

If you require and force them to give you more back than you lent them, then that's stealing. You're asking, you're requiring them to give what isn't yours, but what is just what you want above and beyond. Now, there's many other varieties of stealing that we do, and they all have to do with withholding what belongs to someone else, withholding the good thing that belongs to someone else.

In Proverbs chapter three. Verses 27 and 28, it says, withhold not good from them to whom it is due when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbor,

go and come again, and tomorrow I will give it when thou hast it by thee.

Now, what he's saying there, of course, is if you owe something to someone, don't withhold it. That is stealing, too. If you don't give someone what they have coming, if you withhold it, then that's stealing.

That's violating the commandment. Now, there are a lot of ways that people withhold what is due to someone. The instance that the Proverbs is probably speaking about has to do with withholding an employee's pay.

Under the law of Moses, employees had to be paid at the end of each day. They weren't paid every two weeks or every week or every month. They were paid every day because the average labor was poor.

And he got a penny a day, a penny was worth more. In that day than it is today, but that was the wage, they got a penny a day for a day's work and they got paid at the end of it because they needed it. They didn't have enough leftover from the previous day to survive, so they had to be paid every day.

And what this is forbidding in this proverb is if you owe something to your employees, don't say come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you. No, you give it to him today if you've got it by you. He says if it's in the power of your hand to give it, then give it.

Don't withhold good from them to whom it is due. Well, there's ways in which we do that. One way in which people can withhold that which is due to another is by tax evasion.

I made reference already to this earlier tax evasion. Now, that is withholding what is due to another, namely the government, you can steal from the government just like you can steal from individuals. Jesus said, render to Caesar that which is Caesar's.

The word render in the Greek means pay back, meaning that. The coins that we use, and this was the context, Jesus was looking at a coin that had Caesar's face on it, he said, whose face is that? And they said that Caesar's and he said, well, give to Caesar what Caesars. Obviously, if it's got Caesar's face on it must be his.

Give it back to him. Fact of the matter is, all the money that we hold was minted by our government. But it originally came from them and they require a certain percentage back.

It might be an unjust percentage. In fact, I heard that the the demonstrators at the Boston Tea Party were taxed much less heavily than we are today. And yet they found it intolerable and the American Revolution started over it.

But I understand that their rate of taxation was about less than half of what ours is today. It's true the government exacts unjust amounts. But see, it's not for the Christian

to decide that's too much tax for me to pay.

God will judge governments if they're exploiting the poor. God will judge them. But he'll judge you for whether you withhold what's due.

And what's due is what the government asks from you. Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, implying that Caesar had it coming. Therefore, Christians should give it back to him.

It says the same thing in Romans chapter 13, verses. Six and seven, it says, for for this cause, pay you tribute or taxes also for they, meaning the government officials are God's ministers attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues tribute to whom tribute is due custom to whom custom is due fear to whom fear and honor to whom honor.

Now, Paul is basically quoting Jesus, where Jesus said, render to Caesar what is Caesar's here, Paul says, render to every man what is his due. And he's speaking specifically of paying tribute and custom to the government officials. Now, I know some Christians who don't pay taxes and the way they justify it is this.

They say we oppose nuclear war and an enormous percentage of our tax money is used in the nuclear arms race. And of course, another percentage of our tax money is used to support government sponsored abortions in public abortion clinics. And we don't believe in abortion.

We don't believe in nuclear arms race. And they say also we don't believe in the unjust increase of the senators and congressmen's pay.