

“Thou Shalt Not Steal”

August 22, 2021
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Scripture Readings

Exodus 10:1-17

John 10:1,7-11

Hymns/Songs (a cappella)

"This Is the Day" (*sung twice*)

"This Is My Father's World"

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-8, 12-17

Abbreviated Reading of the Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words, saying,

² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath...

⁷ "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ "You shall not murder.

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ **"You shall not steal.**

¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ "You shall not covet."

John 10:1,7-11

I Am the Good Shepherd

¹⁰ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber."

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not

listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

SERMON: “You Shall Not Steal”

Our loving Lord God of life gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel to enable them one day to inhabit the Promised Land. Likewise, the Lord gave the world the Ten Commandments to give all of us spiritual entrance into His “spiritual promised land,” which Christ often called the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus preached that this Kingdom of love and wisdom actually lives within us all like a wondrous “well of the spirit,” which can be used to find and feel and enjoy what the Lord called the “*living waters of life*.” “**The Kingdom of Heaven is within you,**” Jesus preached. A primary goal of good religion is to help people learn how to find entrance into the Promised Land of spiritual life, which our Lord is sustaining deeply within us all. Let us reflect together this morning about one of the ten great spiritual laws of this inner, spiritual landscape within each of us here today: “**you shall not steal.**”

In its literal level of meaning, this Commandment reminds us that we must not allow ourselves to steal in a worldly sense that which is not our own. The application of this law is far reaching. A humane and good-natured world is one where people respect the property and goods of others, which is why all civilized societies have laws not only against stealing another person’s property and money, but also one’s ideas, artwork, writing or inventions. **Thus, thank God for copyright, trademark and patent laws.**

In addition, business owners are to pay fair wages to their employees who earn an honest day’s work—those business owners who do not pay their employees a fair wage are guilty of stealing what belongs to someone else. Likewise, workers must truly earn the wages they are paid. Anyone who lollygags on the job or who does not fulfill his or her contracted work output also breaks this Commandment: “**you shall not steal.**”

And the basic spiritual point here is so important—God’s Kingdom is one of pure love and respect. To take what belongs to someone else is robbing them of their goods. It hurts to be robbed and to lose that which is precious to one’s heart. And, lest we allow our false reasoning to get the better of us, this Commandment applies to even the smallest things. Stealing anything hurts the human spirit and causes serious spiritual distancing between God and ourselves.

The great spiritual reward for not being a thief in any way is a clean conscience and a heart of peace. When we fulfill this Commandment we have truly contributed to the world of USEFULNESS by giving instead of stealing. Recently I’ve been reading quotes from journal entries of people who’ve taken the *Rise Above It: Ten*

Commandments Seminar and allowed them to be printed in our text, and I was moved deeply when reading about prison inmates who still feel pangs in their conscience since they chose in their life to steal what belonged to someone else.

One prisoner wrote: *"When I read this here commandment it takes me back to when I was about nine years old. It was the first time that I remember taking something that didn't belong to me (stealing). My conscience just wouldn't let me sleep in peace, so I confessed up to what I had done. But as I got older, I kind of found out a way of getting around that guilty feeling that would always occur when I stole something.*

"How did I do that?" this prisoner writes. "Well, I can remember one time when I stole \$600 and that guilt feeling appeared in my mind. I told myself that the couple shouldn't have been so careless with that amount of money and that they deserved it, they had it coming, etc. But guess what? My conscience still bothers me because I stole what belonged to someone else." (Rise Above It: Spiritual Development Through The Ten Commandments, by Ray and Star Silverman, p. 155)

This man was commenting on what it feels like to take one's own spirit out of the Lord's spiritual Promised Land, the spiritual land of goodness and truth, also known as "a land of milk and honey," which God loves to give to all who honor the full meaning of the Ten Commandments.

It's important to note in our scholarly education about the original context of this Commandment against stealing that in ancient Palestine often times to break this law of God was tantamount to breaking the Commandment against murder. The ancient Hebrew lifestyle was one of raw subsistence. Stealing another person's cloak might mean he would sleep outside on a cold, bitter night without proper insulation, which could lead to severe illness and death. Stealing a man's flock of sheep also could mean the loss of someone's livelihood. Stealing someone else's water jugs in the middle of the desert might kill a man or woman who would die of thirst. The Lord knew how vital it was that faithful Hebrews should give the world an example of how best to care for and love each other.

But there are more subtle forms of stealing, which this Commandment calls our attention to as well. The evil enjoyment of stealing goes all the way back to the story of Adam and Eve. God tells His two children in that ancient tale that they may eat of every tree and enjoy every fruit in their paradise garden except for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That story shows that the woman in the story saw in her own eyes that it was good to eat of the tree that God had forbidden she and Adam to eat from, which the serpent had tempted her to do, so that her own eyes might be opened to the knowledge of good and evil and see things as God sees them. One might wonder why God would want His children not to know the distinction between right and wrong? The subtler or symbolic meaning of this important story of Adam and Eve teaches us that

when we finite human beings feel tempted to believe that we need any other basic knowledge of good and evil than that which our One True God of life reveals to us in His holy writings, which we call *The Bible*. In every holy book on earth the core revelation of right and wrong is given. Clearly, the Lord **does** want us to understand what good things are to be enjoyed and done and what evil things should be avoided. We steal from the Lord when we feel justified in changing what is given in the Ten Commandments to suit our own view of what is good. We steal from God when we use our human reasoning to either water down God's holy truth or to follow the fickle reasoning we are apt to conjure up in our own minds.

To reason our way out of not learning God's divine truth, or to twist it to suit our own needs and desires is *stealing from God what belongs to God*. It is folly for anyone of us to think that we can ever be all-knowing and have the grasp of the full knowledge of love and truth that our Creator has. To try and enter God's Kingdom by any other way other than deep study, reflection, prayer and putting to use the revealed truth given to us by God's holy Word is tantamount to trying to enter Heaven by means of climbing in through another way as a "thief in the night." Those who try to gain entrance into the Lord's Kingdom by any other way are spiritual thieves and robbers.

For the Christian disciple our lesson in *The Gospel of John* this morning reminds us of this critical and comforting truth. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who leads us to good pastures where nourishing truths and doctrine may be found. The Lord can protect us against the onslaught of ravenous temperments and attitudes that want to steal and devour our affection for the Lord, His Kingdom, and an innocent and humble spirit, which sheep represent. Like the truly caring shepherds of Israel, our Lord guides us and watches over us constantly. His angels are armed with the Lord's divine truth from spiritual love, symbolized by the slingshots and small clubs shepherds of Jesus' day would have used, to help us fend off the hellish aspect of our natural minds, which hopes to steal us away from God.

On a still deeper level of application of the 7th Commandment prohibiting stealing, we learn from God's Word how good it is to the soul to always be humbly ready to give all glory and honor to God, who gives us Himself as our source of power for every loving feeling, good thought, or useful work we may enjoy. The Lord spoke to this crucial internal truth when He said, "**Without Me, you can do nothing.**" (Jn. 15:5) This depth of truth in our 7th Commandment lesson this morning is about giving credit where credit is due. I deeply appreciate this comment by Emanuel Swedenborg in his book *Heaven and Hell* 280 that reads: "The wisest of the angels know that they have nothing of wisdom from themselves, and that acknowledging this is being wise. They know also that what they know is as nothing compared to what they do not know." The amazing heavenly-spiritual part of our being recognizes that it is a crime to steal or take away from the Lord the credit that belongs to Him regarding our good thoughts, our good feelings, and our good actions.

We can seriously delude ourselves and others if we think that “we know” better than God’s holy Word. Such folly invites us to believe that we know better than anyone else—that, like God, we have a perfect knowledge and understanding of good and evil. This was the first spiritual mistake made by our earliest ancestors who lived in the time of Adam and Eve. It is the commonest of human temptations to want to trust our five senses only and their ability to gather information about spiritual things above that which is revealed to us by God through His holy Word. We sometimes think we can see just as well as God sees. Yet as St. Paul learned, we human beings tend to **“see through a glass, darkly.”** (1 Cor. 13:12) To trust our five senses above the Lord’s Word is to yield to the serpent’s wiley voice and eat from the forbidden fruit, which expels us from the garden of innocence and humility.

The Lord’s 7th Commandment bids us not to steal what belongs to God or to our neighbors so that we may rise above our natural will and understanding and inhabit the Promised Land of goodness, which is our inheritance from God. We are to give credit where credit is due. We are to enjoy what God has given us to use, and not steal from our neighbors, our employers, nor from those who work for us. May we each follow the Lord’s heavenly truth as a pathway into deep peace and a clear conscience for good living. Amen.