

Thou Shalt Not Steal

Exodus 20:15

Phil Johnson

Our study of the Ten Commandments has been a stop-and-go affair for the past several months. It seems like we cover a commandment and then get interrupted for three or four weeks, and then we get back to the series. So it has taken us nearly six months to cover seven commandments. Someone recently told me that's OK, because the Ten Commandments have been so convicting. And I have to confess to you that I feel a bit that way myself. These commandments are extremely convicting. If you have walked away after any one of them so far thinking your hands are totally clean, then you probably haven't been listening very well.

And that is the way it ought to be. That's one of the main reasons God gave us the Ten Commandments: to bring us face to face with our guilt. According to Galatians 3:22, "**the Scripture has confined [us] all under sin.**" The law is a *judge* that convicts us of sin. It is a *jailor* that keeps us under guard. And it is a *juvenile officer*, treating us like delinquent children and bringing us to Christ, so that we can be justified by faith. That is precisely what Galatians 3:22-24 says:

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

In other words, the law is supposed to bring us face to face with our own sin and guilt—and show us how helpless we are to please God by our own efforts. If that has been your experience as we have studied the Ten Commandments, then the law is simply doing its job.

But the law has another purpose as far as believers are concerned, and it is this: it reminds us of the high standards God demands, and it governs our behavior as children of light, by showing us what should characterize the walk of faith.

I have said this several times before, but it bears repeating: if you think the moral standards of the law are irrelevant to those who are not under the law but under grace, then you have a wrong view of the law. One of the results of being in Christ is that we are enabled to walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4: **"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,**

on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

So the moral standards that we have been studying in this series on the Ten Commandments are the very standards that should govern how we live. The law shows us what true righteousness is. Although Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf, and we no longer live under the threat of condemnation from the law, that doesn't mean the law is relegated to the realm of irrelevance. These laws set the standard of righteousness for us in the walk of faith. These laws describe the righteous standard God is conforming us to. They tell us what true Christlikeness is. And therefore the Ten Commandments do still have an important application for Christian living.

If you want to be like Christ, these commandments tell you how to live, because this is how Christ lived—in perfect conformity to the righteous demands of the law. And even though the law no longer condemns us to eternal perdition, it still rebukes our sin, and it still tells us how we ought to live. And that is why we believe a study of the Ten Commandments is necessary, and edifying, even for the redeemed believer. So I hope you are listening with all of that in mind.

Our study this morning brings us to the Eighth Commandment. You'll find it in Exodus 20:15. The whole verse is just four words long: "**You shall not steal.**"

Maybe someone is already thinking, *Well, I should be OK with this one. I'm not a thief. I've never robbed a bank, or stolen a car, or held up a convenience store, or embezzled any large sums of money. Finally, here's a commandment that ought to leave me fairly unscathed.*

Let's see, shall we?

Because like all the commandments, this one is sweeping in its scope. It has implications that condemn every one of us, and the standard it sets is higher than any sinner can attain. We need to approach it humbly, recognizing our guilt, and willing to bow to the demands it makes of us. James 1:23-25 says,

if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

So as we look into the mirror of this Eighth Commandment, let's be prepared to let it show us the defects in our lives, and let's commit at the outset to correcting those things that need to be corrected, OK?

Just a few preliminaries about this commandment: This is the chief foundation-stone of a biblical view of economics. This commandment establishes by implication the right to private ownership of property. It rules out the communist notion that there is something evil about ownership of private property. Listen to Deuteronomy 23:25: **"When you come into your neighbor's standing grain . . . you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain."** Property is to be respected. There is no virtue at all in an economic system that regards all property as the common possession of everyone.

The biblical standard of economics is established in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12:

If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

In other words, the primary way by which we are supposed to provide for our needs, sustain our earthly lives, and increase our wealth is by working. And those who are too lazy to work and earn their own livelihood are consistently condemned in Scripture. I'll have more to say about this later,

but for now, I just want to point out that biblical principles of economics have more in common with capitalism than with socialism or communism.

Two fundamental economic principles were established at creation. One is the principle of private ownership, and the other is the principle of work. Listen to Genesis 1:27-30:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."

In other words, God created Adam, and He gave him ownership and dominion over all earth's resources. He also commanded him to work. Genesis 2:15: **"Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."**

Now, I don't know what work was like in the perfect environment of the garden. There were no weeds; there was no sweat or disease or unpleasantness. Adam's work was pure joy and delight. But when he fell, his work took on aspects that were unpleasant. Genesis 3:17, when God cursed the earth because of Adam's sin, this is what He said:

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.

18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."

So the pure joy of work was spoiled by the curse. But here is something many people do not realize: work, when done faithfully as unto the Lord, is *still* a source of great joy. It is through our work that God bestows some of the greatest blessings of life on us. Proverbs 14:23: "**In all labor there is profit.**" This is the plan of God for our lives (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12): "**that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands . . . that you may lack nothing.**" The one who labors faithfully will lack nothing.

This same principle, you may remember, is part of the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:9): "**Six days you shall labor and do all your work.**" About six-sevenths of our lives are to be devoted to work. And let me assure you that if you want the highest happiness in life, if you want to experience the Lord's richest earthly blessings, you will not find it in

your leisure activities, entertainment, and all the other things people today desperately seek pleasure in. If you want the highest degree of earthly blessings, you will find it by devoting yourself to *work*. Because that is the plan of God for His creatures. And even though the curse has added elements of drudgery, sweat, and unpleasantness to our work, work is still a more fruitful place than leisure and entertainment to seek personal fulfillment and divine blessing in life.

Stealing is a sinful attempt to circumvent the work God has made us to do.

I can think of three sins that underlie the sin of stealing. First is the sin of unbelief. People steal because they distrust goodness of divine Providence. Like the sin of the Israelites, who according to Psalm 78:19, said, "**Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?**" We don't trust God to spread a lavish enough feast for us through the fruits of our labor, and so we resort to stealing, or cheating, or some other dishonest means of spreading our own table at someone else's expense.

A second cause of stealing is the sin of covetousness. We allow ourselves to become sinfully dissatisfied with what God has given us, and we covet that which belongs to others. Colossians 3:5 says covetousness is a form of idolatry. It is supremely wicked—the root of all kinds of evil. We'll have more to say about that when we look at the Tenth Commandment.

A third underlying cause of stealing is the sin of laziness. Sloth. A love of idleness and hatred for hard work.

All of these are extreme forms of wickedness. Remember that Judas was first and foremost a thief. John 12:6 says, "**he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.**" Judas was also guilty of unbelief, covetousness, and sloth. Don't ever think of these as minor character flaws or petty sins. Look at the life of Judas if you want to see what supreme evil can be borne out of the sin of stealing.

This morning I want to look at three major categories of life where this commandment applies. (I have already touched on some of these things, but now I want to expand these ideas more thoroughly.) If we take this commandment seriously, it will have implications for our citizenship, our work ethic, and our stewardship. If you are taking notes, we'll look at them one at a time. First, let's see how this commandment has implications for—

1. OUR CITIZENSHIP

To steal is to take dishonestly or secretly that which belongs to someone else without permission or without the intention of returning it. This obviously includes common thievery—the taking of someone else's purse or possessions. Stealing is perhaps the fundamental breach of good citizenship. It is universally recognized as a crime, and every nation under the sun has laws that prohibit stealing.

There are many kinds of stealing that everyone in every culture would instantly recognize as evil: Embezzlement, armed robbery, burglary, hijacking, larceny, piracy, and extortion. There's no need to belabor such things because they are all so obviously a violation of this commandment. I doubt there is anyone here this morning who would attempt to justify any of those wanton kinds of stealing.

But there are many other kinds of petty thievery that even good people sometimes try to justify. When you borrow something from your neighbor and forget to return what you have borrowed, that's the same thing as stealing. The fact that you "forgot" your debt doesn't mitigate the sin. If you think so little of your neighbor's property that you would forget to return what you have borrowed from him, you simply reveal that you had the heart of a thief in the first place. (I have lost scores of books to people who borrowed them and simply forgot to return them.) Those are the kinds of things Jesus

said we will be called upon to give an account for in the day of judgment.

When the clerk at the checkout counter mistakenly gives you too much change or undercharges you for an item you are purchasing, if you knowingly allow yourself to benefit from such a transaction, you have violated the Eighth Commandment. And the sin of that exchange is no less a sin than if you reached into the cash register and stole the money yourself.

Or if you are a merchant and you cheat customers by overcharging or using dishonest scales, Scripture says that is the sin of stealing, too. Amos 8:5-6 condemns those who steal by "**skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.**" Hosea 12:7 likewise condemns those who use deceitful scales. All of that is a violation of the Eighth Commandment.

Jesus condemned the money-changers at the Temple because they charged exorbitant rates for sacrificial animals. They took unfair advantage of people coming to worship and charged outrageous prices just because they owned the concession and could get by with it. They were price-gouging. They weren't beating people up and taking their money, but Jesus said what they were doing was morally tantamount to robbery, and he described them as "**a 'den of thieves'**" (Matthew 21:13).

People who cheat on their taxes are stealing from the government. Jesus commanded us in Mark 12:17 to "**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.**" And Romans 13:7 says, "**Render . . . to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.**" To skimp or cut corners or falsify your tax return in any way is the sin of stealing.

In verses 5-6 of that same chapter (Romans 13) Paul wrote, "**Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes.**" Do it for conscience' sake—because it is the right thing to do—not just because you fear getting caught. There are lots of ways to cheat on your taxes in petty and questionable ways that you can easily hide or falsify without much chance of being caught. But if you do that, you are stealing, and morally, your guilt is the same as if you walked in and stole gold from the national treasury.

All of this calls us to be scrupulously honest in our dealings with money and other possessions, in every context. If you are an employer, don't take advantage of people by paying them less than their work is really worth. Don't try to pad your profit margin at the expense of your workers. Jeremiah 22:13 says, "**Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages And gives him nothing for his work.**" Luke 10:7: "**The laborer is worthy of his wages,**" so if

you take advantage of people who work for you, you are violating the Eighth Commandment.

If you are someone who bills clients for your time, don't pad the numbers. If you are an office employee, don't use the company photocopier for personal copies unless you have permission to do so. Whoever you are, pay your bills on time, and be fair in all your business dealings with people.

Did you know that delaying to pay that which you owe is morally the same thing as stealing? Listen to Leviticus 19:13: **"You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning."**

Carefully guard your integrity when it comes to these things, even in the petty things. Because even the most petty kind of theft is still a violation of the Eighth Commandment. And there is something particularly tragic about compromising one's integrity over something petty.

Christians, of all people, ought to guard their reputations when it comes to this matter. Remember that the money-changers at the Temple portrayed themselves as religious men, performing a spiritual service. When Jesus called them a den of thieves, He was quoting the prophecy of Jeremiah 7:9-11:

"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know,

10 "and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?"

11 "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes?"

There is something particularly sinister about a professing believer who plays fast and loose with theft. God himself calls it an abomination.

Here's a second category of life for which this commandment has profound implications. If we take the commandment seriously, it will make a profound impact upon—

2. OUR WORK ETHIC

Now, I alluded to this earlier, but I want to expand on it here. The Eighth Commandment presupposes a very strong work ethic. Ephesians 4:28 says, **"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."**

Hard work is the best remedy someone who is prone to stealing. Paul says, "Stop stealing, but work with your own hands. And do it so that you will have something to give to others who are in need.

Christian charity demands that we give to those in need. That is the polar opposite of stealing. In other words, stealing

is antithetical to everything Christ stands for. Instead of taking that which belongs to others and sinfully appropriating it for ourselves, we ought to be working to gain material blessings for the purpose of helping others in need.

Now, "**him who has need**" in Ephesians 4:28 refers to people with legitimate needs—widows and orphans, poor people, disabled people, and so on. This does not refer to people who are chronically unemployed because they think the only jobs available are beneath their station in life. Remember 2 Thessalonians 3:10: "**If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.**" Legitimate Christian charity doesn't demand that we support someone who will not work. And the person who will not work but accepts handouts from others is guilty of violating the Eighth Commandment.

Now let me be clear: I'm not trying to make anyone feel guilty if you have a legitimate need for accepting financial help from others in a time of trouble. I don't want to minimize the needs of the truly poor, and Scripture has much to say about our duty as believers to use what God has given us to give to others in need. If we withhold help from those who are truly in need of our charity, we are guilty of violating the Eighth Commandment.

But by the same token, if someone's financial woes are caused by his own unwillingness to work, we're not to encourage that sort of idleness with charity. And this is a

particular problem in America. The abuse of the welfare system has reached epidemic proportions in our society. When I was in college, I took a job sacking groceries to help pay my school bill and living expenses. It was the most menial kind of labor, but I was happy to have the job, and it paid my way through my final year in college. But I used to watch people come in week after week with wads of food stamps, buying most of their groceries with government aid. (And in those days, the sacker would carry your groceries to the car for you.) And I can't tell you how many times I have wheeled out a cart full of groceries purchased with government charity, and put those groceries into the trunk of a brand-new Cadillac or Mercedes. I was working a minimum-wage job for 40 hours a week in addition to going to school. And I was walking 2 miles to work because I didn't have a car. And when I got to work I had to carry groceries for people who were buying their food at government expense and driving luxury cars. That sort of welfare abuse is a clear violation of the Eighth Commandment.

The notion that society owes people benefits whether they work or not is unbiblical. Scripture is quite clear that if someone is *unwilling* to work for a living, he forfeits his right to even the most basic necessities of life: "**If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.**" And those who are unwilling to work but take benefits from the government or the church, or

who impose on the kindness of other believers—such people are guilty of stealing.

Now again, I'm not talking about people who are physically unable to work, or those who are temporarily unemployed and facing legitimate, immediate, temporary needs. I'm talking about people who have made a career out of being unemployed and who look to other people or the government for support—who think it's somehow beneath them to take a job flipping burgers or doing janitorial work. That is a sin, and it is the same sin that is condemned by the Eighth Commandment. It is the sin of stealing, because they are taking that which they *could* earn by working, but they are aren't doing any work. That's no better morally than being a pickpocket.

Even if you are gainfully employed, this commandment has implications for *your* work ethic, too. You owe it to your employer to give him a full day's work. If you spend your day chatting with other employees by the copy machine, or surfing the Internet for non-business-related reasons, or playing games on your computer, or doing anything other than what your employer is paying you do to do, you are violating the Eighth Commandment.

If you work lackadaisically and fail to give your best to your work, you are stealing time from your employer. If you stretch your coffee breaks and your lunch hour, you are stealing from your employer. If you phone in sick when you

are not really sick, turning your sick days into vacation time, that is stealing.

Students, if you don't apply yourselves in your studies and do the best you can to learn as much as possible and excel academically, that's morally the same as stealing the money your parents are paying to put you through college. If you plagiarize material when you write your papers, you are stealing someone else's intellectual property.

Fathers, if you don't devote yourselves to being the best employees you can be, you are not only stealing from your employer, but you are also stealing from your family the blessings and benefits that come when you excel in your work.

And no matter who you are, if you are not applying yourself at work to be the best employee you can be, you are robbing your employer, you are robbing those who depend on you as a provider, you are robbing the poor (because you could do more to help them with your gifts if you worked harder and earned more), and you are robbing Christ (because you are not being the kind of testimony you ought to be). Christians ought to be the *best* employees, because we are supposed to do our work "**as to the Lord, and not to men**" (Ephesians 6:7).

Let me sum this point up by saying that the if the Eighth Commandment means anything, it is all about our work ethic. Let me read Ephesians 4:28 one more time: "**Let him**

who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

Notice that even after you have done your work and earned your paycheck, you still have a duty to use some of your wealth to help those in need.

If you squander all your excess income on luxuries and leisure, entertainment and pleasure, you are stealing from those whom you ought to be helping who have legitimate needs. *That* is the ultimate reason God blesses us with abundance; not so that we can consume it on our own lusts. And if you are spending all your discretionary funds for your own pleasure, God may be withholding His blessings from you for that very reason. James 4:3 says, "**You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**"

Once again, giving to those in need is the polar opposite of stealing. And the duty of giving is therefore implied in this commandment not to steal. We have seen this principle repeatedly in our study of the Ten Commandments: When a positive duty is commanded, the opposite sin is prohibited by implication. Likewise, when a sin is expressly prohibited, the opposite duty is commanded by implication. So when the Eighth Commandment says, "**You shall not steal,**" the duty of *giving* to those in need is also implied. In fact, the positive command is made explicit by Ephesians 4:28: "**Let him who**

stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." The moral principle of this commandment is summed up in the words of Christ quoted in Acts 20:35: **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

And that brings us to the third area of life that must be brought into submission to the Eighth Commandment. If you're taking notes, this is point three. This commandment has profound implications for—

3. OUR STEWARDSHIP

You may be scrupulous about returning every penny of excess change the cashier mistakenly gives you. You may also be a model employee, always putting your nickel in the cup every time you use the company's photocopier. You might bend over backward to be fair and accurate with your tax returns. But if you skimp in your giving—if you are miserly when it comes to giving back to God a portion of what He has blessed you with—you are guilty of a far worse sin than robbing your neighbor or robbing your employer or robbing the IRS. *If you aren't generous in your giving to the Lord, that is the same as robbing God.*

Malachi 3. Turn there. It's the last book before the New Testament, so find Matthew 1 and turn back a few pages to Malachi 3, the second-to-last chapter in the Old Testament. And I'm reading starting in Malachi 3:8:

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

They were skimping on their tithes and offerings. Now, to be clear, the Old Testament tithe was more than a free-will offering. It was analogous to a national tax. It supported not only the priesthood and the temple, but also the government. But this was a theocracy, so money given to the government was essentially money given to God.

And there was no foolproof way to do individual accounting for what was owed. Farmers were required to give ten percent of their grain, ten percent of their flocks, and ten percent of their income. Merchants and businessmen were required to give ten percent of their profits. No matter what your livelihood, the *first* ten percent of everything, and the *best* ten percent of everything—belonged to the Lord.

In New Testament times, of course, the Roman government had tax assessors and tax collectors who simply told you what you owed and took it from you. And they were notoriously corrupt, so that they usually overcharged people and then skimmed the profits for themselves. They were some of the worst thieves ever, and Roman tax collectors came to epitomize what the Eighth Commandment forbids.

That's why when Zaccheus was converted, the first thing he did was restore what he had taken unfairly, with interest.

[By the way, that is the penalty the law required for stealing: full restitution, plus heavy interest. Exodus 22:1: **""If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep."** That's why Zaccheus restored what he had taken fourfold.]

Anyway, the tax system in the Old Testament was run largely by the honor system. It was the individual's responsibility to do the accounting and give God His portion. But the people had devised ways to cut corners, obscure their profits, and give God less than He was due. In essence, they were robbing God.

Notice that they were robbing Him not only by withholding their *tithes* (the ten-percent tax that was required), but also by withholding their *offerings*. Those were free-will gifts that were prescribed by the law even though the amount was left to the discretion of the giver. People were being stingy with God, and God himself regarded that as stealing from Him. So He cursed the nation because of it. Verse 9: **"You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation."**

He goes on to say in verse 10: **"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That**

there will not be room enough to receive it." In other words, He promised to remove the curse and pour out abundant blessings on them if they would only render to Him what was rightfully His.

That's a pretty shocking indictment, isn't it? They were robbing God; stealing from the Almighty; directly assaulting His honor by keeping back from Him what they ought to have been giving.

Now let me say this cautiously, but it needs to be said: This is a particular sin here at Grace Community Church. I may be in a better position to say this than most of the pastors here at grace Church, because I am a layman. I'm not on the church payroll. I have no vested interest in making this an issue. But it needs to be dealt with. The sin of robbing God is epidemic right here in our own flock.

How do I know that? I don't have access to anyone's personal giving history. I don't know who gives or how much, and I don't *want* to know.

But from the statistics that anyone can read about our corporate giving, it seems obvious that something is not quite right. Here are some statistics that might surprise you: Almost 60 percent of the households that make up Grace Church's membership give less than \$300 per year. That's less than \$25 per month. And nearly a fourth of the families in our church—I'm talking about households, not just individuals—nearly a fourth of the households at Grace

church gave nothing at all last year. That's pretty embarrassing, isn't it?

I mentioned those statistics once before and a few people told me after class that they give cash only, so there's no record of their giving. That's fine. Other people give substantial amounts to other ministries besides the church, and that is OK too.

As I said, I don't have access to anyone's giving record, and I'm not interested in knowing the details about anyone's giving but my own. My remarks aren't meant to target anyone in particular. What you give is entirely between you and God.

But the statistics still suggest that there are many, many people who belong to Grace Church who are *not* faithful in supporting the ministry financially. The amount of cash that comes in weekly is not enough to change the figures I am citing. And the money we give to parachurch organizations should not diminish the amount we give to the church.

No matter how you do the math, it is clear that giving at our church is not what it ought to be.

And I think that is profoundly sad—and especially sad for such a well-taught church. Again, I am not bringing this up to target anyone in particular. The only reason I'm bringing it up is because it is a major issue in Scripture, and it needs to be part of our teaching. If we're not being generous in our giving to God, we are robbing Him of what He is due. And

that may be the worst of all sins against the Eighth Commandment—to rob God.

If it's important for us to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, how much more important is it to render to God that which is God's? People who would never dream of ripping off the IRS steal from God without giving it a second thought.

I met someone once who argued that giving is totally optional for the Christian. He quoted 2 Corinthians 9:7: "**let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**" And he said Christians should never view giving as an obligation.

But 2 Corinthians 9:7 isn't teaching that all giving is optional. It means that our giving, just like our obedience to all God's commands, ought to come from a cheerful, willing heart. If we withhold from God our willing obedience, we are guilty of robbing Him of that which He deserves.

First Chronicles 16:29 says, "**Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.**"

All of that is what we owe God. To withhold from Him our worship, or our gifts, or our glad-hearted obedience is to rob Him.

So you see how far-reaching this commandment is. Like the rest of the Ten Commandments, this one simple rule

contains a whole world of moral obligations. We do not obey it perfectly. And therefore it condemns us.

But the good news is that Christ obeyed this commandment—and all the law of God—perfectly. And His perfect righteousness is imputed to those who trust Him alone as Savior. That's our one hope in the face of the law's condemnation.

If you look into the mirror of the law and see yourself as a condemned sinner, then you have heard the law's message correctly. But the message of the gospel is good news for the sinner. Christ has obeyed the law on behalf of those who trust Him. He has also paid sin's penalty on their behalf. So if you trust Christ, you are promised full forgiveness and you are freed from the curse of the law.

Remember that Christ was crucified between two thieves. One of those thieves repented and turned to Christ for forgiveness. And according to Luke 23:43, "**Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'**"

There is forgiveness for those who have broken this commandment. But that forgiveness is available only to those who place their trust in the One Person, Jesus Christ, who obeyed this commandment with flawless perfection.