



**Deut 5:19 ' You shall not steal.  
Taking What We Want**

Some years ago I remember watching a TV documentary on prisons, it had a lot of interaction with inmates and the people who work with them. One prison worker commented disgustedly that he had expected if you laid out the facts for the inmates and showed them that crime really doesn't pay that it would cause them to want to change. He said that he would show men the statistics that showed that the average career criminal spent the majority of his adult incarcerated and during his lifetime never earned more than he would have earned if he simply collected welfare checks, and yet he saw the same guys he had shared the facts with again and again.

What that prison worker was failing to account for was that in confronting those prisoners, he wasn't dealing with a social or educational problem, he was dealing with a spiritual problem. You are no more likely to cure a man of thieving by giving him sobering statistics than you are likely to cure a man of gambling by pointing out that the house always comes out ahead and that the average gambling addict spends his entire life progressively *losing* all his money, not winning any (and incidentally gambling is also a form of theft, the victim in that case being *us*). If someone as bright as Bill Bennett who has actually written about the evils of gambling, and campaigned against its extension precisely because it is a moral evil that ruins lives, could get bitten by the gambling bug, and lose over a million dollars, do we really expect simple education to remove the problem?

The real problem is that the thief is enslaved has become a slave of one particular sin, because of his fallen nature and the inclination of his heart. Really therefore the only way you will cure a man of that sin is to change the inclination of his heart, and only the gospel can do that. Sadly, many portions of the prison system are actually working to remove the very faith based programs that are the most effective tools for producing real change.

Because until and unless his heart is changed and He comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that man will be locked into an inevitable progression. His heart conceives of a desire and says "I want" which becomes in his mind "I need", and then he goes out and takes what he believes he needs. His heart is ensnared and he is enslaved to its desires. The Lord contrasted the difference between the difference between the way the heart that he has worked in operates and the way the fallen heart does and what happens to them very well in Ezek. 11:19-21 where he said:

***19 "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,***

***20 "that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.***

***21 "But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD.***

Now if I can I want to impress upon you this one fundamental fact, that faith is opposed to theft and vice versa. Theft inevitably results from a lack of faith in God. The thief says in His heart 1) there is no God to see me, and 2) there is no God to provide for me.

1) When Israel and Judah were sunk low and each man robbed from his neighbor and defrauded widows and orphans and sold their brethren into slavery, what was the conviction of their heart? The prophets revealed it:

Isa. 47:10 "For you have trusted in your wickedness; You have said, 'No one sees me'; Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; And you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'

Ezek 9:9 Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!'

Atheists maintain that we can have morals without a belief in the God of the bible, but all the evidence says that is absolutely false. In societies where there is no fear of God, there are no morals. As Dostoyevsky insightfully put **"If God is Dead, then all things are permitted"** Atheistic convictions never lead to good works, quite the contrary, the lead to all manner of abomination **"The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good."**

2) If we do not believe in God or if we distrust him and do not believe that he will do us good, it is also inherent that we will not believe in or trust in his providence or his mercy.

As the people were lead out of Egypt they were constantly revealing their doubt in God and his goodness: "And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." (Num. 21:5)

God showed them his goodness again and again, and yet because of the hardness of their hearts they still doubted:

**Psalm 78:15 He split the rocks in the wilderness, And gave them drink in abundance like the depths.**

**16 He also brought streams out of the rock, And caused waters to run down like rivers.**

**17 But they sinned even more against Him By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.**

**18 And they tested God in their heart By asking for the food of their fancy.**

**19 Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"**

The unbeliever answers that final question with a resounding NO! And therefore it is his conclusion that he must provide for himself. And as Watson puts it so well: **"Therefore he is resolved he will spread a table for himself, but it shall be at other men's cost, and both first and second course shall be served in with stolen goods."**

You can contrast that directly with the trust of the believer in the goodness and provision of the Lord: Psalm 23:5 **"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever."**

So the answer to the problem of theft will always lie in true faith in God and in his provision for all of our needs, temporal and spiritual. But those of you who have been believers for some time will know that sin is not the sole dominion of the unbeliever, and that Christians too can be tempted to steal, and cheat, and defraud, and gamble in order to get what they feel they need. You too can be lead by our great enemies the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, into a form of practical atheism and where you end up believing you must take what you need.

Let me therefore set before those of you who know, love and trust the Lord Jesus Christ some things that will I pray, help you to do that:

1) Remember who is the ultimate owner of all property in the first place – God. All property, everything in creation, ultimately belongs to God. Morton Smith explains why: ***"Before the act of creation, nothing existed. All property that now exists was the result of God's commanding it to come into being. Thus, in the ultimate sense God is the only natural proprietor. Man's right to property is based upon God's gift of the world to man (Genesis 1:29)."***

There is a very real sense therefore in which we are not properly owners in an absolute sense of anything, but rather stewards of it. Yes certain things belong to us, and other things belong to our neighbors and we are not to confuse them. But those things are given to us, and we are to be good stewards of them.

2) Your greatest asset in this area will be to be to know that if you Love and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, that he knows what you need, and will cause all things – the good and the bad – to work together for your good and therefore culture contentment with the things that we have been give to be stewards over:

Be very, very wary in this area. Discontentment with our lot in life is a source of all sorts of evil including theft:

***1 Tim 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.***

***7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.***

***8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.***

***9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***

***10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.***

3) Be content therefore with your job and do not be give over to laziness. ***2 Thess. 3:10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: 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.***

4) Remember that the material things we so fervently desire cannot be held onto anyway. You can hold on to nothing in this world. Also remember that ultimately ***"For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."*** You *can't* take it with you.

As Job said "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

Finally above all, do not allow your hearts to be captivated by the Love of Money or any worldly goods, they can become an idol that turns you away from God in a moment. And then you rob God not only of his due worship, but you rob yourselves of happiness and hope and ultimately salvation. You are putting your trust in things that are fleeting and ultimately come to nothing.

The Laodicean church fell into this error of thinking more of riches than of Christ and Christ had nothing but contempt for their choice:

**Rev. 3:16** *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

**17** *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked --*

**18** *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

**19** *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

Kids, let me give you instruction that I hope will set you on the right path if and when you do fall into the sin of theft:

*"Samuel Kilpin, giving an account of his early life, says, 'when seven years old, I was left in charge of the shop. A man passed, crying, "little lambs, and all white and clean, at one penny each." In my eagerness to get one, I lost all self-command, and taking a penny from the drawer, I made the purchase. My keen-eyed, wise mother, inquired how I came by the money. I evaded the question with something like a lie. In God's sight it was a lie, as I kept back the truth. The lamb was placed on the chimney-shelf, and much admired. To me it was a source of inexpressible anguish. Continually there sounded in my ears and heart—"Thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not lie." Guilt and darkness overcame my mind, and in sore agony of soul, I went to a hay-loft, the place is now perfectly in my recollection, and there prayed, and pleaded with groaning that could not be uttered for mercy and pardon. I entreated mercy for Jesus' sake. With joy and transport I left the loft, from a believing application of the text, "Thy sins that are many are all forgiven thee," I went to my mother, told her what I had done, sought her forgiveness, and burnt the lamb, whilst she wept over her young penitent.' Kilpin later went on to become a Gospel Minister."*

Remember that the blood of Christ can cover even this sin, and that all you need do to receive that forgiveness is to take the advice He gave to the Laodiceans to repent and believe in Him.