

Property Rights and You

The Ten Commandments

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Well, we have a magnificently searching and magnificently practical text in front of us this morning as we return to our study of the 10 Commandments and I invite you to turn to Exodus 20 with me. The brevity of the text belies the far-reaching nature of the text as we read in Exodus 20:15 where in English it says simply,

15 You shall not steal.

You shall not steal. We've already covered this in two messages, today will be the final message on this commandment, and it occurred to me that in the matter of full disclosure, I suppose that it's fitting for you to know that there is a former thief in your midst today, former thief that's actually speaking from the pulpit. I am a former thief, a redeemed thief, yes, but a thief nonetheless. Among other things, I suppose, the thing that most clearly comes to my mind about this was that I worked in high school as a cashier at a local drugstore in my small hometown. Looking back on it, I routinely pilfered things from my employer as I ran the cash register. If I got hungry, I'd take a bag of chips or a candy bar or whatever it was, and accumulated a lot of sins against this commandment in the course of my employment there, and there's no doubt in my mind that there are others gathered together here who you would look back on your past and you would have to make a similar confession, if you were honest, that you have stolen, have taken things that did not belong to you and are convicted and condemned even by this commandment.

Last time as we looked at this commandment, we saw the nature of theft, that it's an appropriating to yourself of something that belongs to someone else. We saw the kinds of theft, that there are many different ways that we can steal including simply an employee not giving his employer the best of his time or doing personal things while he's being paid on the clock; that is a type of thievery and a type of theft from the employer no matter how culturally appropriate it may be by society's standards. We saw the motives for theft, that there is greed and discontent that are woven into this sin, and we saw the biblical condemnation of theft both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the New Testament saying that thieves will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

That's all very very sobering and the question that I want to address today is what shall you do if the Bible has convicted you that you are a thief? What shall you do if you've

been convicted as a thief? Well, in the broadest sense, we should come to the recognition right away that men must be born again. Jesus said unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. And one of the things that is so penetrating about the biblical assessment of man and the biblical assessment of our souls is that you cannot change your own soul, you cannot change your own condition. A sinner cannot change his nature away from sin anymore than a leopard can change his spots, or a zebra can change his stripes. We are helplessly condemned, not only condemned of guilt but we are helpless in the sense that we have no power to change our own nature. Scripture says that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, that we are dominated by the devil, that we are doomed to suffer the wrath of God, and it goes further and says that the natural man cannot change these things, the natural man cannot understand the things of God, the things of Christ, and so Scripture brings us to a point of utter helplessness. And my friend, if you have not come to a point of understanding and seeing something of utter spiritual desperation in the presence of a holy God, you might want to step back and ask yourself whether you're an actual Christian or not because Scripture leaves us as those who are utterly helpless before God, and that is why it is so precious that the Lord Jesus Christ came to be a Savior and a Redeemer of sinners, it's that we were helpless to do anything of our own.

The 10 Commandments, as I've said many times, do not congratulate us on our self-righteousness or on our merit before God, what the 10 Commandments do is they show us that we are completely guilty and helpless before him. Each individual commandment does that to each individual man and the collective weight of 10 commandments all doing that is just far beyond what any soul can bear. We're to understand that and it's to make us cry out to God for mercy, not for what we deserve because what we deserve is judgment and condemnation and hell, but to cry out for mercy and forgiveness that we do not deserve. That is the nature of true, saving, repentant faith, fleeing to Christ, casting yourself on his crucified and resurrected being for your only hope of salvation, and you know, time came where this thief had to do that in the years that followed of his corrupt life. The point being that only God has the power to change your heart. You cannot do it on your own.

You can think about it this way, just a little simple illustration. If you think about an electric fan, if that fan is not plugged in, it will not operate no matter what you do. You can spin it with your finger, you can reach through the grate and spin it with your finger and it will turn a little bit but there's no power to make it operate as it should. That's a picture of the helplessness that you have to change yourself and to make yourself acceptable to God. You can try to twirl the blades of righteousness with your finger and maybe make some temporary adjustments but you can't do anything to address the depth of your sinfulness, the depth of your guilt, the depth of the grip that sin has on your heart. You're powerless to change that, and so at a broad macro sense, we come and realize that we need God to have mercy on our souls, we need the Spirit of God to form Christ in us, to call out that we could even call out to him for salvation. That's how desperately lost each and every man and woman and boy and girl is. You must be born by the Spirit of God.

Now having addressed that preliminary matter, let's step into the realm of Christianity, step into the realm of those who have been redeemed, let's assume that a man has been born again, that Christ has saved him through faith alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, he has been born again and now he is set apart on a new life to live; God has set you apart to live for his purposes, what is it, then, that you should do in response to the eighth commandment as a Christian? And I want to take you through five different points and you're going to see that they're all very practical and that they all have far-reaching implications for all of life.

So you're a thief like I was, what do you do? 1. Biblically speaking you start with restitution. You start with restitution. That's the first point here this morning and, you know, and I encourage you to take notes and to think through these things carefully. This is one of the distinguishing marks of true repentance is whether someone who has stolen, who has violated that which belonged to another, whether he is willing to make restitution or not. The Scriptures are replete with this kind of instruction.

In the Moosaic law, in the same law that provides the context for the 10 Commandments, in the book of Exodus you see this principle of restitution being made. In chapter 20 it says, "You shall not steal." In Exodus 22, look over at verse 1 with me, in Exodus 22:1 it says this, "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it," so the Bible is making commentary on the Bible. You must understand that. The Bible has said, "You shall not steal," within a matter of a few short verses the Bible is saying, "If a man steals," you're getting a divinely inspired commentary on what God says a thief must do and so it says, "If he steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." An animal thief was required to pay back four or fivefold what he had taken.

In further texts written by Moses, turn over to the book of Leviticus 6. As you're turning there, the first five books of the Bible are called the book of Moses, they were all written by Moses as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, so you have the same divine author and the same human author in the first five books. We shouldn't think about them as sharply distinct and unrelated to one another, they provide the whole context to the 10 Commandments as we read through them. And in Leviticus 6 you see this, again in verse 1, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering.'"

You say, "Well, that's the Old Testament. I see it there, four or fivefold for an animal thief, 20% interest on financial fraud or, you know, some kind of financial matter." Well, what about the New Testament? Do we remember the story of Zacchaeus, the tax

collector, and how he expressed his repentance to Jesus? After he had been converted, after the Lord had saved him and there were critics saying that Christ had gone to be with a tax collector and a sinner, Zacchaeus stood apart from the crowd, Zacchaeus who was a very rich man as a result of his tax collecting activity on behalf of the Roman government, Zacchaeus rather than defending himself against the accusation, he acknowledged the truth of the fact that he had been a thief and he said in the presence of everyone, to the Lord he said, "If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give him back four times as much." Four times as much, Luke 19:8. Now the point here is not to talk about how much needs to be repaid and multiplying out things like that, that is not my point and I'm not setting a standard on the amount to be repaid with interest or anything like that, rather simply recognizing the biblical principle that demands restitution. If a thief claims to come to Christ, how can he in good conscience keep the fruit of his prior sin? How can he do that? How could you do that if you are guilty of theft to keep that which never belonged to you in the first place?

So I ask you whether you are conscious of thefts that you have committed at some point in the past? Biblically speaking, it is not enough for you simply to be sorry and to just make a confession to God and move on if you're not willing to do something about the fruit of the sin that is in your possession. It would be wrong for you to continue to be enriched by that which you gained through that which violated the commandment of God. You need to somehow restore it to the person or to the entity that you have wronged. That's just biblical sanctification. That's biblical righteousness. And it disturbs me to think that there would be Christians claiming the blood of Jesus on their souls who are not willing to make an obviously righteous effort at restitution if they're able to do so. Sometimes the person is dead, you can't make it right; at that point, you just leave it to the Lord and trust him for it. But if the person is living, you know, you need to consider how it is that you can make restoration.

One of the most powerful affirmations that my salvation was genuine in the days that followed after my conversion, one of the things that I draw comfort from not because it demonstrates my righteousness at all but because it shows the work of the Spirit of God in my heart after the Lord saved me. Early on before anyone had told me any of these things, I realized that I needed to make restitution to the drugstore even though it had been four or five years later that I was converted and it just occurred to me, "I've got to do something to pay them back." So I wrote a letter to my former boss, I wrote out a check that wasn't much but it was a lot to me at the time, and I just wrote a letter and said, "Bob, I've got to tell you, you know, while I was working for you I stole a lot of things at the cash register, I took a lot of things, ate a lot of things, and I'm enclosing this check to try to make some measure of restitution. I've become a Christian now. I want to make this right as much as I can." It was a humbling letter to write. I guess I didn't know what he was going to do with the check but I know that he got it because he cashed the check, and it was just a way of clearing things in that small little way in order to make right.

And if you're a new Christian here today and, you know, this is reminding you of things, let me encourage you in the power of the Spirit of God to make it right, to make a step toward restitution and humble yourself before God and before man and show forth the

reality of your salvation by being willing to pay the cost, of actually incurring a cost of being a Christian, a cost that was never yours to begin with. This is the only right thing to do. If you keep the fruit of your sin after becoming a Christian, beloved, your repentance is not genuine. If you consciously keep the fruit of your sin and continue to live in, you know, the aftermath of it without making any effort at restitution, while rejecting restitution, having no interest in restitution, you need to question your salvation. If you are that hard-hearted against such a clear commandment of God, "You shall not steal," restitution is biblical, to reject that, you know, you have to wonder where the compliant obedient spirit that the new nature brings to a Christian, where that dwells in you if you utterly reject the reality of that. So you need to take care of that matter in your life quickly as a mark, as an expression of the sincerity of your salvation. It's the only thing that shows a proper gratitude. I mean, Christ suffered for your sin, Christ suffered for your thieving self, Christ suffered for those acts of theft that you have committed and would you keep what you took in light of what he has done on your behalf? We're just not thinking rightly about it if that's just not immediately clear to us as the appropriate mark of true repentance.

So we see, first of all, that for the one who has been born again, you start with restitution. Now secondly, and here we're going to turn to a New Testament text to help us navigate our way through most of the remainder of the message. Turn over to the book of Ephesians 4. I alluded to this text in the first message on this commandment and now I'm keeping my promise to come back to it later in the series. The second point for this morning, we've said you start with restitution and, secondly, just to state it real simply, you stop stealing. You stop stealing. You stop it. You don't continue on but you bring forth the fruit of repentance in repentance and by redirecting your selfish stealing heart, redirecting it in a different direction and that starts with to stop stealing.

The Bible calls you, brothers and sisters, the Bible calls us all, those who are able-bodied, to live by our own labor, not by the labor of others, and look at Ephesians 4:28. Paul, of course, has in the first three chapters set forth a broad sweep of the glorious nature of Christian salvation all to the praise of the glory of the grace of God in our lives, and then in chapter 4 he starts working out the practical ramifications of what salvation means. He starts, interestingly enough, let's just look there for a moment, having set forth the glory of Christ in salvation, the glorious position that a Christian holds in Christ, a defining nature of everything that we are, our identity is found in this Christ who chose us, adopted us, redeemed us, and sealed us with his Spirit, Ephesians 1, then he goes on, we're saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is a gift of God not as a result of works that no one should boast, chapter 2, verse 10, we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. God has not only prepared the works for us in the providential ordering of our lives, he has told us in his word what those works should be. So salvation is never a static matter that simply changes a man's status before God and leaves the man unchanged. No, no, not at all. The Bible says if any man is in Christ he's a new creation, the old things have passed away, behold, new things have come. A new life has been born and in this springtime of seeing flowers literally come up from the ground and trees begin to bloom and blossom before our very eyes with glorious majesty, so a new life in

Christ inevitably brings forth new fruit, new life that can be seen by the changes that take place in the man or the woman that has been converted to Christ.

It's interesting to me, this is always interesting to me and I never get tired of mentioning this, that one of the initial fruits of true salvation where Paul says the starting point of working out your salvation is found in the way that you handle the unity of the church. Ephesians 4:1, I'm on a little tangent, a little side road and that's perfectly fine; it's setting the context for the verse that we're going to look at. After talking about these glories of Christ and Paul praying that we would be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, Ephesians 3:16 and 17, he says, "Therefore," chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Chapter 2, verse 10, he said walk in the works that God has appointed for you. He picks up that theme of walking in chapter 4, verse 1, walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, and what does he say? What's his point? What's the lead statement that he makes? "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." He calls for people to live together in the local church in unity and to honor each other in love, and not to violate that spirit of unity that Christ died to make happen in the life of his people. These things are profound. You see what God cares about the most as he sets this forth. He says salvation and salvation leads to unity in the local body. It's a matter of great priority to God and that's why we speak about it often from the pulpit because the Scriptures speak about it so often.

Then he goes on in chapter 4 and now we'll get back onto the main road here talking about the eighth commandment, as he talks about part of the fruit of true salvation, he says this in Ephesians 4:28, he says, "He who steals must steal no longer." It's obvious that this is commentary on the eighth commandment. In the progress of revelation, God is making known the fullness of how he views his precious word, his authoritative commandment, "You shall not steal," here in Ephesians 4:28 we get a New Testament perspective on the fullness of everything that's included in the realm of that commandment. "He who steals must steal no longer," in other words, stop stealing, that's our second point this morning, "but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." There's the negative prohibition, stop doing this, with the positive command, start doing this. This is the biblical pattern for change. Stop this, start that, replace it with something else.

So he says in verse 28 there, look at it again with me, "He who steals must steal no longer." No longer. Now right there you have a really fascinating insight into the condition of the early church. The fact that he has to say this to believers, he's writing to those who are in Christ Jesus, you see that in chapter 1, verse 1, from the very start he makes it plain that he's writing to Christians, and yet he has to tell Christians that the one who is stealing must steal no longer. This was an existing problem, this was a contemporaneous problem to Paul writing the letter to the church at Ephesus and the surrounding churches; it was a circular letter designed to be shared with many churches in the first century. Do you know what that means? It means that Christians were

stealing. Christians were stealing. If they weren't Paul wouldn't have had to tell them to stop. He's writing to the church, he tells the church to stop stealing.

Now that's amazing to think about and it may sound surprising to you to think that such a thing could exist in the church but it speaks to the corrupt culture in which they lived. Their society was influencing their conduct. Maybe, this is just speculation that some commentators make, maybe he had in mind those who were day-laborers who kind of lived hand to mouth and they were stealing things in order to support their family. That's possible but do you know what? Even if it's true, even if it was born out of necessity, that does not justify theft in the life of a Christian, that does not justify violating the eighth commandment. Need does not justify sin in that sense or in any sense, for that matter. This was a problem in the church and before you get too self-righteous and say, "I can't believe that they were doing that back then," just understand that all of us are influenced and conditioned by our culture more than we realize. If we saw our lives in their culturally conditioned ways as God sees them, we would see many things in our own life with clarity that would grieve us over how we've adapted to the culture rather than adapting ourselves to the Spirit of God. So Paul said this because it was an existing problem in the church at the time. We ought to have the humility to realize, "Do you know what? I'm sure there are things in my life that are wrong also, that if the Spirit of God shone it with such a great spotlight at the moment on my soul that I would be convicted and embarrassed as well."

So the point is, as Paul is writing here, he says the thievery has to stop, and let me just remind you of the passage that we looked at last time in 1 Corinthians 6 where it specifically lists thieves as being among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:10, a passage worth imprinting on your mind, thieves and the covetous will not enter the kingdom of God. You know, in a room of this size, I am convinced that this ought to be sobering and frightening for some of you that are in this room just by mathematics, just by the sheer numbers of people that are in here, I have no expectation that 200-300 people, that there aren't any that this applies to. That's mathematically impossible and it's spiritually highly, highly unlikely. So God's word is speaking to you directly saying, "Stop the stealing." And understand that it's more than taking a bag of chips off the shelf, there's a whole breadth of range of thievery that takes place that we reviewed last time in our message. There are multiple, multiple, multiple ways that this can be violated.

So Paul says to stop it, to realize that the Spirit of God, that the word of God is calling you to change, to acknowledge your sin before God and to turn from it, turn from it and make restitution if possible, turn from it and make a commitment that way of living has got to stop and something new has to replace it. Point number 3, you could call it start sweating. Start sweating. In other words, start working, but that doesn't alliterate in the same way so we call it start sweating. Notice the sharp contrast introduced by the phrase "but rather." Verse 28, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather," there must be a sharp change. Repentance is a conscious turn away from your sin toward the righteousness that is found in Christ. It's a sharp turn, you know, there's not this, "Well, you know, I'll make a gradual change here. I'll just kind of wean myself off of it until I

get into a better..." No. No. Stop it but rather, rather do this, verse 28, "rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." There's a prohibition, stop stealing. There's a positive injunction, a positive command, start working with your own hands. And there's an ultimate goal shown in that he will have something to share with one who has need.

Here we're at the third point: start sweating. This positive command indicates that a man is supposed to work and we covered this in the past. In the garden of Eden before the fall, God gave Adam work to do. In the moral law expressed in Exodus 20 as he talked about the Sabbath and the fourth commandment, he said, "Six days a man must work." And we go on in the New Testament and we find it being repeated here. This is a moral requirement from God. You are to be a hard-working man, a hard-working woman. This is what God calls us to. Not simply a life of unearned wealth and health and prosperity so that we can have things easy and go on all the trips that we want to and live at our leisure. Even if you're wealthy, you're intended to work. This is what God calls a man to do. Your life is somehow to be given to productive labor.

The word that is used here that "rather he must labor," it's a Greek word from the Greek verb *kopiaio*, it means to work to the point of exhaustion. It can be translated "to work hard; to toil or even to struggle." It's the idea of exerting yourself until you're fatigued in what you do, and it's often used as a term that simply describes manual labor of someone working with their hands. You know, in our high-tech society, you know, people that do manual labor and work with their hands are, you know, are sometimes looked down upon by those that are in, you know, more technical white collar type jobs. That's not the perspective of Scripture at all. Scripture calls this kind of work honorable and calls men to work in this manner, and to a point that, so much so that it tells Christians that a believer must work in order to support his family.

Look over at the Thessalonian epistles, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, which is just on the other side of the book of Colossians at the end of Ephesians. 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 12. As you're turning there, as we see Scripture condemning thievery, we see that it is, by implication, condemning laziness. To say you shall not steal implies that you shall work, which means that you should not be a lazy person just trying to get by on the efforts of others. Scripture forbids that in the church. 1 Thessalonians 4:11 says, "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need."

Look over at 2 Thessalonians 3. I'm reading this again having gone here in a prior message. Verse 7, "you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you." Paul is describing his apostolic ministry. This is what Paul did as an apostle of Jesus Christ, how much more us who don't hold that lofty office? Verse 9, "not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example." Verse 10, "For

even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you," this is, again, this is written to Christians. Christians were stealing. Christians were being lazy and living off the dole. Paul would have nothing of it. Christ has nothing of it. This is not what he saved his people to do. This is not the kind of life that Christ called you to live, a lazy, unproductive life, the antithesis of what Christian living is meant to be. "We hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread."

So Scripture is very very clear on this point. It is misplaced sympathy, it is a distortion of grace for Christians to support a man who is able to work, has opportunity to work – everything that I'm saying here is critical to the context of what I'm saying – it is wrong for the church to support able-bodied men who have work available but refuse to do it. The righteous thing is to let them go hungry rather than to support them in their lazy unproductive lifestyle. Now for many Christians that's just shocking to hear because we're just so conditioned to think of things about, you know, you just give to everyone who asks you. That is not the fullness of what Scripture describes. It, instead, is misplaced sympathy, it disobeys God's word, and rather than taking handouts, the believer should aim to support his family even if all he has is a humble job with which to do it, even if he's just passing out carts at Walmart, that's far more honorable than refusing work that is available for the sake of, you know, whatever motivation he would try to justify it by. Listen, humble work, hard work is not dishonorable at all. Scripture commends it as a pattern by which believers are to live. And so we see that the idea is to stop stealing, and instead of taking from others in order to support your desired lifestyle, you start working for it, and if that means that you have to lower your standard of living in order to fit within what you're capable of earning, that's what you do. You don't finance it with debt. You don't borrow from others when you have no ability to pay back. You work and you live within the means that God has provided you to do.

Now having said all of that and not at all to diminish it or to qualify it in any way, there are times where good men, providence has taken a hard turn against them, you know, they want to work but can't, that's a different situation than a man who has opportunity but refuses to take it. You must be able to make those discriminating judgments and distinctions in your mind as you're looking upon things like this so that you are able to carry out and fulfill the righteousness of God in your life. You shall work. Six days a man is to labor. And so the lazy spirit of our culture and the fact that people can live off the government indefinitely in our culture, that is not a sign of good compassionate government, that's a sign of unbiblical government going to seed and conditioning people and enabling people to live in violation of the commandments of God. That's not good. That's bad.

So we see that Paul says stop stealing, start sweating, fourthly, I alluded to it earlier, point number 4, to seek sharing. To seek sharing. Look at Ephesians 4:28 with me again. There's a purpose to all of this. There's an overall goal. There is a heart condition that Paul is seeking to cultivate here as he tells us how to live as Christians, remembering that

the commandments are ultimately teaching us how to love. The commandments are not simply teaching us to work, they do that but the goal of the commandments is to love, to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to position ourselves in life with what we do so that we are able to serve others and to support those who have legitimate genuine need. And that's what Paul is getting at in verse 28. He says, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that," purpose clause, you're to work with your own hands so that this goal can be attained in your life, "so that he will have something to share with one who has need." Something to share with one who has need and, boy, does this just shoot a massive cannonball against the self-centered materialistic nature of so much of what claims to be the evangelical church today. You know, "God, I want You to make me healthy. God, I want You to make me wealthy. I want the job that I want and I want the money that I want." Oh, stop! I wish I could just stand on the steeple of some of these churches and just say, "Stop! Go home! Don't gather to do this in the name of Christ. You are violating the very holiness of God by saying such things and conditioning people to have such a spirit about them. The self-centeredness of it is so contrary to New Testament revelation. It's appalling!"

If you want to hear more about it, you know, go to my messages that are on moralistic therapeutic deism from 2018 and listen to those messages and see if that is not in perfect conformity with what Paul is saying here, this idea that God just exists to be your helper and to make your life go like you want it to do, and minimize the problems, and it's all just so self-centered, it's appalling to me. I don't know how else to say it. The whole gist of what Paul is saying in this verse is that you are to live this way so that you can have an outward focus of being gracious and generous with those who have legitimate need, not so that you can keep it for yourself.

What Jesus Christ does when a man is truly saved, not the false conversions of praying a prayer and just going on living however you want, no, when Christ really saves a man unto himself, he starts to make the man like himself. Christ saves us in order to conform us to his image, to make us like him, which is the highest noblest ambition that any man or woman, boy or girl, could have is to be like Christ. Christ was not a thief, which is to say, Christ was not a taker, Christ was a giver. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many."

Beloved, what you have to understand is this commandment opens up to us the very realm of the nature of Christ, it opens up to us the very realm of what God intends us to be. Christ turns us from takers into givers, from selfish self-centered people into those that are concerned with his glory, with serving Christ and somehow, you know, through however God has gifted us to serve men. To love God and to love man, that's the point of salvation. That's how it's to be lived out. And wouldn't it be sad, just to develop this thought just a bit more, wouldn't it be sad if there were audio recordings available of our prayer life that would play back the things that we pray for. "Bless me, Lord. Bless me, Lord." It's all I ever hear. "Help me this aspect of my job. Help me financially. Help me

this. Me. Me. Me. Me. Me." Speaking to the God who gives, gives gives. What is wrong with us? What is wrong with us? Do you see how contrary the spirit of things are? Go beyond matters of restitution and how a man works and earns his living, go beyond all of that and just go to the disposition of heart that this is addressing. God saved us and God enables us so that we could be givers in some manner or another, especially within the body of Christ. And how grievous it is to see people in the body of Christ being takers, takers, takers, if not materially in relationships and in their demands and what they expect from others and the control that they try to assert over others. It's appalling. It is appalling that that exists. Now I'm speaking broadly about the church in general but do you know what? Every local church is a microcosm of the greater church as well. Christ turns a taker into a giver and you come into a local church not to take but to give. To receive ministry, yes, but not only to receive, to give, to share of your life, to share of your resources, to make it better for others by your presence.

Now Paul, the Apostle Paul, quotes Christ elsewhere to emphasize this point. Look over at Acts 20 in verse 34 as Paul is saying farewell to the elders at Ephesus. Acts 20:34, he says, "You yourselves know that these hands," speaking of his own, "these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" The final words that are recorded of Paul speaking to the Ephesian elders before they said good-bye to him in the rest of the chapter is focused on this matter of working hard to being in a position to give and to help the weak. Well, beloved, if we're to help the weak in this way, then we have to develop individually, we have to work in a way that we're able to have resources to share.

Now with all of that said, I try to keep things balanced when I speak, I don't always succeed, probably usually fail, that's the way things go, but having said all of this, let me say this, that over the course of time, speaking to the long-term body of Truth Community Church, it has been very encouraging for us as elders to see how generously our people respond. When we speak about our elder chairman going to Mexico, you guys respond so that he's able to take down a bounty to share with people who have less, those that are ministering in Mexico in dire need, in dire poverty. Recently, you know, when we made opportunity to help our brothers in western Kentucky, you guys responded in an incredible way. And so I'm very grateful to see that happening in our church. That's the way it's supposed to work. In this way you're exemplary in the way that you're living and corporately there's this wonderful thing to see happening in our midst. It's just important for us to be mindful that this applies to us individually and that each one of us is to be like that. The fact that corporately it happens doesn't mean that each one is like that, and until each one is formed fully into the image of Christ we have room to excel still more.

So we've said that you start with restitution, you stop stealing, you start sweating, number 4, you seek sharing, and fifthly in something that utterly does not alliterate, point number 5, you find contentment. You find contentment. You could say you find satisfaction, I guess, and that would have alliterated but I didn't think of that in time. Find contentment. Beloved, the truest obedience to the eighth commandment, the spirit of the

commandment as well as the external outworking of the commandment is this, it is to cultivate in your life a consistent spirit of contentment with what the Lord has given to you. The Lord has given some of us a little, he's given some of us a lot, but within all of that we are to find a contentment in whatever the Lord has chosen and seen fit to give to us. Again, I mentioned this last time, I believe, I don't mind repeating myself on something this important. The truest obedience to the eighth commandment is to cultivate a consistent spirit of contentment in your life.

Turn to Hebrews 13:5. Do something in your Bibles to highlight this verse. Put a star by it, underline it, whatever you do to highlight something very very important in your life. The writer of Hebrews after exalting the person and work of Christ and showing his superiority over angels, over Moses, over the priests, over the Old Testament system of sacrifices, Christ is so much better than all of that Old Testament ceremonial stuff. And as he's bringing things to a conclusion and working out the implications of what that means in an individual life, for an individual Christian, he says in chapter 12, verse 28, he says, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." He goes on and then look at this in verse 5 thinking about everything that we've said as zeroing in on the way that we would receive this verse in our hearts here in this moment. Verse 5 in the New American Standard it reads, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we may confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'"

In verse 5 there where it says "I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you," in Greek that's a triple negative. Unlike English where a double negative cancels it out and makes it a positive statement, in Greek you add negatives in order to make it more emphatic. Here it's a triple negative saying, "I will never ever ever forsake you nor will I ever ever ever desert you. Never ever ever. Don't even consider the thought that that would happen." And if that is true, and it is, if Christ is our helper and loves our soul like that and he has promised to provide all of our needs by his riches and glory in Christ Jesus, then it's impossible that we would ever lack anything that we actually needed. And because that's true, then it ought to be in your heart that, "I am going to be content with what He's given rather than lusting for more on this earthly sod." The spirit of the New Testament is not that God will give you whatever you ask as long as you pray with enough faith. Oh, I've already gone down that road. I won't go there again. It's just so contrary to the spirit of true biblical salvation to think that way. These people aren't even saved that are teaching that. They're not even saved. They don't have the Spirit of Christ in them or they couldn't say such things so consistently over so much time to so many people. It's a spirit of deception all perpetrated in the name of Christ. Scripture says be content with what you have. Show forth the reality of your salvation with a contented heart.

So we are to be glad in what we have, not discontent in what we lack. Over the years, I think I've earned a right to say this, so to speak, I've earned it. It is sad, beloved, it is sad to watch discontented people live and to observe their lives over time. They can't stay in one place. They can't stay in one job. They can't stay in one marriage. They can't stay in one church. The common thread in all of that is a spirit of discontent with what God has provided. Now I'm not saying that a man can't change jobs. I've had three different careers in my life. I'm not saying that a man can't move his family to a better house. I'm not saying that. What is it that motivates people to be moving on to something else? "I've gotta have something else. I've gotta go somewhere else. I've gotta do something else. I've gotta have something else." They just show a perpetual restlessness and dissatisfaction and their unsettled lives, the pattern of unsettledness in their lives reveals a chronically disgruntled heart that is discontent with what God has given to them.

Beloved, let me just say very bluntly, very candidly in a pastoral way here. People like that are to be pitied and prayed for but they are not people to be followed. They are to be pitied but they are not to be followed. Look at what God has given you today, look at your spouse, look at your family, look at your home, look at your job, look at your finances, look at it all and say, "Lord, thank You. I'm going to offer You gratitude with reverence and awe. You've given this guilty sinner far more than she deserved. You've been far more good to me than what my sins against You should have called forth. I'm content, Lord. I don't want anything from You today, I just want to offer You the thanks of my heart for being such a good God to me in the Lord Jesus Christ." That's where a proper understanding of the commandment, "You shall not steal," takes you. So I ask you, my friends, are you content with what God has given to you?

Let's pray together.

Father, certainly this convicts us all. We are creatures of flesh. So often we walk by sight and not by faith. Dear Lord, by Your mercy let today be different for each one of us. By Your Spirit refresh our mind, refresh our understanding, remind us forcefully and yet graciously that Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. You are good and gracious to us even in our disgruntled state but, Father, let that not cause us to settle into disgruntledness and discontentment, rather let us call us out of that, call us out of the discontent and into gratitude, out of selfishness and into service, out of self-preoccupation into Christ-preoccupation loving and serving faithfully His people that You've brought together here in this body.

My friend, if you have been convicted by God's word today and you feel the weight of the Spirit of God pressing upon you and your conscience rages against your sinfulness, your thievery, your lack of restitution even, my friend, by the mercy of Christ I call you to repent of your sin and to turn to Christ. You don't have to assume that you're a Christian and call out and say, "Lord, I don't know who I am, I don't know what I am, I just know that I'm wrong. Have mercy on me, the sinner, based on the death and resurrection of Christ." Let me assure you that he will show you mercy.

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You fulfilled the law for us with Your righteous life, You paid the price of all of our sin with your shed blood at Calvary. Father, I thank You that even a thief like me could find a welcome forgiveness in the arms of Christ. May it be true for every unbeliever in the room with me today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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