

# Keeping The Eighth Commandment

*Baptist Catechism*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12  
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Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace. We thank you for this word. We pray, Lord, that you would grant to us to hear what you would have us know and we pray, Lord, that you would bless the preaching of your word and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.*

Please be seated.

We're going to talk a little bit about the eighth commandment, and as we say on many occasions, we must always remember that the way that the commands of God especially as given to us in the Ten Commandments, both imply a negative and a positive regardless of whether the command is negative or positive. The positive commands, like honor your father and mother, imply the negative, and the negatives, no stealing in this case, imply the positive in terms of protecting people's rights and property.

So I want to talk a little bit about that. The eighth commandment is very simple, "You shall not steal," and oftentimes we tend to want to think the commandments very simplistically and I haven't stolen anything, I haven't shoplifted anything, I haven't cheated anyone, but hopefully I would push that a little further. As our Catechism reminds us in Question 79, "What is required by the eighth commandment? The eighth commandment requires the lawful procuring in furthering the wealth and outward estate for ourselves and others."

The family I grew up in was never beyond the immediate family, it was never real close. I've got cousins I've never met kind of all spread out across the fruited plain, as they say. But I have a cousin who's still around named Billy, he's probably my closest in terms of my relatives, but he had a brother who got himself into trouble under this commandment. I lived in Virginia with my dad at the time. My dad worked for a company that had a lot to do with the military though he was a civilian and was in civilian private business, but because of his work, was very involved with and interacted with many Generals. Anyway, Billy's brother, my other cousin, I won't mention his name. It doesn't matter but no sense saying it just for courtesy sake. He was a Sergeant in the army, had done a tour

or two in Vietnam, was a gunner on a helicopter over there, but when he was back home, he was more of a supply Sergeant and so he would order things. So there would be maybe...the one thing I remember, there were others but I remember he had to order a bunch of wood for some project, maybe building some bunks for the Army or whatever, and so let's say he needed 20 pieces of lumber and he would order 40 pieces of lumber and he would deliver 20 and sell the other 20 on the market, so to speak, in order to make more money. He got himself in trouble and he ended up going to jail and the reason why I brought up my dad was the phone call when he was given his one phone call, he didn't call a lawyer, he called my dad and said, "Do you know any Generals?" And my dad was able to intercede a little bit but my cousin still went to jail because he was stealing.

We kind of tend to think of stealing in those types of terms or the Catechism says the procuring and furthering of wealth in our outward estate, so we shouldn't be stealing, we shouldn't be involved in the black market, we shouldn't be lying. But remember it also says ourselves and others; that part of the commandment is, remember the commandment is love, the number of times that Paul will say like in Romans 13, "no man love," and then he'll list some of the Ten Commandments. Jesus will say, "Those who love me will keep my commandments." Paul will argue in the book of Galatians 5 there is a connection between the love and the keeping of the commandments and even in this text when I read, "now that you love your brethren, you have no need of anyone to write you for yourselves are taught of God to love one another, indeed practice it even more." But then he says, "But make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend your own business and work with your hands." Part of loving God and our neighbor is not just the absence of stealing from my neighbor, taking something illegitimately that is not mine, but it is also actively procuring things and advancing or furthering others. We are not just in this isolation, but we are to be helpful to one another, we are to encourage one another, and one of the ways in which we can help one another is to help other people get work and to keep work.

Another thing that I remember from my youth is my dad who worked in the defense industry and the way that worked at the time he was in it, I think I've said on other occasions, if you get hired and you're hired at this position in the defense industry, this was on the civilian side, the private business, you come in at this level, the standard practice is you fire everybody underneath you and you bring in your own people. Very cutthroat and I remember my dad one time being asked to take somebody out to lunch to brief him on a defense project, a defense contract, and he came back from lunch having briefed this man to find out that that's his replacement and my dad went home unemployed, and he just told the other guy how to win the deal. That's just the way it is. You can like it or not like it, but that's how it was at the time.

So I remember my dad being on the phone quite a bit with people calling him and saying, "I just got a job. Do you want to come and work for me at such-and-such a company," or, "We got a new boss and I'm unemployed. Do you know anybody who's hiring?" And that sort of thing. And my point is that part of the commandment of not stealing isn't just that I refrain from taking your stuff like my cousin did, but actively finding ways of promoting the general welfare of other people because when you take from somebody,

it's not just stealing in the sense of I acquired something illegally, you've taken something that somebody else worked hard for.

When I was a young man and we lived in Virginia, many of you know in Washington, DC there's a part of DC called Georgetown and in the life of my lifespan, Georgetown has gone from really affluent and upper-middle class to upper-upper class, to in the late 60s, early 70s, being where the hippies and the druggies went and you wouldn't go there unless you were looking for trouble, to where now I understand it's kind of come back to be whatever. But in the time when I was in high school and it was the druggie place, somebody was running what was called when I was a kid an underground newspaper. If you're 50 or 60, you might remember underground newspapers. It's kind of like FM radio, there used to be underground radio stations. That's where everybody listened to AM and there was like three channels on your FM radio and you could listen to all the music they wouldn't play on the top 40, that's what made it underground. Anyway, whatever, but there was this underground newspaper called "Quicksilver Times" and I remember reading an article in the "Quicksilver Times" which usually a copy was floating around my high school because it was an underground paper, and I remember reading this article and it made perfect sense to me at the time until somebody pointed out to me the pure idiocy of it. It's like it said, you know, if you don't have any money for food, just go to the grocery store and wait for someone to come out of the grocery store with their shopping cart so all the groceries in there are paid for and then you can take those. That's not stealing because the groceries are all paid for. I thought, "Wow, that's kind of insightful." No, that's stealing too, isn't it? You're not stealing from the store, you're stealing from the person who paid for all those groceries which was a lot of money, always is.

So part of love is keeping the commandments. Part of the love is not just the negative, in this case do not steal, but looking for ways to promote, like protect your neighbor, protect your neighbor's property, protect his possessions. For example to see kind of the positive side, go back to Deuteronomy 22. Here is the eighth commandment stated in a positive sort of way. Deuteronomy 22,

1 You shall not see your countryman's ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. 2 If your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect them. 4 You shall not see your countryman's donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up.

So you see there's the positive side. You're a farmer, you're out in the middle of who-knows-where, and you may be so remote that you don't even know your neighbor but all

of a sudden there's a cow that doesn't belong to you or a donkey that doesn't belong to you in your yard or just walking down the road, you have a responsibility, eighth commandment, to see that that cattle is returned or that you at least protect it and provide for it. So now you are losing money because now you've got an extra mouth to feed, so to speak, an extra piece of cattle to take care of which is costing you time, money and effort and product until your countryman comes to claim it.

So that's the balance of these commandments. Negatively we do not take and it's not just simple stealing, it can be neglecting. Positively, we do not neglect, we look for ways to help and to advance and to provide for other people because in God's providence we all will have the proverbial donkey that goes astray; we all will leave our coat somewhere; we all will have times when we are out of work; we all have times when we have work, maybe an abundance of work; we all have times when we have need of a little extra money; there will be times when we have some extra money; and love says in terms of the eighth commandment, not only do I not wrongfully take but I seek ways of furthering the outward estate of others.

You take care of one another and that's what love does and remember the commandments, as I said earlier, are always tied to love. It's not just some cold ethical system. How do I know if I'm loving you? You know, we are to love one another, how do we know that Christians are loving one another? I'm not stealing your wife. I'm not stealing your things. But it's not just I'm not stealing your wife or your things, I am protecting your marriage and I am protecting your possessions. I am promoting your relationship and I am helping you better in keeping and preserving the things that you have. That's what love does. That's what love is. Unfortunately, we tend to have a very Hallmark card view of love, as you said, "I love you this much. I love you with all my heart," as if we actually know what that means. The Bible takes a much more practical look at things.

In our text, notice it says, "Now as to the love of the brethren," so again we have this love context here, "we don't have any need to write you because you're taught of God to love one another." If you're a Christian, God has already taught you and is teaching you to love one another. A Christian who is not loving, a Christian who is not concerned about his brother or sister in Christ is a contradiction in terms. You cannot profess to be Christ's and be indifferent to your brethren in the body of Christ. It's a contradiction.

"Indeed you practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia," notice not just local. It's towards all Macedonia. Part of our ability to go, say, down to Cuba or in the past when many of us went down to Lake Shore, that was an opportunity for us to express love. It's not just that we have an opportunity to go and do something that's interesting and kind of unique, but it's an opportunity to go enrich lives, and some of you who went to Lake Shore will remember that you went into some people's homes who lost everything. They talk about a 10 foot swell coming in off the shore in this present storm but with the Hurricane Katrina as it came off the Gulf of Mexico, it had a 50 foot swell or surge in terms of that, and the church, Lake Shore Baptist Church, was less than a mile from the shore and I can remember as you're driving through this very wooded area,

you're going down these roads and you see these really tall pine trees and there's like nothing on them up to 50 feet high, and whatever is there above that has grown since then. It was just really an amazing thing but people lost everything and as people from our church and from our association and from many other associations went down there and helped rebuild not just the church building but an entire community, you show up at their house and they just start crying because so many people came and helped rebuild their home. They felt a sense of love. They felt loved because people helped them in their time of need. So here these brethren are practicing love towards others and not just in their congregation but even beyond.

"But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more." Paul is not critical of them. We are loving. They are loving, I should say, and they're doing well, but Paul says to do more. When have we loved enough? We have never loved enough. We cannot love enough. We can never get to a place where I've loved enough and now I can sit back and watch other people do it. No, we are by the word of God commanded to excel more and more.

But then notice it says, "make it your ambition." Make it your ambition. It's an interesting word and it's a combination of a couple of words, Greek words, a love and honor, and it's sometimes it's the idea of to aspire for something. It's used three times in the New Testament. Paul uses it, he aspired to preach the Gospel where Christ had not already been preached. That was the word here in verse 11, "make it your ambition." In Romans 15:20, it's "aspire." It's my ambition to preach Christ where he hasn't. It's also used in 2 Corinthians, "Therefore we also have as our ambition whether it to be at home or present, to be pleasing to him." The Christian aspires or has as an ambition to be pleasing to the Lord. That should be always at the heart of all that we do.

So Paul calls them to have this aspiration or this ambition to do several things. 1. Lead a quiet life. To lead a quiet life and that's we're not drawing attention to ourselves, we're not part of the trouble, we are quiet. You know, there are too many busybodies in the body of Christ. In fact, he would have to write to the Thessalonians a second time in 2 Thessalonians 3:11, "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies." When you're driving down the road and you see the traffic's all back-upped and you're kind of wondering, "What's wrong?" And then you find out there's been an accident and your side of the road is actually wide open and you could just be zipping right through there but everybody wants to slow down and look, right? Rubber-neckers, sometimes they call them. Why? Because they're being busybodies.

We're all curious and curiosity is okay, there's nothing wrong with that, but I'm oftentimes amazed how often people who don't need to know something have a lust for knowing things, situations for which you are not a solution, you're not part of the help, you are not part of the problem but you're not part of the help either, but something has happened and you just need to know all the details. No, you don't. Lead a quiet life. Tend to your business. Don't worry about the businesses of others in the sense of gossipy busybodies wanting to know all the details. If God wants you to know the details, you're going to know the details and you're not going to have to worry about finding them out.

But have this as your ambition, aspire to this, to have this quiet life and attend to your own business. You focus on what you need to do. You focus on what you need to do.

I know from sports, my football coach used to always say, "Know your position." I played corner, I played left cornerback. I did not need to know the defensive end's position. He'd say, "Don't worry about him. You know your position. You play your position." And I was just watching a college game the other day and I saw them run a quick-pitch kind of play, option play, and the defense played it exactly the way I had been coached to do it and I thought, boy, that brought back memories. There was a corner and he was not to go after the quarterback, he was to go after the guy who might get the ball pitched to him, and you saw this guy just watching the quarterback, watching the pitchman, watching the quarterback, watching the pitchman. The quarterback starts to turn up, it would have been natural for him to go after the quarterback. No, leave him alone. That's not your man. Somebody else takes him. You just keep an eye on this guy. Sure enough, the quarterback pitched over to this guy and because the guy knew his position and played his position, he could tackle the guy.

The same thing in swimming. When you're swimming in the Olympics, it's always tempting to want to lift your head and see where everybody else is, and every time you lift your head, you lose ½ a second. Just keep your head down. Mind your own business. Swim your own race. Stay in your own lane. Know your own position. There's enough trouble in your own life to take care of and to pray about, don't worry about everybody else. You don't need to know. Pray for them. If they come to you and have a prayer request, pray for those things, but you don't need to know.

Take care to live a quiet life and attend to your own business and then, "work with your hands just as we commanded you." A Christian who does not work is a contradiction in terms. A Christian who does not work is a contradiction in terms. What does that mean? Well, I'm going to college right now, well, that's your work. Work at it. When it says "work" it's not necessarily implying that you have to be employed 40 hours a week, but there are things you need to do. You need to be constantly working.

I remember when I was in seminary and the church that Linda and I attended, we did these Bible clubs down in Hazard, Kentucky up in the Appalachian Mountains. Yes, there really is a place called Hazard, Kentucky, and the Baptist preacher that was hosting us told us about hollers that we were not allowed to go up into because if you went up into them, you may not come back. Think "Deliverance," the movie. And that's the kind of place we were at, and so anyway, I'm standing there and meeting some of the men in the church and it's typical to ask, "What's your name?" Then after you ask someone's name, you say, "Well, what do you do?" So there was this guy, he's about the size that I am now and he was just standing there and I said, "What do you do?" I don't remember the guy's name, we'll call him Sam. He says, "My name's Sam." I said, "Well, what do you do, Sam?" He says, "I draw." I said, "You're an artist?" "No, I draw government money." That was his job. No. I mean, there are times when you may need to go on government funding and we can discuss the merits of that or not, but in our society, we all pay in taxes and so if you've had to, need to do some of that, I'm not saying that that's right or

wrong but it is wrong if that's what you do 24/7 for your career. How can I go from government program to government program to government program so I don't have to work. That's a problem.

We are to work with our hands and notice it's commanded. How much you have to work, you should be able to work in order to supply all your needs. Paul will say over in Ephesians 5, "Let he who steals, steal no longer but let him work with his own hands in order that he might have something to give to him who has need." How hard should you work? Well, again, our Catechism says that we are not only not to steal but we're to procure in furthering the wealth and outward state of ourselves and others. You should be working hard enough not just to pay your bills but in order that you might have something to give to other people when they are in a difficult situation which might mean not going to Disneyland this year. It may mean not upgrading to the newest iPhone XS or whatever. I mean, really? Yeah, maybe, so that you can have those extra funds to be able to give to somebody else who has need. It does not require that you get a Samsung instead of an iPhone because that would be going too far, but to be thinking in terms of how can I be prepared to care for others, and this is a command and it's linked to the eighth commandment.

So we are to work with our hands. How are we to work with our hands? It doesn't tell us what you have to do. It doesn't tell you how much you need to do, but you ought to be working in such a way that you are providing for yourself and your family and as God's providence sees fit, that you're able to give to those who have need, because everyone in this room will have a time in their life when they will have a need. It doesn't matter who you are, young or old, you will have a need and the body of Christ should rally around you.

I've said this in other contexts, I'd like to say it in this context. In another context, I've talked about when a brother or sister has fallen into sin, assuming that they're repenting, what's the one thing they need from the body of Christ? They need the body of Christ to run or to draw near? To draw near. To rally around them. You've caught yourself into some sin, no matter what sin you've done, some Christian somewhere has already done it before you did it, probably someone in this body has done it before you did it. Sin is not strange. Sin is not abnormal in the life of the Christian because I think I read once somewhere that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. I do think that's somewhere in the Bible. Oh, I can't really remember. Oh, yeah, Romans, right? So when you sin, nothing strange has happened. Of course we have to repent of our sin, we have to confess our sin, not hide it, but when the sin has been brought out, what do we need from our brothers and sisters? For them to run from us? No, we need them to draw near.

The same thing when we have a need. You've lost a job or whatever. You've had a major expense that there's no way you could have foreseen it would happen. The body of Christ should be prepared to rally and try to cover that need in whatever way we can. Maybe not every way it needs to be but the best that we can. The body of Christ, and to do that, I need to be working, you need to be working, we need to be preparing for those times where we're able to have needs.

One of the things when I try to be promoting North Dakota, one of the stories I'll tell all the poor dolts that have never gotten the chance to live in North Dakota, I tell them about the B.'s and the stories that they've told me about some of the other farmers in their area, and I believe, I'm sure I won't have the story totally correct but the farmers will end up, I think there were a few years back where one had some back surgery or whatever and wasn't able to do his harvest, and the other farmers took care of that. That's what the eighth commandment would have us do. It's not, "Oh gee, Jim can't get his stuff to market, now that's going to help me get there ahead of him and get more money." No, how do I help Jim or whoever the farmer was that was hurt, how do I help? That's the eighth commandment.

And to do it out of love and as Christians to do it by faith because what never is not of faith is sin. Why am I doing this? Why am I trying to keep the eighth commandment? Because I believe that Christ has kept that commandment for me and Christ has given me the actual righteous credit as if I have fulfilled this commandment and, therefore, I believe he's clothed me with the righteous credit of that. To whatever degree his grace has sanctified me, I will do what I can by faith to keep that commandment for the glory of Christ in gratitude towards Christ and for the welfare of my neighbor.

But notice it also says in verse 12, "so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need." People watch Christians. You know that. You've heard people says, "Well, if that's what it means to be a Christian, I don't want to," but one of the things that we'd like the world to see is that as Christians, as a congregation, that we are not like them and that we take care of our own to the degree that we can.

We live in an increasingly fragmented society and that fragmentation is coming to North Dakota. In other parts of the country, it's been there for a long time. Like in California, you know that you are a native of California if you've lived in California longer than the person you're talking to. So if you've only lived there two weeks and he's lived there a week, you're the native and it's very rare to be in a church in California where you'll find multigenerations. I remember one Sunday here and the Anderson family had grandma and then Leroy and Sherry, and then Tom, and Tom's kids all in one pew. I'm sure it happens elsewhere, I'm sure it happens even in California but in all of my years of being in California, I don't remember four generations of people of a family sitting in a pew together. That's what I mean by fragmentation.

Our society is becoming fragmented. My sister lives in Washington state, my brother lives in Southern California and I live really close to heaven in North Dakota, and we see each other like just short of never, and that's fragmentation, and you're left alone and you don't have family to help you, you don't have family to call in the middle of the night, "What do I do?" And that's becoming more and more all around us, especially as more and more people are moving into North Dakota who are what they call New Americans. Who are they going to call? What are they going to see as the American society? That I'm just going to kind of live in isolation? I come to church, do my thing and then I go home and I hide or am I involved and are we caring for one another because that's what

Christians do and the non-Christian world is watching. The non-Christian world wants to be loved. The non-Christian world wants to know there's somebody who actually cares for them and the more that we model that, the more that that becomes the reputation, "Do you know that Community Baptist Church, they're really odd. You know, I hear they really take care of their own. I heard of this one guy or one gal and there was this need and, boy, I've never heard of a church that has gone so far out of their way to see that that person was helped." Then we are modeling the kind of Christian ethic and love that becomes an opportunity to evangelize our non-Christian friends. "Why do you do that?" Because that's the love of God and that's what he would have us do, and it becomes a great opportunity to be able to speak to a society that's becoming more and more post-Christian, more and more fragmented, more and more isolated, more and more dependent upon a government or some impersonal bureaucracy than family and friends.

So there's a real practicality to this commandment and I hope that in the coming years, that we will find new and better ways to be prepared. While we will never probably ever face a hurricane in North Dakota, although if we did, we'd have a bigger problem than just a hurricane, but we most certainly will have a blizzard, won't we? We will most certainly probably have more flooding, won't we? And will we be prepared in that day to care for the needs of those in the body of Christ and beyond? And what would we do if we were prepared? What would we have stored up? Like Joseph in the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine, he saved many because the food was prepared and stored ahead of time. What would we do? What would that look like? And how might we be used of God to care for the body of Christ and beyond in the day of great need?

That's part of what it means to keep the eighth commandment so I hope that you hear going forward that the eighth commandment is more than don't shoplift, don't swipe your neighbor's stuff. The Heidelberg Catechism asking what does this commandment require, it says that I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others, further also that I faithfully labor so that I may be able to relieve the needy.

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for the way that you meet our needs and we thank you that you do so not according to what we have done or what we deserve but according to your lovingkindness and the greatness of your mercy and goodness. May we be found to be kind and good to others as well. In Christ we pray. Amen.*