

# **Faithful Stewardship in Earthly Things: The Eighth Commandment, Part I. Romans 13:7-10**

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The Eighth Commandment is simple: "Thou Shalt Not Steal"

The HC gives the meaning this way:

Q110: What does God forbid in the eighth Commandment?

A110: God forbids not only such theft and robbery as are punished by the government, but God views as theft also all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we seek to get our neighbor's goods, whether by force or by deceit, such as unjust weights, lengths, measures, goods, coins, usury, or by any means forbidden of God; also all covetousness and the misuse and waste of His gifts.

Q111: But what does God require of you in this Commandment?

A111: That I further my neighbor's good where I can and may, deal with him as I would have others deal with me, and labor faithfully, so that I may be able to help the poor in their need.

There is another question in the catechism that goes to this subject:

Q55: What do you understand by the "communion of saints"?

A55: First, that believers, one and all, as members of the Lord Jesus Christ, are partakers with Him in all His treasures and gifts; second, that each one must feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members.

Simply stated, the implications of this commandment are these.

1. All things belong to God; no one has absolute property in himself or in his possessions.
2. Things in the world are held in a sacred trust. There is a sacrilegious aspect to theft, because it intrudes upon the sacred character of the sacred trust that exists in the relationship of people to property. It is given to them by God, and it is a usurpation of that sacred relationship for others to destroy that sacred trust by theft, deceit, or fraud.
3. So, there is blaspheme and impiety connected with this commandment. The Bible does not make a difference between crimes against property and crimes against people. The modern world, under the pretense of sanctifying theft by governments, tries to make distinction.
4. Legal ways of gaining rights to property:

- a. Gift, bequest, will, donation.
- b. Earn it. Purchase is a kind of earning: you exchange your labor for the good.

But let us look at some of the important things.

A. This commandment may be taken positively, or negatively.

- 1. Positively: It is wrong to claim title to something that belongs to another.
  - a. Physical property
  - b. Moral or Spiritual property
- 2. Negatively: It is wrong to deprive someone of something that is due them.

B. This commandment is illustrated in the text I read a moment ago from

1. Romans 13:

7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honor.

8 Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

2. Note:

- a. Give everyone what they have coming to them: tribute, custom, fear, honor. This idea is also expressed in Proverbs 3:27 Withhold not good from Them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Also in James 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.
- b. Do not be in debt to anyone, but love one another. Because you are created in the image of God, you are required to love one another---it is a debt that you must pay. Love does no evil to his neighbor—so love is the fulfilling of the law—not that love itself excuses you from the requirements of the commandment, as some would say—but love is the great motivator.
- c. The primary application of this passage is the duty we owe to magistrates and rulers, and Christians should not come short in any of these. Because rulers carry the authority of God to regulate the world in righteousness, as we saw when we

considered the Fifth Commandment, we therefore owe the image of God: tribute, custom, fear, honor.

- d. Stinginess is a form of theft: Some people are stingy in praise, in honor, in compliments, in charity, in alms. God would have His children to be generous in all of life.
- e. Paul follows his regular way of teaching: he calls attention to some specific thing—in this case honor and obedience to rulers, and then goes to the general principle. He derives paying taxes from the general requirement of love for one another.

C. People who are robbed. Here are people you are not to steal from:

- 1. Yourself. Do not rob yourself of eternal life. “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul.”
- 2. The closest to you: your wife; your spouse. Do not defraud one another in sexual things, the apostle says. Marriage makes you one flesh, and your spouse has property in your body, in your emotions, in your support, presence, etc. But neither should we demand more than is due. Theft can be both ways—in withholding what is due; or in demanding what is not due.
- 3. Your children: discipline; support; “If any man provide not....”
- 4. The church: Communion of the saints. If Christ died for us, we also should lay down our lives for the brethren. Paul said, “If I be poured out.
- 5. God: Malachi: “You have robbed me...” How did we rob you: “In tithes and offerings....” God has our tithes and offerings coming to Him, but the withholding of tithes and offerings is a symptom of a much greater problem: the idea that you belong to yourself. It is a miserable idea to claim that you belong to yourself, and that is the greatest theft of all.
  - a. You belong to God because He created you. You are the vineyard that the Lord expect fruit from.
  - b. You belong to God because Jesus died for you.” What, know ye not....” You are not your own. We confess in the HC 1: “My only comfort in life and in death is that I be-long to my faithful savior....”
  - c. This means that everything you have are is the property of Jesus Christ, by virtue of creation and redemption. What He has given you is given you in trust, and someday you must give an account.
- 6. There are two parables that illustrate this great truth.
  - a. The parable of the unjust steward. Luke 16: Explain:
    - 1. And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.
3. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.
4. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.
5. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?
6. And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.
7. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.
8. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.
9. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.
10. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.
11. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?
12. And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?
13. No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

b. The parable of the Talents: Matthew 25 Exposit

14. For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.
15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.
16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.
17. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained

other two.

18. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

D. The summary is this:

1. The things of this world—your entire present possessions: body, mind, soul, heart, wealth, reputation, etc., are given to you to be held in trust for the glory of God through Jesus Christ. None of them are ends in themselves, but are to be used as means for the kingdom of God. This is what the law requires. You and I only

make a small beginning in this obedience, but this is the mark at which we must shoot. You, yourself, do not belong to yourself, and neither does anything you have. This is true not only of you, but of every man that walks the earth. You are to use your own things to the glory of God; and to respect and honor the stewardship that other people have over their own things. May this church be characterized by a spirit of generosity toward others and carefulness in our own stewardship of the gift of God.

- a. We are not to make too much of our gifts and possessions as though we have eternal right to them, that we have absolute title. We don't, for you cannot take any of it with you. The last possession you will have on this earth is a plot of ground into which men will place your casket—and then you will get to keep it only until the worms have finished their work.
  - b. But neither must we make too little of the things that God has given us. They are temporary and fading, but they can be given eternal significance by the use we make of them. What is our life, it is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, then vanishes away; but there is a way to keep your life: Jesus said, if you love you life you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake and the Gospel, you will find it. Mark 8:35. That gossamer of life that is drifting away from you can be captured and preserved for all eternity by giving it away—by giving it to Jesus Christ and the Gospel, so that even a cup of cold water that is given in His name will not lose its reward, Jesus said.
2. So it all comes down to this:

HC 1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him.

May God bless you.