

## Command 8 - Do Not Steal

**July 15, 2018**

I came back and it was gone. I had it less than a week. I spent my hard money on it but never saw it again.

It was my yellow Sony Sports Walkman. Today, it wouldn't be worth much, because it played cassette tapes, but in its day, it was cutting edge technology.

My Sony Sports Walkman was special because it had a solar panel on the side to help keep the rechargeable battery fresh. It was perfect Walkman for my summer job. That summer, I worked for the grounds crew at my college. I spent most of my time mindlessly weed-whacking around trees and under bushes. A Walkman on my belt, to listen to my favorite music instead of the constant whine of a tiny engine, was a dream come true. That day, it was a particularly hot day, like today. I was cutting grass under a long row of bushes on the west corner of campus. The batteries in my Walkman died. Not having a pocket in my shorts, I took off the Walkman and hid it under one of the bushes where nobody could see. I planned to continue weed-whacking down the long row of bushes then come back for the Walkman. The Walkman would be out of my sight for a while, but stowing it under that bush where nobody could see felt like a safe place for the short time it would be out of my sight.

I finished that long row of bushes and went back for my hidden treasure, but it was gone. I was angry. When did this happen? Who took it in the short time I was gone? I felt angry. I felt violated. I wanted revenge. I reported it stolen but nothing became of it.

Has anyone else had that feeling of anger and violation because they had something stolen? I assume many of us have had things something stolen that are far more costly than a Walkman. You understand this pain.

This morning, we are talking about stealing. Stealing is a much bigger problem that most of us realize. Stealing is such a big problem that most of modern life is built around protecting ourselves from thieves. For example, think about your house. Does anyone have a lock on the door? Why do we need that lock? Does anybody have a security system? Does anyone have the ultimate in home security systems? Does anyone keep a shotgun under you bed? We are protecting ourselves from the thieves.

Let's think about your car. Does anybody lock their car doors? Does anyone have a car alarm? Does anyone use a LoJack system so you can track your car and not just find your car but also find the thief if it is stolen? There is a lot of technology to protect us from car thieves.

Think about your technology. Does anyone have a password on your phone, iPad or computer? If not, you should. Does anyone have a fingerprint reader or a facial scanner on your phone? That is a lot of money and technology for added security. Let's think about websites. Have you ever used a website that asked you to create a password? Why does our bank website require double or even triple layers of verification? It is to protect us from thieves.

How about shopping? How many stores today have security cameras? Almost all of them. How many stores have tags in their merchandise so if you take a piece of clothing out of the store an alarm sounds? Most clothing stores

have those basic layers of security. Just so you know, the reason Wal-Mart has greeters is not to welcome you when you come in the store but to stop you when you go out of the store to make sure you are not stealing. Protecting ourselves from thieves is a big problem

It cracks me up when folks say people are basically good. We are not basically good. We are basically sinful. Everyone by nature is a thief. People steal. If the world wasn't filled with thieves, why would we see so much money and work poured into technology to protect us from those thieves?

It makes me laugh when some people claim we should abolish the U.S. border. They want to get rid of any immigration policy and let everyone come into our country and leave the country as they please. They propose this because they believe everyone is basically a good person. No, we are not good. If we need locks, passwords, security cameras and security guards to feel safe when it comes to living in America, it only makes sense that there should be some kind of security to protect us from those coming to America. That is not a political statement. It is a practical statement because everyone is a thief.

I like the way Martin Luther said it. He said if all the thieves were hung for their crimes, the world would not have enough rope. We would need to start hanging men by their belts. In other words, stealing is a much more prevalent problem than we realize.

As a church, we are studying our way through the Ten Commandments. Today we come to the eighth commandment, which is about stealing. It is a short and sweet commandment.

## You shall not steal. Exodus 20:15 (ESV)

This morning, we are going to see what this command means. How do we violate it? Why did God give it? How do we apply it to our lives?

### What does it mean to steal?

I want to point out that this command does not have a lot of footnotes. It is simple. It says, “Don’t steal.” (period!) It doesn’t say we can steal from people if they have two of something and we need one of what they have. It doesn’t say that we can act like Robin Hood and steal from the rich to give to the poor. Robin Hood is fictional character. He was not a biblical character. Check the book.

The Hebrew word for stealing in this verse is the word *ganaf*. It means carrying anything away that is not your property. It means taking *anything* that is not yours. The key word is anything. That means this command applies to any conceivable situation when we take something that isn’t ours.

### How do we steal?

It covers theft, burglary, robbery, larceny (which is taking something and not returning it), hijacking, shoplifting, pick pocketing, embezzlement (misuse of funds placed in your hands to manage), extortion (stealing through force or threats), and racketeering (dishonest business dealings). It covers stealing from public places. Have you ever taken a hotel towel expecting them to replace it? That is stealing. One hotel reported that in a year they had 38,000 spoons and 355 coffee pots taken by patrons. The sad news is they only had 100 Gideon Bibles taken. Let’s hope people take more Gideon Bibles and less spoons next year.

Stealing can also be from the government. The easiest way to do that is not reporting all your taxes. The government can also steal from its people through bureaucratic waste. The government also steals from people by increasing our national debt, which is stealing from our future citizens.

This word for stealing covers theft at work, which is more common than we realize. Stealing at work is not being honest on your time cards. It is calling in a sick day when you are not sick. It is stealing office supplies, paper or other resources from your employer. It is placing private purchases on your professional expense account.

Another way stealing takes place at work is through wasting time. Studies say one of the most common ways we waste time at work is on the Internet. Instead of working, we check Facebook. We post on social media. We watch Youtube. If we find a good clip on YouTube, we pass it to a co-worker so they can also waste time at work.

Some people even play video games at work. When I was a youth pastor, I spent time with another new youth pastor in a neighboring church. He told me he wasn't sure what to do around the office once he photocopied his lesson plans out of a preprinted book. He played video games in the church office during work hours. That is stealing. I recommend he read the Bible during work if he can't find anything else better to do. That is just a helpful suggestion.

It is estimated that employee theft costs American businesses 200 billion dollars annual. Some estimates say that up to a third of a product's price is to

cover the various thefts of the product and parts of the product that take place during the manufacturing and marketing of the product.

Some common business practices are also a form of stealing. Price gouging is one of them. When Hurricane Harvey struck the Gulf Coast of Texas, gas stations began price gouging their customers by charging up to \$20 per gallon for fuel.<sup>1</sup> The truth is there was no problem with supply and demand. It was just a fancy way of preying on people to steal their money.

We also see this kind of stealing in the used car market. This past week I was talking with a friend about a mechanic both of us trust. When he used to work at a dealership, he experienced times when the dealership was not honest with its customers. For example, as a mechanic, he would identify a list of problems to be repaired on a car for it to be a GM-certified vehicle. Instead of repairing all the problems, the dealership would repair only part of the problems then claim the vehicles as a GM-certified vehicle anyway. That is just a fancy way of stealing from the customer since he or she will need to make those repairs shortly after buying the vehicle.

There is also credit theft. That is lending money at an exorbitant rate so a lending organization can make an unjust profit. Credit card companies are the most egregious in this area. Some cards charge interest rates as high as 20 percent. They market those cards to people of low income so they will make purchases on the card and not be in a position to pay off the card any time soon. They are stealing and taking advantage of the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thedrive.com/news/13932/hurricane-harvey-price-gouging-skyrockets-gas-prices-to-20-a-gallon>

There is also theft of intellectual property. Has anyone illegally duplicated music or illegally downloaded software? I have. Everybody does it. It is a violation of the eighth command. Has anybody plagiarized in a paper and not used proper footnotes to give credit where credit is due? That is intellectual theft.

I hope I am driving home the point that everyone is a thief, even though 90 percent of Christians believe they haven't violated the eighth commandment. The truth is, all of us steal.

### **Why is stealing wrong?**

Stealing is wrong for many reasons. I will point out two.

#### **Every theft is a failure to trust God's provision for my life.**

Whenever we take something that doesn't belong to us, we deny that God has given us or is able to give us everything we need. Keeping the eighth commandment is an exercise in a practical faith. If I don't have something, it is because God doesn't think I need it to accomplish what he wants me to do with my life. If we need something to accomplish God's will for our lives, he will provide us with what we need. If God hasn't provided something, we don't need it to do his will for our lives at that time. Stealing anything is a way of saying we cannot trust God to provide for our needs.

Some of you know I started at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Many folks use Westminster as the launching pad for their PhD. programs in Cambridge. To get to Cambridge, you needed to ace almost every class. Just so you know, I wasn't close to acing every class. I was just hoping to pass every class.

For some of the larger classes at Westminster, I heard teachers reused old exams in their classes. I was told that if I studied the exams from previous years, I could be pretty sure to see a similar exam when I went to take my tests. When studying for one of my first exams, I read through a few previous tests that were passed around class by the students. To my shock, when I took the test, it has the exact same questions as previous year!

I talked with my friends after the exam. I told him I didn't want to look at exams from previous years. It was a form of cheating.

One of the guys I talked with tried to justify looking at those old exams. He told me he needed all the help he could get to keep his perfect GPA so he could get into Cambridge. I remember thinking, if you need to cheat to get into Cambridge, God doesn't want you in Cambridge. This is an exercise in practical faith. God will provide what you need to get you where he wants you to go. You never need to steal to get you where God wants you to go. If you need to steal to get something or be somewhere, you are out of God's will for your life when you get there.

So for all of those who in middle school, high school or college and you are tempted to steal answers in school for higher grades to get into better colleges or to get more scholarship money, remember you don't need to steal to get you where God wants you to be in life.

**Every theft is taking away what God provided others to accomplish his will.**

If we take something that God gave to someone else, it takes away what God provided him to accomplish what God wants him to do with his life. Let's

say someone has two lawnmowers, and that person isn't using them. You don't have a lawnmower, but you desperately need a one. Stealing your neighbor's lawnmower is still wrong. You are denying your neighbor the opportunity to do what God wants him or her to do with those extra lawnmowers. You are denying your neighbor the opportunity to sell the extra lawnmower or to give away the extra lawnmower.

### **How do we steal on the job?**

Now that we understand what this command means, how easy it is to break in any area of life and why God tells us not to steal, let's see how this command applies in different areas of life. We will begin by looking at the work environment.

#### **Employers can steal from their employees.**

Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. James 5:4–5 (ESV)

What we have here is stealing. People worked in a rich man's field. They worked for an agreed-upon wage. When the work was done, instead of giving the workers everything they were owed, the landowner only gave his workers a portion of what should have been paid or delayed paying the workers. That is stealing. Just this past week, I was talking with a friend who told me he left one job and went to a new job because the manager agreed to pay him a particular wage. When his paychecks started coming in, he noticed they didn't add up. He was short \$200 to \$300 every paycheck. When he talked to his boss, he simply told him they decided to not pay him what they agreed to pay him. That is

stealing. That is an employer using his position of power to manipulate his employees.

Another example of this is employers making it complicated for their employees to get paid; they withhold pay from their workers because they claim the paperwork is still processing. If there is anything wrong with the complicated paperwork, the employer holds the check. You see this in the construction industry. It is approval after approval and delay after delay as the rich financiers of a project hold back the funds from the workers on the project as a way of using them. This hangs the employees and contractors out to dry while the fat cats hold onto their money. It is stealing.

This is the situation James was talking about in this verse. Notice it says the landowners lived in luxury and self-indulgence while they kept back part of the money they owed the poor laborers who worked their fields. This verse is not saying it is wrong to be a rich employer. It says it is wrong to use your wealth to manipulate employees by withholding due payment from them. That is a form of stealing.

Those who are in business for themselves know this situation. They are often paid half the money for their work up front, then they should be paid for the rest of their work when they are done with their work. Many times, employers don't send that final check until months after it is due. In the meantime, those who are in business for themselves struggle to survive as they personally float the loan.

Many times those who can barely afford to pay, pay on time. Those who have more than enough money to pay, often delay, manipulate and short change you.

Sometimes employers are so low that they intentionally only pay a portion of their bill. They know the lawyer fees and the headaches will cost you so much money so they decide to reduce their own bill by a few thousand dollars because they know all the litigation and headaches will cost you so much money that it is not worth you taking them to court. That is being a thief. This is a common and underhanded practice.

God has a great response to this. He says the cries of the people who mowed your fields have reached the Lord of hosts. The Lord of hosts means the Lord of heavens' army. All you did was fatten yourself for the day of slaughter. You may get away with ripping off people in this life, but when everyone stands before Jesus, you will learn that nobody gets away with ripping off people when it comes to the next life. Even Christians, who are forgiven by Jesus, will still lose eternal rewards in the next life if they rip people off in this life. By definition, all eternal rewards in heaven are far greater than any earthly rewards we gain by ripping people off. It is always right to do what is right. It is never right to take what isn't yours.

I have to ask you, are you a good employer? Do you pay on time? Do you short change your workers? Do you make promises but fail to keep them to your workers?

## Employees can steal from their bosses.

Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:9–10 (ESV)

In our day, we don't have bondservants. A close parallel relationship in our day is the relationship between employees and their bosses. Paul gave instructions to employees on how they are to work.

They are to be submissive to their own masters in everything. That means if your boss asks you to get something done, rather than whining, you get the job done.

They are to be well-pleasing. That means giving pleasure and satisfaction. If you are a boss, you know that some employees you love, others are harder to love because they are hard to trust and they don't work hard. In a well-pleasing employee, it is often not the big parts of a job that make the difference but the little parts. It is cleaning up without being asked. It is taking initiative to find and get work done. It is an employee treating your business with the care and attention they would give to their own business. As Christian employees, are we known for putting a smile on the face of our boss by the way we work?

Christian workers are not to be argumentative. This means no fighting with your boss. I have experienced employees that like to fight when I bring things up. They are problem-centered, not solution-centered. They want to fight about work rather than get work done. Nobody likes an employee like that.

Employees are not to pilfer. That brings us back to our topic. As employees, we are not to take stuff from work and call it our own. While most of

us do not literally take things from work, one of the things we often take from work is time.

Studies say the average worker is unproductive for two of their eight hours every day. They are frittering during those hours or talking during those hours, even though they are paid to work during those hours. That is stealing from the boss. Think of it this way. Imagine you go to Wyman's Spudnutz and order eight Spudnutz. You get to the car and open the bag but there are only six in the bag. You go back to the store and complain that they shorted you two donuts. The owner says, "We are running a special. It is 'The way you work day.' You buy eight and get six." I don't think you would be happy. Neither is your boss when you treat him the same way.

The big idea is that your work is your witness. The way we work is the way we witness at work. Christians employees should be the best employees. When we are the best employees, people will notice we are different because we aren't stealing from our bosses. We work eight of the eight hours when we are at work. The best way to be a witness at work is to be a witness in the way we work. People should see our Christian faith through the way we work before they hear about our faith through our words at work.

**We steal from God when we don't worship him with our wealth.**

**Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. Malachi 3:8 (ESV)**

The Bible tells us one of the ways we can be thieves is we steal from God by not worshipping him with our wealth. In other words, when the offering plates goes by, we may say Jesus means everything to us but we worship him with

nothing. There is a problem. Our words and our actions do not match. There are two types of financial gifts Malachi discussed. One is a tithe. The other is a contribution.

What is a tithe? A tithe literally means a tenth. It is 10 percent of your paycheck. Of every 10 dollars, one dollar was given back in worship to God. In the Old Testament there were actually multiple tithes that added up to people giving between 25 to 27 percent of their income in worship. We need to realize that giving in ancient Israel was not all for worship. Part of their giving was their government because they were a theocracy run by God, not a democracy run by the people. You could say part of their giving was their taxes.

What is a contribution? Those are special gifts for special needs that are above and beyond the tithe. These contributions went to help the poor and were part of festivals and holidays.

Just to be straight, while tithing was an Old Testament thing, tithing is not prescribed as a New Testament thing. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, it says our giving as Christians should be generous, proportionate, sacrificial and cheerful. A tithe, 10 percent, may be the proportion you feel you can give in worship that is generous, sacrificial and cheerful for you. A tithe may also be too little. For others, it may be too much, but that is usually not the case. I have always believed 10 percent is a good floor for our giving but it shouldn't be considered our ceiling.

I mention this because after doing some research on giving, I learned some interesting things about giving in the American church. Christian Smith, in

his book Passing the Plate, claims that one in five Christians attend church but give almost nothing to church. There is a disconnect. Many times these folks claim they can't afford to give. The honest truth is they don't want to give. Scarcity reveals priority. When times are tough, we cut back on extra things and only spend money on essential things. If worshipping God with our wealth is a priority, it will stay in our budget.

Incidentally, this is the entire problem that the verse we just studied in Malachi was written to address. God's people were experiencing scarcity after returning from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem. In that time of scarcity, they stripped away their giving. That revealed God was an accessory in their lives, not a priority.

If God's people were robbing Him when they weren't worshipping with their money in the Old Testament times, how much worse are we robbing God when we aren't worshipping God with our wealth in the New Testament times? If you claim to love Jesus but don't worship God by giving to him a sacrificial but cheerful portion of your resources, you are a thief. You are breaking the eighth commandment. You are stealing from God.

Jesus said it this way:

**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21 (ESV)**

If you aren't worshipping God with your wealth, it is questionable if you have a heart that loves God at all.

Other thing I learned in my research is that the church now competes with many other good Christian organizations for the total pool of money that is given by Christians. It is not uncommon for people to take the amount of money they

plan to give to God, say that is 10 percent of their income, then scatter it to various ministries, missionaries and other organizations, so everybody in the group gets a small percentage of their total giving. At the end of the day, the local church may end up with only 2 percent of someone's total giving because the local church is only a small part of a family's planned giving.

There was a time I thought that way. Then, I was in a church where a pastor spoke on giving to the local church. He said this line that I never forgot: "Would this church survive if everyone gave to this church like you do?" At the time, I was a student. The answer was painfully obvious. Nobody could survive on what I gave to my local church. I had no money. In my local church, I was a taker, not a giver. I needed to change.

As I thought about this, I came to the realization that the local church is different from missionaries or parachurch organizations. Missionaries and parachurch organizations have a very wide giving base. Missionaries can approach as many churches as they desire asking for support. In the same way, a parachurch organization spans across denominational and church lines for its giving base. The local church does not have a wide giving base. It has a narrow giving base. It is you and me. The local church is the primary place where we are fed. It is our primary place of education for our children. It is our primary place of spiritual fellowship. It is our primary place of mission. It only survives based on how we give to allow it to function.

Randy Alcorn discusses this in his book [Money, Possessions and Eternity](#). He points out that the spiritual community where Christians are fed and to which

they are accountable should be where their giving always starts. It shouldn't be where their giving stops. In the New Testament, even giving to needs outside the local church was always directed to a local church and through a local church. For example, when Paul was collecting money for the poor believers in Jerusalem, that money was to be collected by local churches, then sent by Paul to the church in Jerusalem.

Incidentally, at CrossWinds, your giving does not necessarily stay here. Ten percent of our annual budget goes to support a group of missionaries that we have screened and who we are confident are going a great job in sharing the gospel. Each year more than \$80,000 dollars is sent from our budget to those missionaries we support and in whom believe in the quality of their work. In addition, as a church, we also receive gifts for benevolence. Last year, we gave away more than \$60,000 to benevolence needs to families and individuals in distress in our local church community. Giving to the local church means you are giving to missions. Giving to the church benevolent fund means you are helping people in distress that you may not know about, but your pastors and elder are closely connected to those situations and privileged to steward your resources wisely to make a difference for Christ when it comes to single moms and families in need.

Our first fruit offerings should always go to the church as a standard proportion of our income that we can give sacrificially and cheerfully. Of that offering, know a portion of that always goes outside of the church to missionaries we can support and endorse. It is OK to give freewill offerings above and beyond

church giving or to give to worthy parachurch ministries or missionaries, but remember that in the New Testament, first fruits giving was done to the local church. Freewill giving, which is above and beyond giving, was typically how needs outside of the local church were addressed.

In summary, when it comes to robbing from God in our giving, we know statistically one in five Christians steal from God by giving nothing to Christ and his church. Secondly, we know statically many of Christians de-prioritize the church in their local giving. The problem is for many people, if everyone gave to their local church like they did, it would never survive.

**If I have stolen, I need to super-abundantly restore.**

There may be some this morning, that are realizing they have stolen. They are a thief. What should we do about it? The Bible tells us it is not just our responsibility to ask forgiveness from God but to restore what we have taken. Exodus 22:1 tells us about this.

**If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. Exodus 22:1 (ESV)**

This says that if you steal a sheep or an ox or an iPad or a cell phone and then kill it or sell it so that you profit from it, you should repay four sheep and five oxen for what you have done. The big idea is that if you take something that isn't yours, you don't just need to simply seek forgiveness from God but you need to restore what you stole. You don't just replace what you stole but you super restore it. That means give back far more than you take. Why does the Bible say this?

First, the need to super-abundantly restore discourages crime. Nobody wants to restore five laptops after stealing one laptop.

Second, this promotes healing. When somebody steals from you, you can't help but talk about it. If the person who stole from you goes out of their way in repentance to super-abundantly restore something, when you talk, you will be discussing the actions of their healing, not their stealing. People will be talking about how you went above and beyond to make things right, not the things you did that were wrong.

### **Jesus is the only way to restore my debt to God.**

When Jesus was crucified, he was crucified between two thieves. They were dying for breaking the eighth commandment. As they hung next to Jesus, they had different approaches to Jesus when it came to their sin. One of the thieves said...

**“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Luke 23:42 (ESV)**

He was forgiven for all of his stealing and all of his sin that day. Jesus said to him.

**“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43 (ESV)**

The other thief didn't trust in Jesus. He only laughed at him. That day, when he closed his eyes, he began just punishment for all his thievery that will last for eternity.

The question for each us today is not, “Are you a thief?” All of us are thieves. The only question that matters is, “Which thief are you?” The one who turned to Jesus, was forgiven, and became one of the most blessed beings in the

universe, or are you the one who laughed at Jesus but in the end will be paying off the debt of his sin forever?



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