

RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

"Thou shalt not steal." Exodus 20:15.

Perhaps it is not necessary to warn you against the grosser violations of this commandment, for you do not often practice this sin. Shop-lifting and pocket-picking are not your practices. But a man can be a thief without cracking a safe or holding up a bank. Indirect stealing of various kinds is indeed very common.

I. What Is Implied In This Commandment?

The right of private ownership. Man has a right to own property. Why is this so? Different answers may be advanced.

1. Modern philosophy says, "Might makes right." There is a theory that superior brains and superior muscles give right to possession.
2. Another says, "Private ownership brings the greatest joy and happiness to mankind."
3. Another says, "Private ownership is expedient since through it man's talents are developed."
Property is the means of advancing our individuality.
4. Some say, "Well, it is generally taken for granted."
5. Others say, "Because of the common consent of mankind."
6. We are told that it is "A creation of human law."
7. The fact is, "It is a God-given right."
Man has the right of private ownership because God gives him that right. He gives him that right because he is an image bearer of God. The great underlying principle is that God is the absolute owner of all that is His. His right of possession is based upon His work of creation and providence. "All the earth is mine." The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof."

There is a difference between Divine ownership and human ownership. God's ownership is absolute and unlimited. Human ownership is limited and always relative. We would have no claim whatsoever on anything that we have except that the right came from God. Man has a right of private ownership because God created man to be king of creation.

II. What Is Forbidden In This Commandment?

1. Robbery.
The taking of property by force or violence.
2. Theft.
The taking away of another's goods without his knowledge or will or consent.
 - (1) Private theft--taking an individual's property without consent.
 - (2) Public theft--taking away property belonging to the community.
3. Fraudulent practices.
 - (1) Deceptive advertising.
 - (2) Adulteration of goods.
 - (3) Concealment of defects.

- (4) Misrepresentation of quality.
"Will it hold color?" "As long as there is a piece of it." The best fruit is always placed on top of the basket.
- (5) Short weights and measures.
- (6) Selling goods of inferior value.
- (7) Taking advantage of ignorance of others.
- (8) Taking advantage of the needy when they are prostrate and helpless.
 - a. Demand extortionate interest for use of money.
 - b. Demand exorbitant rent for premises.
 - c. Extravagant prices for commodities.
- (9) Refusing fair wages.
- (10) Refusing fair and honest day's work.
- (11) Contracting debts beyond possibility of paying them.
- (12) Incurring debts will not pay.
- (13) Undue delay in payment of debts when due.
- (14) Borrowing without intention of returning.
- (15) Borrowing and then forgetting to return them.
Money, umbrellas, books, etc.

The temptation to steal is widespread. There is the temptation to steal talents, time, influence, possessions, love, reputation, etc. This temptation often springs from:

1. The sense of necessity.
2. Laziness.
Some will not make an honest living by working. They prefer to get it by scheming and trickery if possible. If not that way, then they want to depend on charity.
3. Fast living.
4. Haste to become rich.
5. Love of display.
6. Living beyond income.

Men rob themselves, rob others and rob God.

III. What Is Required In This Commandment?

1. A recognition of God's ownership of all things. He is the giver of all good.
2. A realization that men are but stewards of God's good gifts.
No matter whether we have acquired our property by labor, inheritance or gifts, we are only stewards. Stewards should be honest. And all must give a final account of our stewardship. Therefore, we should use all that we have--talents, time, influence, intelligence, possessions, love, etc. to further God's cause on earth and to promote His glory. We cannot afford to be careless, indifferent or lazy.