

**The Ten Commandments**  
**Lesson 19: No Stealing (Part 2)**  
**The Virtues of Hard Work And Giving As Opposed To Taking**

### 1. Jesus Changes Thieves

The New Testament contains numerous mentions of stealing and its consequences and provides stories of ways in which people sought to obey the eighth commandment.

- a. At the very first of Jesus' ministry, when John the Baptist was preparing the way for the Messiah, John was questioned by some tax collectors about how they should fulfill their duties. Look at **Luke 3:3-14**, particularly verses 12-14. What was John's advice to them (verses 12-13)?
  - i. What did John tell the soldiers who also spoke to him (verse 14)?
- b. Later, in the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry, our Lord met one of the chief tax collectors of that time face to face. Read the account of Jesus' meeting with Zaccheus in **Luke 19:1-10**. From what it says in verses 2-4, describe this man.
  - i. According to verse 5, how did Jesus greet Zaccheus, and what was the tax collector's reaction?
  - ii. Zaccheus made a heartfelt promise to Jesus (verse 8). What was it, and what was Jesus's response (verses 9-10)?

Though the townspeople despised this rich man and viewed him only as a sinner, Jesus called him to come down so that He might come to his house. Zaccheus was overjoyed. He told Jesus that he would give half of everything he owned to the poor and would return four hundred percent of the money that he had taken for himself through false accusation or fraud (NKJV). The law only required repayment of what was stolen plus twenty percent, but Zaccheus wanted to do much more. Because this calculating tax collector had given evidence of a repentant heart, willing to obey the Word of God, Jesus declared, "Salvation has come to this house" (verse 9).

- c. Not only were tax collectors and soldiers notorious for their *professional* thefts, but certain scribes were also skilled at stealing. What did Jesus have to say about the scribes in **Mark 12:38-40**?

Jesus warned His listeners to beware of the scribes, those most learned in the law of God, who wanted to be honored in the marketplace, in the synagogues, and at feasts. Yet, Jesus warned that they would "*devour widows' houses,*" meaning that they took advantage of widows by convincing them to give their resources to the Temple or to the scribes themselves, either by giving their tithes and offerings far greater than what the law required or even by giving up their homes rather than keeping what their husbands had left them for their security in old age. Jesus wasn't saying that it is wrong for the those in the ministry to receive financial support from others, because He and the disciples received support from various followers (**Luke 8:1-3**). But, he was saying that when the scribes took excessive offerings from widows, who were some of the most needy and helpless citizens of first-century Israel, this was a form of stealing.

- d. Even among His own disciples, Jesus had to deal with theft. In an incident at a home in Bethany, we find a thief at work. Read **John 12:1-8**. What did Mary do to honor Jesus (verse 3)?
- i. According to verses 4-5, how did Judas respond to this beautiful act of worship?
  - ii. In **John 12:6**, John reveals to us what the disciples learned later. What does this say about Judas' character?
  - iii. How did Jesus respond to Mary's worship and Judas's reaction?

That meal at Bethany occurred on Saturday night before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sunday, just five days before the arrest leading to His crucifixion. Both Matthew and Mark note that sometime during the next few days, Judas went to the chief priests to bargain with them in an eventual deal that required Judas to disclose Jesus' whereabouts (**Matthew 26:6-16; Mark 14: 3-11**). The chief priests gave Judas thirty pieces of silver for this information, the price of a slave (**Exodus 21:32**).

Once again, Judas revealed that he had the heart of a thief and a kidnapper who was willing to capture and then hand over a person for money. Jesus knew all about Judas—what Judas would do and why he would do it, following the devil's urging (**John 13:2-4, 21-30**). Jesus understood that Judas, like Satan, was a thief, always ready to *"steal, and kill, and destroy"* (**John 10:10**).

Jesus came to change hearts and lives, and He can change the heart of any thief who comes to Him in repentance and faith. A beautiful example of His power and love occurred while He hung on the cross. Matthew notes that *"two robbers were crucified with Him"* and that both were shouting insults at Him (**Matthew 27:38, 44**).

- e. Read a more complete account of this incident in **Luke 23:32-43**. According to verses 40-42, what changes occurred in one of the thieves hanging next to Jesus?
- i. How did Jesus respond to the thief's request (**Luke 23:43**)?

At first, both thieves mocked and cursed Jesus. Sometime during the agonizing hours before their deaths drew near, one of them had a change of heart, and admitted that he was a sinner and that it was right for him to pay the penalty for his wicked deeds. He also acknowledged that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and then he declared his faith in Him, saying, *"Lord remember me when You come into Your kingdom"* (**Luke 23:42 NKJV**). Jesus assured him, *"Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise"* (**Luke 23:42 NKJV**).

Jesus the King had given His Word. A man who had lived most of his life stealing, hurting, or perhaps even killing others in order to take what was not his, was guaranteed a home in paradise forever. By grace through faith, the thief received forgiveness for all of his sins, and Jesus gave him eternal life.

The apostles carried this message of Christ to person after person in nation after nation. Let's see what they taught concerning the eighth commandment.

## 2. Becoming Givers Instead of Takers

The disciples traveled with Jesus for three years, seeing Him confront subtle and not-so-subtle modes of thievery. They saw His giving lifestyle. The apostle Paul, though he did not follow Jesus during Christ's earthly ministry, received revelations from the resurrected Jesus during an extended time in Arabia (**Galatians 1:17-18**). Let's look at some other New Testament scriptures that will help us understand and apply the full meaning of the eighth commandment.

- a. One of the clearest examples of stealing in the New Testament occurred in the Jerusalem church. Read **Acts 4:32-37** and **5:1-11**. What sins did Ananias and Sapphira commit?

Whatever their motive, they decided to deceive their fellow Christians, and then they lied to both God and the church. The penalty for their sin was death, an example of God's judgment on deception and stealing. Why such seemingly severe judgment? Stealing what was dedicated to the Lord was an affront to Him. God wanted people to take seriously their relationship to Him and the use of resources He entrusted to them.

- b. **Acts 18:1-5**. What did Paul do when he first arrived in Corinth?

While Paul was in Corinth, the Corinthian church did not help him financially. In **2 Corinthians 11:9**, Paul speaks of not being a burden to the Corinthians and then notes the financial support brought from Macedonia (northern Greece) by "the brethren" (Silas and Timothy).

- c. Read **1 Corinthians 9:3-14**. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand the will of God about giving. What practical issues does he bring up in verses 3-6?
  - i. Every job pays some sort of wage or compensation. What examples of tangible wages or support does Paul give in verses 7-10?
  - ii. In verses 11-14, Paul makes a connection between spiritual things and material things. What practical applications are made concerning those. Who are involved in the ministry of the gospel?
- d. In **Luke 10:1-11**, Jesus included this topic of material support when He sent the seventy disciples two by two to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom. What applications does Jesus make of these principles in **Luke 10:7**?
- e. These are not matters only for those who travel about, but also for those who stay in one location working with a congregation. Paul wanted Timothy to understand how these principles applied to the local church. What applications do you find in **1 Timothy 5:17-18**?

As we mentioned before, Paul did not receive financial support from the church at Corinth. But he wanted them to clearly understand the teaching of the Lord on this subject. Jesus had told His disciples, "*The laborer is worthy of his wages*" (**Luke 10:7**). Paul sought to show how everyone who works expects adequate wages. And those who work in ministry must also receive appropriate compensation for their work, or they will not be able to continue. The contributions of others are God's way for them to make a living.

- f. When Paul was gathering the offering for the famine-stricken saints in Jerusalem, he was very careful to do so with the utmost integrity and honesty. The guidelines that he followed are found in **2 Corinthians 8:16-24** (note especially verse 20-21). What were they?
- g. In Paul's writing, the Spirit directed him with clear applications concerning theft, honest labor, and joyful giving. What guidelines do you find for Christians who have been guilty of stealing in the past (**Ephesians 4:28**)?
  - i. According to that verse, what does God command about one's work habits?
- h. At the end of **Ephesians 4:28**, what further counsel do you find on how God wants us to handle our wages and resources?
- i. Labour is good, and God has given various guidelines throughout the Scriptures concerning honest labor, guidelines that help us avoid stealing in some way. Some of those guidelines are found in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. What wisdom does Paul share in **1 Thessalonians**? What wisdom does Paul share in **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12**?
- j. Some in Thessalonica were confused about the Lord's return and their personal responsibility until He returns. What clear and practical guidelines did Paul give in his second letter to them? Look at **2 Thessalonians 3:6-11** and summarize those guidelines.
- k. Read **Titus 2:9-10**. What does it say about on-the-job attitudes and actions?

Paul urged bond slaves to be submissive to their masters in all things. We can apply his wisdom to our employer-employee situations today. As Christians, we should do what is assigned on the job, trying to be "well pleasing," not contentious or "argumentative" (**Titus 2:9**). Christians should also be careful to avoid any type of stealing in the workplace, which can include setting aside time for oneself, not doing one's job, or setting aside goods or supplies, even embezzling funds. Instead, each should make his or her faith in Christ evident through honest hard work, just as though Jesus were doing that Job Himself.

### 3. For Me to Follow God

The Scriptures have shown us that God is the owner of all and that everything is a gift from Him. Therefore, all that we use and the work that we do should bring our thoughts and adoration back to Him. We should also do our work with a clear conviction of the value of diligent and honest labor and the privilege and responsibility of giving to those in need. Now let's look at practical ways of applying these truths, ways that will help us avoid stealing and enjoy working and giving.

- a. Preventive medicine is often the best kind. How can we prevent theft? The Scriptures say that God wants each of us to do honest and honorable work. Paul's instructions in **Ephesians 6:5-9** and **Colossians 3:22-25** and **4:1** make that clear. Summarize the messages in those verses for employees and employers.

An employee's first consideration at work should be allegiance to the Lord Jesus, working with reverence for Him. It is He for whom each assignment should be completed. Work should be done with "sincerity of heart" (**Colossians 3:22**), a phrase emphasizing full and focused attention. Working with the Lord in mind also means

working throughout the time allotted (no unauthorized goofing off) and fully carrying out the tasks at hand, when the boss is not watching as well as under close supervision. Work is to be done “heartily” (the literal meaning of the original text here is “from the soul”; this refers to decisive, thoughtful action and intensity. God’s will is for each employee to do the job with good intentions toward the employer, and for the employer to manage with good intentions toward the employee. Such attitudes will eliminate theft on the job, at all levels. The Lord will impartially reward each for the attitude with which the work was done and for the quality of work performed. He will also determine appropriate consequences for those who have done wrong.

**APPLY.** Consider the following three areas of life (job, income/spending, and giving), and evaluate where you are in each. Note strengths and needed improvements in each area.

### My Job

- Attitude toward my superiors
- Attitude toward my fellow workers
- Job performance—always on time? Full-time effort?
- Quality of work

### My Income/Spending

- Am I providing for my needs and the needs of my family?
- Am I saving for future needs?
- Am I investing where I can, trusting God to guide me in managing what He has given me?
- Am I continually learning about better management of what God has entrusted to me?
- Am I wasting my income on needless items, useless habits, or frivolous pursuits?

### My Giving

- From my weekly income am I giving first to the Lord through my local church? Am I tithing as an acknowledgement that all is a gift from Him and that I am entrusted by Him as a manager?
- Am I giving to the cause of missions, both locally and abroad, as the Lord directs me?
- Am I attentive in giving to areas of ministry and to the needs of others to which God alerts me?
- Am I praying and listening for God’s response concerning how I should give to various special areas of ministry?

**APPLY.** God has entrusted us with many resources in addition to money and material things. Like money, we can spend, invest, give, save, waste, or steal from God and others our **time** and **effort**. How are you using or misusing these? Prayerfully read the questions that follow, asking God to show you areas where you need to surrender.

- Do you use your time wisely at work, giving an hour’s work for an hour’s wage?
- Do you steal time at work? Do you take longer break times than allowed?
- Do you take anything from your employer that has not been given?
- Do you spend (and invest for eternity) time and effort in ministry of some sort in your church?
- Are you honest in your income tax return or have you stolen from the government by your dishonesty?
- Do you steal from others in your schoolwork or office work? Do you plagiarize, copying what is not yours and presenting it as though it was yours?

Spend some time with God in prayer thanking Him for the command to not steal. Thank Him for the job you have and/or the income you receive. Praise Him for being your provider and rewarder.

**Homework:** Review Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 7:28; Isaiah 65:16; Romans 3:4; and Titus 1:2

**Lesson Topics:** No False Witness, Dealing with False Testimony, An Everyday Decision—Truth or Deceit

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