

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

"STEALING vs. STEWARDING"

For individual study or group discussion

At first glance, the narrow sense of "do not steal" seems to be simple and straightforward—we do not take what belongs to another. But as we have been learning from our study of the *Ten Commandments*, these applications of the law defined a more thorough communal ethic. Today's passage in Deuteronomy 5:19 also prescribes the principle of stewarding wealth and resources to promote the prosperity of our neighbors.

The Rationale Behind the Commandment

The gift of ownership and the responsibility of stewardship is outlined for us in Genesis 1:28-29: "And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.'" Within the creation mandate, God gave human-kind dominion over the earth and provided the gift of earthly possessions to serve in their vocations as they delighted in God's creation.

- A steward is "one who administers anything as the agent of another or others."¹ Read Psalm 24:1, 89:11 and Acts 17:24-26. How are we to view our possessions in light of our relationship to God as his stewards?
- Read Genesis 3:1-6. How did Adam and Eve fail in their role as God's stewards and break the eighth commandment?

The Meaning of the Commandment

More often than not, people are motivated to work, save, and amass earthly possessions for the sake of their own power, wealth, and security. But God calls on us to use our riches and resources for the sake of service to others. The essence and effect of "do not steal" teaches not only "do not take what belongs to others," but we are to delight in giving generously what God has entrusted to us. You may remember from our studies in the *Gospel of Luke* that this "upside-down" ethic was taught by Jesus during his earthly ministry: "But love your enemies, do good, lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil (Luke 6:35). In God's economy, leaders are servants, enemies are loved, debts are forgiven, power is weakness, and suffering leads to glory (Matthew 5-7).

- The opposite of stealing is giving. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 and 9:6-15. What is the basis for giving in these verses? What should motivate us to give?
- Using the [WCF Larger Catechism Q&A 141-142](#), discuss the duties required and sins forbidden in the eighth commandment. Are there any applications of the law that you find surprising?

The Hope for Those Who Break This Commandment

The inescapable, comprehensive nature of the law condemns each one of us. We have sinned and fallen short of God's standard. Yet our hope comes from the One who kept the law perfectly, even while unjustly suffering on the cross between two thieves. Don't overlook the irony of what Jesus endured on our behalf: The one who knew no sin, who honored his Father, who valued and protected life, who made his bride holy, who gave freely and generously out of the abundance of his riches, was impoverished, dishonored, shamed, betrayed, and murdered—all so that we might have the hope of new life in him.

- Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck observed, "Christ is a gift of God's love. And He is at the same time a manifestation of God's righteousness. In the cross on Golgotha righteousness and grace were joined together."² How does the life, death, and resurrection of Christ free us serve others "in the new way of the Spirit" (Romans 7:4-6; Ezekiel 11:19)?

DATE: March 5, 2023

SPEAKER: Frank/Chad

SERIES: Deuteronomy

PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 5:19

Family Dinner Table

The Antidote to Stealing: Giving Generously

You are probably familiar with the literary classic, *Les Misérables*. French writer Victor Hugo tells the story of Jean Valjean, a poor peasant who steals a loaf of bread in order to feed his family. Released after nineteen years in prison, a demoralized and desperate Valjean seeks refuge in a church. Despairing from hopelessness, he makes off with the silver tableware. Caught by the local police, Valjean is presented to Bishop Bienvenue, whose unexpected mercy changes the course of Valjean's life: "Ah! Here you are! he exclaimed, looking at Valjean. 'I am glad to see you. Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too, which are of silver like the rest, and for which you can certainly get 200 francs. Why did you not carry them away with your forks and spoons? Freed by the gendarme, the bishop's final words to Valjean impart redemption, "My brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God."³

- Read Philippians 2:3-8. How did Jesus deal with our sins? How then should we treat others?
- What is the best antidote to stealing? (See Proverbs 19:17; Philippians 2:4; and Ephesians 4:28.)
- Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Leviticus 25:35-38; Isaiah 58:7. How should society provide for the poor?

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¹ Dictionary.com <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/steward> 03/01/2023

² Bavinck, Herman. *The Wonderful Works of God*. 2019: Glenside, PA. Westminster Seminary Press. 433-36

³ Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables*. 2012 NY NY: Penguin Classics. 77