

# You Shall Not Steal

*The Ten Commandments*

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For our study from God's word this morning, we turn again to the book of Exodus 20 as we continue our series on the 10 Commandments, and this morning I want to take the time to just read all 10 Commandments in verses 1 through 17 to reset the context, to impress us once again with the majesty of the word of God, and then we'll proceed to consider again the eighth commandment found in verse 15.

Exodus 20, beginning in verse 1,

1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. 8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. 12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Now we've gone through the first 14 verses of those over the past few months and now what the Lord has brought us to, verse 15, which we know as the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal." And we opened our study of this commandment last time and we considered the context of this command against theft. We saw that God established work to be part of the created order. He established work for man from the beginning in the garden of Eden, and his moral law here in chapter 20 call for men to work and to work hard. And we saw even from the principles of the New Testament that God calls for men and women to work and to work hard; it is part of what we are to do. God did not intend us to be creatures of leisure just consumed with entertainment and the fulfillment of our carnal desires. He calls us to work and as we consider the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," there in verse 15, we see that this is a commandment against that which would violate the created and moral and social order of God. Theft is a very very serious sin.

So we look at it one more time just to see it there in verse 15, "You shall not steal." Now it's very interesting when you contemplate this commandment to recognize that it establishes property rights and it establishes even economic systems that are appropriate and inappropriate in the world. Before we get into that, to understand the scope of what this commandment means, we need to think vertically, we need to think about things on earth from the perspective of God. You know, you and I, we naturally think of our property rights, "That's my stuff. Don't touch my stuff. Don't put your hands on what is mine and I won't put my hands on what is yours." And we tend to think about it horizontally in relationship to one another. That's a completely inadequate way for us to think.

There is a higher sense that prevails over such things. Psalm 24:1 says that, "The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains." Everything in creation belongs to God because he is the source and the sustainer of it all, and that means for you and me, that all property on earth and everything that we have and call our own actually and ultimately belongs to God himself. God owns it all. God has the authority over it all. He tells us how to handle it, how to handle what is in a subsidiary sense ours, and how to view what belongs to others. And so this is rooted vertically in the fact that God is the creator and sustainer of all things, in him we live and move and have our being, and as a result of that, he has authority over everything, it all belongs to him, and he has the authority to tell us not only what we are to do with it but how we are to think about it and how we are to view things. This is a really important point, so much so that it's even in italics in my notes, not that you would know that. But what you possess in this life, beloved, is not ultimately yours to dispose of in any way that you choose. You will give an account for it. God has given you a stewardship, some a little, some a lot, but God has given you a stewardship and you will give an account to him of what you have done not only with your soul but with the skills and with the material things that he has entrusted to you. And all of a sudden we're greatly sobered to realize that for all of the blessings that we enjoy in our Western culture, there will be an account that we each and individually give for what we have done with it, and the eighth commandment gives us perspective on those things.

It's two simple words in Hebrew and yet those two simple Hebrew words actually form an entire philosophy on national economic systems as well as personal behavior in our attitude toward our possessions. One theologian puts it this way, he says, "The Bible establishes a system in which property belongs to individuals, not to the government or society as a whole." That's the only possible way that the eighth commandment makes any sense, you shall not steal because that belongs to someone else, someone else has right and authority over it. And you can see that the Bible opposes the godlessness of Communism, the godlessness of the systems of Karl Marx who said, Karl Marx said, "The theory of the Communist may be summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property." Scripture condemns that. Scripture condemns that entire train of thought and that entire realm of thought because the eighth commandment assumes that men will own property that belongs to them and not to other people.

We're not going to take the time to look at all of the passages that will establish this, but the law codes in the book of Exodus and in the book of Deuteronomy assume that there will be private ownership of property and private ownership even of real estate, and so Scripture protects not just personal property but real estate also. If you're taking notes and you're interested to explore this later, you can look at Exodus 21 and 22; Deuteronomy 19 and 22 and 23. All set forth these kinds of principles with the law code that it has for the regulation of private property. What I would encourage you to do is to just step back and take and realize how breathtaking that is, that in the 10 Commandments we see not only that which regulates private morality but establishes a direction for the way that national economies are to operate. This is the wisdom and the power of God and it is the omniscience of the Holy Spirit who can express such far-reaching truth in such a short little phrase, "You shall not steal."

Now I do want to show you just a couple of passages in Proverbs that build on this idea of private property. In Proverbs 15, you can turn there along with Proverbs 22 and 23. Proverbs 15, you can get your finger there. I was speaking with our brother Kyle Reader just a day or two ago. He was debriefing me on his time at our church and in our pulpit, and one of the things that he commended you on that was an encouragement to him was exactly what you're doing right now. He said, "Don, when I referred to a passage of Scripture, they actually turned to it in their Bible in order to read it along with me, and once they had read it, they looked back up to me to pay attention." And that's exactly the way it's to be. We point you to the Scriptures so that you can read them for yourselves so that you see it and don't simply take my word for what Scripture says, but you see it in the Bible for yourself. There is something very profound and very significant about that because it's training you, it's helping you to understand over the course of time that the Bible is the authority. Scripture is the authority, not the mere words of man. And so as we turn to Scripture, we find what the ultimate and final authority is and it doesn't matter that politicians might favor, for example, public ownership of different things, Scripture speaks to a different kind of system.

So Proverbs 15:25 speaking about land rights says, "The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow." Even an older woman who's lost her husband has rights that are to be respected in her property. Look over at

chapter 22, Proverbs 22:28. "Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set." And in chapter 23, verse 10 in similar language, "Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless, For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you." So that the rights in property of even the most vulnerable in society are to be protected. They have rights that God intends to be protected against the overreach of government, against rapacious greedy individuals. These are rights that are to be respected in private property.

So God commands us in his word to respect the property that belongs to other people. You shall not steal. One pastor put it this way, "Stealing is a sin against God," vertically speaking, that's my commentary, "Stealing is a sin against God because it takes what He has provided to someone else." It is a sin vertically against God, it is a sin against his providence and the way that he has ordained life to be in order to reach in and take that which belongs to someone else and to make it your own. So it is a vertical sin against God as well as a horizontal sin against the one from whom you take it.

We just want to develop these thoughts with four principles here this morning, four principles that are going to help us see that the nature of theft, the nature of stealing, and I will tell you now, I'll give you advance warning not only the nature of theft but the reality that you and I are all guilty of violating this commandment. You might think that you have not done so but it's only because you've viewed things from a narrow perspective and lowered the standard to that which you are able to keep. When we see Scripture and we understand the implications of Scripture, we realize once again that this single commandment alone is enough to condemn each and every one of us. It's really astonishing to see, it's humbling to see that there is none righteous, not even one, for all have fallen short of the glory of God, but just to see what Psalm 119:96 says, "I have seen the limit of all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad." What God's authority and what God has commanded is far broader than what we would ever conceive if we had not studied and taken the time over the past many months to study his 10 Commandments.

So we're going to look at four principles here and the first one is this: the nature of theft. The nature of theft. If you're taking notes, that is your first point to write down, the nature of theft, you could say, the nature of stealing. This command, like so many in the 10 Commandments, is expressed in the original language in the second person singular. It is addressed to you as an individual. It's not simply something that has social implications, it goes directly to the matter of your heart in ways that are so far-reaching. Again, I just feel the weight and the privilege of being able to open God's word to you. It is addressed to you as an individual. That heightens the personal responsibility that you bear as you come under the authority of God's word here. Recognize that God is speaking to you. There's no need to think about what God might say to someone else, to the person sitting next to you, to the person who has violated your property rights. No, he's speaking to you. God is speaking to you and you are to heed him through his word rather than try to shift blame to someone else. The 10 Commandments are not something where any of us should say, "Oh, I know who needs to hear this." Or, "I know who I need to give this message to." If that's your first response, you're missing the most basic aspects of

grammar about the entire passage. God is speaking to you saying, "You shall not steal." So that's very important. It's also important to realize that the prohibition is absolute. The idea is that you are never to do this; not a single time can be excused or acquitted apart from our Lord Jesus Christ. There is guilt attached to every single violation of this because you are never to do what this commandment prohibits.

So what about this word "steal," what does it mean? Well, one Hebrew lexical resource defines the underlying word in this way, "To steal is to take that which belongs to another without his consent or knowledge. It refers to acts of theft that are done in secret." And so the word of God comes and it examines far further than what men can see, it pierces into your private thoughts, into your private...there is no hiding from, there is no hiding from the authority of this commandment.

So to steal is simply to take something that does not belong to you. That's the nature of theft. That's the nature of theft, and so what we want to do is to consider, secondly now, the kinds of theft. How is it that this commandment is violated? Let's consider the kinds of theft. What are the ways in which this commandment can be violated, and this is where it gets pretty personal pretty quickly, okay? It is impossible to name all of the many kinds of theft that men can commit and do commit on a daily basis. You and I in this relatively conservative congregation in which we gather together, you and I would all recognize that it is wrong, you and I would all condemn sins like armed robbery on a city street; we would condemn burglary of someone breaking into a home and taking things, jewelry and other valuables, we would condemn that out of hand; we would condemn extortion where somebody by force has someone seemingly voluntarily give them money for the sake of protection. We'd all condemn that and all of that is a sin and a violation of the eighth commandment that you shall not steal, but let's not talk about it in that realm, in realms where, you know, I'm guessing that, you know, 95-99% of us have never violated the commandment in that kind of way, some of you have, I know because of different things, but this is not characteristic of the fine people at Truth Community Church. And so we can recognize those things as sinful but we shouldn't stop there, we should go into the realm of our private life and consider that there are other kinds of theft that we do practice or that we accept or tolerate or wink at, anyway, or justify in our minds. So let's just go through those things of which, you know, which come a little bit closer to our personal lives, as my friend a long time ago said, that gets into our kitchen, dear Frances who is now in heaven.

Think about this. To steal would include knowingly keeping too much change from the cashier at the grocery store. Stealing would include those merchants who cheat with dishonest packaging or price gouging in times of distress. As we come upon the conclusion of tax season, stealing would include misstating your finances to the government on your tax forms. Stealing would include delaying payment to those who have worked for you, James 5:4 speaks about that very explicitly. Stealing even includes failing to return something that you've borrowed. Think about that. Think about what's sitting in your home that you borrowed from someone else that you have never returned. Do you know what? You have your neighbor's property against his will. You've kept it longer than you said you would. You said that you would return it and you didn't. That is

stealing. You have it without his consent. He didn't give it to you to keep indefinitely. You said I'd borrow it for a time. And my friend, it is not excuse that you say, "Oh, well, I forgot about that." All that that says is that, "I did not respect my neighbor's property enough to make sure that I got it back to him in the time frame in which I said that I would do it." It's no excuse that you forgot. That's simply a greater condemnation of showing how little you regard the property of your neighbor, to keep it and to not give it back.

To give a little bit of a light-hearted moment here that's very very true. This is why I do not lend out any books from my library. I do not lend a single book to anyone from my library. It's because I realize that there is this inherent nature of people that they don't return what they borrow and that's like, you know, taking one of my books and not giving it back would be like taking the hammer and saw from a carpenter and not giving it back. So if you want a book that I have, you've got to go out and buy it. Don't try to take mine. It just does not work that way.

As you see, there are just many different ways in which theft can take place, and you can just think through things and realize that all of us have done this at one time or another. You know, it's not a laughing matter in the presence of God. He has said, "You shall never do this at all." And to violate the law of God is to bring guilt upon your soul, it is to bring eternal guilt that requires eternal punishment on your soul. The fact that you and I minimize this, the fact that you and I mitigate against it and excuse it so easily does not mean that the command is not serious, it just means that we have an entirely wrong view of the holiness and authority of God. It's not a reflection that the crime is not serious, it's a reflection that we don't take the crime seriously. And you know, as you read on in Scripture, as we talk about the different kinds of theft, theft occurs in a spiritual realm as well in the way that many handle their finances because Scripture even convicts people of robbing God; it convicts the people of God for robbing him.

Look at the prophet Malachi who is the last prophet, the last book in the Old Testament just before the book of Matthew. And I want to be very careful in the way that we handle this so that you understand what is and is not being said here. In Malachi 3:8 and 9 and 10, Scripture says, ""Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!" In other words, God is convicting the people saying, "You are robbing Me as God." God is being robbed in what is described here in this passage. "But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'" They protest their innocence. "We have not done that! How have we robbed You, O God?" And he responds and he says, "In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!" Speaking to the nation of Israel. He says, ""Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.'" God in the Mosaic economy told his people, "You are guilty of theft because you are not paying the ordained tithe that I require from my people in the nation."

Now how does that apply to us and how should we think about this in a New Testament way? We are not in the Mosaic economy to pay 10% tithes, no matter how many

Southern Baptist sermons have been preached to that effect on this very text. That is not the purpose of this text for the New Testament believer, but the New Testament does teach New Testament believers that if you benefit from a spiritual ministry you have a responsibility somehow to support it. Scripture says that those who benefit from spiritual ministry should support it.

Now before I make my next statement, I want to clarify something very important so that you know from which I speak and the perspective from which I speak. I do not ever see the contribution records to Truth Community Church. I never have. I never will. I don't have access to that. I have no idea at all who gives and who doesn't, okay? This isn't based on a prior review of the corporate records of Truth Community Church. I can say this, though, that it is an established fact that most professing Christians give nothing to support the church that they attend. They come and they take from the ministry, they receive the ministry which churches gladly give to them, but they take and don't give back with the corresponding spirit in which it is given to them. They receive it but there's nothing coming back the other way even though Scripture in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are very clear on these kinds of matters. And in the spirit of this text from Malachi, in the spirit of the New Testament, we see that this is a form of theft to come and to take without recognizing and without acting upon the corresponding responsibility to support that from which you are benefiting from.

Now look, I'm perfectly content to just let the Lord and the Holy Spirit just deal with each one of you as he sees fit. I'm not asking for more contributions to Truth Community Church by mentioning this. Our church is blessed financially and we're grateful to God for that and thankful to those of you that support the ministry that helped make that happen. So this has nothing to do about finances at all. This has nothing to do about the economic status of Truth Community Church at all. This has everything to do with your vertical responsibility before God to not be a thief. This has everything to do with recognizing spiritual responsibilities that come from associating with and receiving ministry from a spiritual work that advances the gospel of Jesus Christ. So there are many different ways for theft to occur and it's okay – you know, look, I have a perfectly clear conscience for having just stepped into everybody's kitchen on these very practical matters because my responsibility is to bring forth the fullness of the word of God, not to worry about how it might offend men or women whom it convicts.

So we've seen the nature of theft, it's to take something that doesn't belong to you in a very basic form, the kinds of theft can go from all the way to violent robbery to, you know, the way a Christian handles his finances in relationship to the people of God, it's pretty far-reaching, but the word of God, as we've seen many many times, the word of God applies to the heart. What is it in our hearts, what is it about our inner man that would make us a thief? Why is it that we would not naturally respect what others have? Why is it that we would not handle the things that God has given us in a way that he's commanded us to do, in a way that pleases him when it's all laid out so plainly in Scripture? Why would we not naturally do that? In other words, so point number 3 here: the motives for theft. The motives for theft. What motivates a thief? Why does a man steal in the manner in which we have spoken about here? "Why" asks what is in his

heart? The question "why" asks what is in his heart that makes him act in that way or to fail to fulfill responsibilities in a way that he becomes guilty of being a thief?

Well, Phil Johnson suggests three different heart sins, three different heart sins that would explain the motivations for theft, of the very broad kind of which we're talking about here. The first one is this: it is unbelief. It is unbelief. People do these things because they do not trust God to provide for them. They do not trust God to provide for them. You can see this illustrated by the people of Israel when they were in the wilderness. They repeatedly grumbled that they would die in the wilderness because they did not have meat, or they did not have water. They had a grumbling disposition against their economic circumstances because Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments condemned them for their unbelief in trusting God to take care of what they actually needed.

Now listen, again, particularly in times like this in which we are living where the economy is going south, where there is rampant inflation, where you have to mortgage your house to fill your van with gas, this is a particular time of temptation for each one of us as we contemplate these things. People can put pictures of the President on the gas pumps saying, "I did this," if you can see that that's becoming a thing as gas prices go up, you know, and I realize that there are a lot of political opinions represented in the room here, but you must think first and foremost as a Christian and you must think first and foremost about your vertical relationship of trusting and depending on God in times like this even when inflation is eating away at your disposable income. You must think and remember that you are going to trust God to provide for you and watch your heart and guard your heart against grumbling about the nature of politicians or the policies that have been put into place that have led to, you know, our economic circumstances. Whatever the rightness of politics might be in your evaluation, your heart should not be one of grumbling discontent over the circumstances. You need to believe God enough, he is in perfect control of what is happening, that somehow he has ordained these circumstances for his glory and for your good, and that he is going to supply what you need and take care of you regardless of what is happening in the economy around you. That is a great spiritual challenge and it is one that we each are responsible to respond to with a humble dependence and a humble submission to our Lord in the midst of these things.

Now secondly, it's not just unbelief that would cause someone to be motivated in the direction of being a grumbling thief but turning back to Exodus 20, a second heart sin that underlines the violation of this particular commandment is covetousness, it's greed, and the Scriptures speak about this very explicitly as we've pointed out multiple times in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment in Exodus 20:17. Exodus 20:17 where the capstone of the 10 Commandments goes to the heart. Verse 17, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Why does someone steal? It's because they want what someone else has. It's greed. It's covetousness. It's desiring that which God has given to someone else but he has not given it to you.



So the thief, speaking in the broadest term, in the broadest possible way that covers us all, that covers you and covers me as well, the thief is someone who has become sinfully dissatisfied with what God has given to him, with what God has given to her. You know, and so we want what God has given to someone else. We want their house. We want their wealth. We want their spouse or we want a spouse. Or you know, we want their children. And then we start to resent God because he hasn't given that to us rather than, rather than – watch this, I mean, this goes to the very center core of the way that you think about yourself in light of the person of God, in light of the person of Christ – the way that we should think is this, the perspective that should govern our hearts is this, "Here I am, a guilty sinner, and what justice would demand of me is that I would be eternally condemned right now. And yet here I am, look at the comforts that I have, look at what has been given to me, look at the kindness that God has shown to me. I am so grateful and so thankful that He has given to me what I don't deserve and He has withheld the judgment from me that I do deserve." And you dwell in a realm of spiritual satisfaction and contentment because you recognize that God has been far more good, far better, far more gracious to you than you deserve, rather than resenting the fact that you look out horizontally and you say, "I don't have everything that I want and therefore I am dissatisfied." That is the heart of rebellion against God. That is the most defiant attitude and perspective with which to live life is to be one who is discontent with what God has given to you; whether it's relationally, whether it's materially, whether it's spiritual opportunities of service, whatever it might be, you and I have a responsibility before God to be content with what he has given to us, to be thankful to him, to be thankful in all things as Scripture so repeatedly tells us to do, rather than being these discontent, dissatisfied people.

Now dissatisfaction, greed, discontent, it's the mother of all kinds of sin. It gives birth to all kinds of wickedness. And until we deal with our covetous hearts at that kind of level, we have not really begun to face up with how deeply we are sinners in the presence of God. Colossians 3:5 says this, listen to this, so convicting. We're talking about idolatry here ultimately. Colossians 3:5 says, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." Colossians 3:5. So this is all very convicting and we can't just brush that off with a simple dismissal or simple wave of the hand and say, "Well, it doesn't matter."

Look, I realize that the things of which we're talking about here today don't matter to men but, beloved, that's not the standard. This matters to God or he wouldn't say it so clearly, so repeatedly, so often in his word. God looks at the heart. God looks at what's going on in your heart and if there is grumbling discontent in your heart over circumstances, over politics, over whatever it might be, then you are guilty of sinning against God and you're guilty of sinning against this eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," because the positive – put it this way – the positive dimension of the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," the positive dimension of it is, "You shall be content." You shall be content with what the Lord has given you so that you don't even desire to take what he has given to someone else.

A third heart sin that leads to theft is laziness. There's unbelief, not trusting God; there's covetousness, discontent; thirdly, there is the matter of laziness. We looked at this passage last week, I believe, but we'll go there again. Proverbs 6 after the book of Psalms. Proverbs 6 in verse 6, "Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest, Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man." Laziness leading to a man who doesn't have what he needs over the course of time, putting him in a position to be tempted toward and even doing acts of theft in order to fill his belly.

Beloved, this is all weighty. Unbelief, covetousness and laziness are not sins to excuse. We should not excuse ourselves of these kinds of heart sins because Colossians 3:6 goes on to say after commanding us to consider our earthly body dead to these matters including evil desire and greed, it goes on to say in verse 6, "For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience." The wrath of God will come upon men for the very kinds of sins of which we are discussing here. And I get the fact that there is nothing in the world to warn you about this. There is nothing in the world, there is nothing in the course of political discourse or conservative news programs or liberal news programs, that speak about these kinds of matters to warn you about the spiritual dangers that it creates. But Scripture is explicit on these matters and there is no excuse for anyone who has had the Bible opened to them, to persist in these sins and think that God will simply disregard and overlook it. That's not the case.

The wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience who are guilty of these kinds of internal and external sins which leads us naturally into our fourth and final point here this morning: the condemnation of theft. The condemnation of theft. We've seen in verse 15, "You shall not steal." We've seen in Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet." We see that this goes to the matter of the heart. With that in mind, look over at the book of Hebrews 13 and here we're going to see all of this kind of coming together in terms of putting off the sin of covetousness and putting on the matter of trust that replaces it, so that, and we're just looking at the heart matter that underlies the matters of theft, in Hebrews 13:5 it says this, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for," here's what undergirds it, he's commanded us, "Keep your character free from the love of money." In other words, "Repent of your covetousness. Repent of your greed. And in your repentance, bring forth the fruit of being content with what you have. Put off the wickedness of greed and covetousness, put off the wickedness of evil desire and put on the heart attitude of contentment." Why? Why? He says, "for," because, what undergirds all of this is something about the very nature and the very character of Christ himself, "for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we may confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'" God commands you to be content in Christ with what you have because your attitude of contentment is a reflection on the way that you believe his promise to be with you, to never forsake you, to help you no matter what the situation may be.

So we can be content not because we have everything that we want, but to be content because we have a God who supplies all of our needs according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. All of this ultimately reflects on what you believe about God, what you believe about Christ, and whether you are content in Christ or not. Is Christ enough for you or not? I'll say it again: is Christ enough for you or not? And if he's not as reflected in your discontented heart, then your discontentment is revealing to you that you value something more than Christ and that is why Colossians 3 condemns it all as idolatry because you are to have nothing in your life that is more important, more precious to you than the Lord Jesus Christ. And whatever you're discontent over, your discontentment is a symptom that is leading you straight to what you value more than the eternal Son of God. Your discontentment is showing that you do not accept and believe and rest in the perfect sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, that to have him is to have everything regardless of what you might lack in life. So, you know, I smile because I'm just stunned at how searching the word of God is, how obviously clear all of this is as Scripture makes it clear to us, and to realize that God exposes our heart through what he has said in his word.

You know, it's earlier in Hebrews in chapter 4, turn back there with me, Hebrews 4:12. I imagine, I can imagine someone saying, "I did not expect the eighth commandment to go there with me. I did not expect the eighth commandment to expose me as a discontent person who is dissatisfied with the sufficiency of Christ." But that's exactly what it's done, and to the extent that that's happened to you today, let that cause you to reverence the word of God even more deeply than you did before you walked into this room an hour ago. This is exactly what Scripture tells us that Scripture does. This is exactly what Scripture tells us to expect. Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." God did not give the eighth commandment to congratulate you on your self-righteousness. He gives you the eighth commandment and calls you to examine whether you are content with Christ or not. It's that plain and that direct.

Now, you know, we're looking here at our fourth and final point, the condemnation of theft, let me just ask this rhetorical question as we come near to a close this morning. How seriously does God view theft and financial dishonesty? How serious is it to God that someone would covet that which did not belong to him, would take that which does not belong to him, and then try to cover it up? How serious is that to God? How serious are the associated sins of pride and dishonesty that surround them? How seriously does God view theft and financial dishonesty, greed and covetousness? How serious is it to him?

Well, let's just think. We won't turn to these passages of Scripture, let's just remember some familiar narratives from the Bible. In the book of Joshua, you'll remember that Achan stole the spoils of war and hid them under his tent. Israel suffered battle losses after that because God was disciplining them because there was sin in the camp. What did God do? Well, over a period of drawing lots, he exposed Achan and exposed his family, and do you remember what he did? He destroyed Achan and his entire family as judgment for

that sin. Achan said, "I saw it. I coveted what I saw. I took it." And there was this breathtaking judgment of God upon him and his family, you can read about it in Joshua 7.

Perhaps even more familiar is the narrative from Acts 5 in the days of the early church. Ananias and Sapphira brought a portion of the proceeds of the sale of their property, laid it at the feet of the apostles, which was fine as far as it went, but they created the appearance, they gave the sense that they were giving all of the proceeds because they wanted the recognition for having been more generous than they actually were. Do you remember what happened? Ananias and Sapphira fell over dead as a result of the judgment of God because they had misled about the proceeds of their property. They'd kept back some in greed and discontent, they had kept back some, they didn't even have to give it, their sin was in their desire for pride, their desire for recognition. And greedily holding onto it and wanting credit for not being greedy, God judges them. They fall down dead.

People died for this, in other words, but then there's even more than that, there's even more than that, there are the broader statements of Scripture in the didactic parts of Scripture. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10. In some ways this text has become the kind of a go-to passage to talk about sexual sin in our society, and it is that but it is more. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. This is a warning about sins that will keep people out of heaven and send them to hell instead, and keeping in mind everything that we've seen, all the dimensions that we have seen about the violations of the eighth commandment, all of the violations that theft and a covetous heart bring about, keeping all of that in mind and recognizing that all of us are, in one way or another, stained with this kind of guilt, verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 6, "do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived," we are warned because people will excuse these things, justify themselves, and think that they are okay and justify themselves before God when they are not justified before God at all. So he says, "Don't be deceived on this most important point. You are subject to, there will be teachers who tell you peace, peace when there is no peace. And even worse, your lying heart will lie to you and tell you that you are okay when you are not okay before God, you are not righteous before him even though your heart tries to tell you that you are." So by the Spirit of God and by the word of God, we see what God himself says about it. He says, "Do not be deceived. Put your mind in the realm of truth and believe the revealed truth, not what you feel about it. Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." Thieves do not go to heaven. Unforgiven thieves do not go to heaven, beloved. And here we are under the weight of a commandment that has convicted us all of being thieves in one way or another.

The situation is desperate. What are we to do? Well, praise God for his mercy, praise God for the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Apostle Paul as he directed him to go on to say this and to not leave it at verse 10 but to go on and say in verse 11 here is the only place of hope and redemption for those who feel the weight of condemnation. There is hope for a thief but it's not in denying your crimes. There is hope for a thief but not in the hope that God will simply not bother with his judgment. No, God will uphold his justice.

The hope is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ as Paul writes to these Christians and assures them, in verse 11 he says, "Such were some of you," past tense, you used to be like this but you're not anymore, something has happened, something has changed, "but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." The only hope for a thief is to look upon Christ and to call out for him for mercy, to ask him to forgive you for your great sins of dissatisfaction and covetousness and taking things, and to ask him to forgive you for that, to wash you and to cleanse you as one who is unworthy and appealing solely to mercy, and Scripture says that Christ delights to save sinners who call out to him like that.

Look at Luke 23 and we'll close with this passage. Luke 23. You know, one of the really wretched things about inadequate presentation of the gospel that just wants people, tries to force people into a decision, get them to pray a prayer and then move on and, you know, everything's fine no matter how they live afterwards, you know, and just reducing the gospel to reciting a prayer that someone gives to you and thinking that you're saved because you prayed a particular prayer, it minimizes all of this. It minimizes all of the guilt. It minimizes all of the work of Christ on behalf of sinners, to just make it to, you know, a mental switch that somebody flips in their minds and says, "Okay, I'll pray that prayer," without any sense of repentance, without any sense of conviction, without any sense of submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, and just going through the motions of mouthing a few words of prayer without any actual sorrow over the fact that we're guilty before a holy God, without any sense of the fear of God in the presentation of the gospel, without any sense of the fear of God in the one who's supposedly responding to it. There is no excuse for that. If you understand anything about the seriousness of the law of God, the seriousness of the judgment of God, the wonder of the grace that is offered in the gospel of Jesus Christ, if you understand anything like that, it can't be something that you kind of take or leave. There's a profound response of repentance, a profound response of turning to Christ, a profound trust in him. That is what the Spirit of God genuinely works in the hearts of those that he's drawing to Christ, and to just treat it superficially is trying to push people into a decision that they're trying to make and, you know, as long as you get a decision in a moment, everything's fine after that, that's a total distortion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You see that reflected in this account of the repentant thief on the cross. Luke 23:39. You remember it well but this was a thief that was hanging before Jesus. Verse 39, "One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God,'" do you see the fear of God? This man was being crucified, he was nailed to a cross like Jesus was and he's under the conviction of the fear of God. "'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds,'" he takes responsibility, he agrees with the sentence of God upon him, "I am condemned and rightly so." That is the mark of someone who is truly having the Spirit of God work in his heart. It's the mark of someone truly coming to Christ who says, "Not only am I not righteous, I deserve the judgment of God for my crimes against Him in my heart and in my body."

And I ask you here in all love and earnestness for your souls, knowing that we may not see each other again. We don't know. I ask you whether you have responded to Christ on those kinds of terms? Under that kind of conviction? "I fear God. I am guilty. I justly deserve His punishment. If He sent me to hell, He would be right and just to do so. There is nothing in me to withstand or to turn back the judgment of God." Have you responded to Christ like that, I ask you? And along with that, that repentant spirit with the faith that this thief also showed, "This man has done nothing wrong." Verse 42, "And he was saying, 'Jesus, Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!'" "Jesus, Jesus, I make no plea of my own righteousness. I don't protest that Your standard is too high. I don't protest that I'm not such a bad person. I don't argue that I'm better than someone else. I forsake all of that and all of my plea and all of my hope is simply this: Jesus, remember me, remember me." Remember we said second person singular at the start of the message it's directed to you? Then the cry of repentant faith likewise has to come from the bottom of your heart, just as the commandment has convicted you to the bottom of your heart. The cry of repentance has to come from the bottom of your heart that says, "I am guilty and, Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom." Like the tax collector in Luke 18, it's the same spirit, "Be merciful to me, the sinner."

Is that your heart? Do you acknowledge your guilt with sorrow? Do you turn to Christ alone and have you turned to him and is your life somehow bearing fruit of a genuine repentance? It's not superficial. It's not something that you pray once and forget about. That's not true conversion. Does your heart cry, "I deserve judgment, Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom"?

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank You for the convicting work of the law of God. We pray that it would be the tutor that You would use to lead many to Christ as a result even of what we've heard here today. We thank You that Jesus Christ receives and forgives sinners. He receives and forgives sinners. He receives and forgives thieves and covetous, dissatisfied, disgruntled people just like us. Just like you, my friend in the audience. Just like me. Lord, remember us when You come into Your kingdom. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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