

God on Property Rights

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Exodus 20:15
Preached on: Sunday, March 6, 2022

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, if you are visiting with us, I would just want you to know the context of our message this morning. We have been studying the 10 Commandments for a number of months and it's taken us a while to get to the eighth commandment which is where we find ourselves this morning. That might seem like a long time to spend on 10 commandments but I am okay with that. We need time to absorb what the 10 Commandments say, to process the way that they sift our hearts, and to work out the implications of it. There have been a number of good pastoral opportunities that have come to us as elders as people have felt the weight of the law of God on their souls and this is the function of the law of God. And to be, you know, just candid, I guess, I undertook this study in large part out of concern for the souls of each one of you. There are many many fine Christians at Truth Community Church and I rejoice in the work of God in your lives, but even for the best of Christians we do not recognize the depth of our sin; the 10 Commandments expose that to us and show forth the remaining sin and rebellion and darkness that is in our hearts. We need to have that work done by the word of God in us so that the Lord would cleanse us, so that we would be humbled, so that we would turn even more thoroughly from our sin than we have beforehand. And so it does a good work that way, also just to be very candid, I'm very mindful of the fact that not everyone that attends Truth Community Church is a Christian at all. They have not been born again. They do not have new life. Their hearts are just as dead now as they were before they started walking through our doors. For some, they're deceived. For some reason the veil has not been lifted from their eyes and they don't realize the danger that they're in. Some are not deceived, some are in the coldness of their hearts and they know it and with each passing week they become harder and harder to the work of the Spirit and of the things which God's word says. For people like that, I would just pray to God and remind you and caution you and admonish you that you need to come face to face with your guilt before a holy God.

I realize that it's somewhat unfashionable to talk about law and guilt and repentance and the possibility of eternal judgment, I realize it's unfashionable by modern standards, but we don't preach according to modern standards, we preach according to the word of God and Scripture makes these themes very clear and very evident and we cannot neglect them for the sake of trying to make people feel good about themselves. The truth of the matter is that especially for an unbeliever the Bible is not a book that makes you feel good about yourself. The Bible says that there is no one righteous, not even one, that

there are none who seek for God, that we are lost and guilty and under the bondage of Satan and dead in sin and under the wrath of God. The last thing that the Bible does is to come to an unbeliever, to an unrepentant sinner, and confirm them and make them feel good about themselves. That is not what Scripture does and that is not the work of the Holy Spirit to assure unbelieving people of their, you know, to affirm them in their ego and self-image because Scripture says that the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict men of sin, judgment and righteousness and if we take those things seriously, as we try to do here at Truth Community Church, then you're going to have to take the law of God seriously and to realize that to break one of God's commandments is to break them all, and to break a commandment of an eternal God is to bring eternal guilt upon your soul. Every one of us has broken the law of God, every one of us has a measure of eternal guilt to deal with, and eternal guilt leads to eternal punishment and so these matters are very lofty and weighty and important for us to take into heart.

They cut against our superficial culture. They cut against our love of entertainment and sports and amusements and things of that nature. But this is what reality is. This is what reality is. God's law brings us into touch with what the truth is. The truth is the way things really are. The truth is the way that God sees them, not how man sees them, and we find these things laid out for us as we study Scripture together, and as we've been studying the 10 Commandments together. I'm not angry with anyone, in fact, my heart is just rather kind of heavy and broken as I speak these things even this morning recognizing that there are some who would hear my words who very well may not be around the throne of God with the rest of us believers at the end, and the thought of that, the thought of that is horrifying. The thought of that is just awful, to realize that here we can be gathered together in the intersection of this moment, the Lord brings 200-300 people together and we intersect at this moment, in a sense we're all on equal ground and sharing in life and sharing in the air that we breathe together, but to realize that the thought that there would be a final eternal parting at the end is almost overwhelming even having preached such things for many many years. And so it's just important for us to realize that we are all dying men, none of us are going to live forever, all of us are going to die one day because Scripture says, "It is appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment," and to realize that there will be an accounting for our sin and guilt at that time, and one of two things will happen, one of two things and only two things will happen: either you will pass through that judgment safely because the blood of Christ has been applied to your soul because you've repented of sin and received Christ alone for salvation and you've confessed your guilt before God, you've submitted to Christ fully without any reservations, without any kind of duplicity, and Christ will keep his own even through the fiery judgment, or you will stand before a holy God naked, as it were, exposed in all of your guilt with no one to intercede for you, with no advocate, and you will be sent away, Jesus saying, "Depart from Me. I never knew you. Depart into the fire that has been reserved for the devil and his angels."

This is the teaching of Scripture, this is God's word which cannot be violated and so it is urgent for us to take these matters seriously, and one way to take them seriously is to give attention to the 10 Commandments that God has set forth in Exodus 20 and also repeated in Deuteronomy 5. So with all of that, you know, background, I guess, we can say this,

what is the purpose of the law of God? The law of God, the moral law of God, the 10 Commandments are designed to have an effect on you and upon your soul. They are designed to show you that the impossibility of you pleasing God with any righteousness of your own. They show the utter impossibility of a man being righteous before God by his own works, by his own attitudes, and by his own words. You do not have any righteousness like that. You are a bankrupt debtor before God. The guilt is so great that you cannot possibly begin to pay it off. Let's assume something impossible, something contrary to fact. Assume that from this moment forward you could live a perfect life, that you could live in perfect obedience to God. Even if you could do that, and you can't, even if you could do that it would do nothing to erase anything of your past sin. It would do nothing to atone for anything in your past. And so there's no avoiding this. David, the king and the great psalmist, said, "In sin my mother conceived me. I was born in iniquity." You know, we're soaked in it.

And so the law of God shows us that we cannot please God and I'd invite you to turn to the book of Galatians just as we, you know, wrap up this little bit of introduction here. You know, and if these things, the Spirit is opening your mind to these things as we're talking about them, well, then the word of God becomes the most important thing in your life, it becomes the most urgent thing to read this word, to understand it, and to find what God has revealed about how a sinner can be reconciled to him when that sinner cannot take away his own sin.

In Galatians 3:22 it says that,

22 ... the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

The law disabuses us of any notion of self-righteousness and, as it were, takes us by the hand and leads us to the only source of righteousness that is acceptable to God and that is the righteousness of Jesus Christ freely imputed to those who believe in him for their eternal salvation. The law teaches you two things, it teaches you that you cannot be righteous on your own before a holy God, and it leads you to the only one who can reconcile you to God, the only one who has the power to forgive your sins and to grant to you the righteousness which God requires and that's found in the person of Jesus Christ alone. So the law crushes our sense of pride, crushes our sense of self-righteousness and that is a good thing to happen in your heart. If you think you are a good person you are in great spiritual danger. You are deceived as Scripture exposes it to you. So the law is designed to make us despair of our own righteousness and lead us to Christ and where alone true righteousness can be found.

Now having come to Christ, when God saves us and makes us new creatures in Christ, when we have new life within us, the law then takes on a different kind of instruction to us, still teaching the same principles but having a different effect on Christians. The law

teaches us in a practical matter how God would have us live in righteousness, how he would have us live in righteousness not to earn favor with him, not to gain merit before him in our own obedience because we rest alone in the obedience of Christ for our righteousness before God, rather the law teaches us how God wants us to live going forward, how he would have us govern our hearts and govern our lives so that we could properly love him with a newfound heartfelt obedience that flows from having the living Holy Spirit within our hearts and lives. So the law of God for the Christian lays forth what he requires from us and shows us the obedience that is pleasing to him, and for those who have been born again, who have been redeemed by Christ, the idea of pleasing God is exceedingly desirable. It is very pleasing for us to know how can I please God, what does he want from me, I want to please this God who has shown such grace and favor to me in the Lord Jesus, I want to please him. And the law of God teaches us how that is to take place.

So with all of those things in mind, I invite you to turn now in your Bibles to Exodus 20 as we pick up at the eighth commandment, the eighth commandment in verse 15. Exodus 20:15 and these brief words are going to occupy us for today and next Sunday and the following Sunday as well. The implications are that great. In Exodus 20:15 the eighth commandment simply says,

15 You shall not steal.

You shall not steal. Now you might wonder how is anyone going to talk for three hours spread over three messages on those brief words, but let me remind you of a principle that we have said throughout our study of the 10 Commandments. In order to properly understand the 10 Commandments, we have to examine what all of Scripture does with those individual commandments. The entire Bible is a commentary on what each commandment means and so we need to kind of search through what Scripture says in order to find out the fullness of the meaning of any individual commandment, and what we're going to find in our study here together is that this eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," teaches us about enormous matters of consequence, or you could say matters of enormous consequence, that affect every aspect of our lives, which affect every aspect of the motions of our inner man, of our inner hearts. It teaches us about property rights. It teaches us about a work ethic. It teaches us about giving. It teaches us how to love one another. And as we go through the eighth commandment, we are going to see once again the truth of this verse found in Psalm 119:96 that says, "Your commandment is exceedingly broad." Your commandment is exceedingly broad. This commandment is far broader than what you might think and so we'll only see the breadth of this commandment if we take the time to see it in the context of Scripture and what we're going to see today is that we need to see – it just amazes me how broad the word of God is – you can only begin to understand this commandment in the context of God's order for the entire universe. You can only understand this commandment if you understand from Genesis 1 through the end of Revelation, to have some sense of what God has established the purpose of man to be. People are looking for self-fulfillment, Christians wonder what's God's will for my life and it's usually in the context of earthly matters of who should I marry, what school should I go to or, you know, where should I

live, those kinds of things. Those things all have their place but, beloved, when you contemplate the will of God from such earthbound perspectives, you're really missing the broader perspective that really informs everything else. You can only rightly answer those kinds of individual questions in a much broader context of why God created the earth and why God created man and what it is that we are to do.

So what we want to do this morning is to take a look at three aspects of God's created order in order to begin to understand the context in which the eighth commandment comes to us, "Thou shall not steal," and that's what we're going to do here this morning. And we're going to look at the created order, we're going to look at the moral order, and then we're going to look at the social order, and I'll explain those terms as we go along.

Let's, first of all, consider God's created order as the context for understanding the eighth commandment, and with that in mind, turn to Genesis 1. When God created the heavens and the earth, he also created man and he gave man dominion over the earth, and this is very vital to understanding things right from the start. Look at Genesis 1:26 and think about it this way; I hadn't really thought about it like this until just this moment. In order to answer the question about what is man to do and how is man to view himself in light of a holy God, you have to go all the way back and ask the question where did man come from and what was he told to do in the process. These matters of creation versus evolution, for example, are matters of highest consequence. These are worldviews and philosophical systems that are completely inconsistent with one another, and if you define man wrongly as a process, as a product of an evolutionary process over millions or billions of years, you have completely misunderstood who man really is, what the truth of man is in the order of the universe, whereas by order of biblical creation, only then do we begin to understand what the purpose and the reason for man's existence is, man as humanity, and then within the context us as individual members of humanity.

So we look at Genesis 1:26 and we see this, that,

26 ...God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. 31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

When God created man, when God created Adam, the first man, he gave a great stewardship to him. He laid before him the created earth and man was responsible to develop it. He was responsible to subdue the earth. He was responsible to exercise dominion over the earth and over the rest of creation. There was a great stewardship that was placed upon him and just think about what that means for just a moment. It means that Adam was obligated to God to manage the resources that were put under his responsibility. He had an obligation to exercise a stewardship over what had been given to him, a stewardship that was pleasing to God, not simply for his own pleasure and management. As you read on in the early chapters of Genesis, you find that that stewardship required Adam to work. It required him to do productive things with his life and with his hands.

Look at Genesis 2:15 where it says,

15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Beloved, this was before the fall. This was before man rebelled against God in the perfect environment that God had created and placed Adam in the garden of Eden. He had a responsibility to work. He had responsibilities to fulfill. He had things to do that were given to him by God.

So it's important to see that God made work part of the created order before the fall and so we realize that in the created order of God work was part of the design, work is something that God declared to be very good. And as a result of that, before the fall Adam would have found his time in the garden, his work in the garden to be something that was pleasant, something that he gained satisfaction and joy from as he obeyed God, did what God had given him to do in the environment that God had given him to do it, and as he did that, that would have been something that brought great pleasure and satisfaction to him. The garden work would have been pleasant to him, but notice for all of its pleasantness it was still a duty and a stewardship and a responsibility that he had to carry out.

Now as you know, you read on in chapter 3 and you find that Adam soon fell into sin with Eve, and a curse, God brought a curse upon the world as a result of their rebellion, and what had been a perfect environment, pleasing and in full concord with the person of God, now disorder and disruption and chaos had been introduced, and God as judgment on Adam for his sin, cursed the earth in a way that made Adam's work difficult. Look at Genesis 3:17-19 with me. Genesis 3, verses 17 and 19, God declaring his curses following the sin of man says to Adam in verse 17,

17 ..."Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You will

eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

And so the reason work is difficult now for us today is a consequence of that curse that has been brought upon us, but what I want you to see is that God from the very beginning always intended for man to work. Man has responsibilities to work and to cultivate the stewardship that God has given to him. This is what God wove into the very created order of the way that things are to be.

I speak with precision here: for able-bodied people who are able to work, God intends for people to earn their living and to support themselves through the work that he has given them to do. Whether it's modest work by the world's standards or lofty work by the world's standards is utterly irrelevant. We have a responsibility as able-bodied men and women to earn a living to support ourselves through the labor of our own hands. It is a gross violation of the biblical order, it is a gross violation of the order of God to contemplate a situation where on an ongoing basis a man or his family is living off of the kindness of others or living off government programs. That is not what God intends. You are to work for a living by the labor of your own hands. This is his created order. And we'll see this more as we go along.

For now we just wanted to go all the way back to the beginning, to the start of man, to the start of creation, and see that the principle of work was woven into the fabric of the way that God established things to be. There is a reason why Scripture condemns laziness. There is a reason why Scripture speaks against sloth. It is a violation of what God intended man to be. So much so, let's turn over to the book of Proverbs 6 for just a moment. Proverbs 6 and we see even in the created order of insects, you go from the created order of man to the created order of insects, you can observe this principle of work being established as shown to us by the words of the holy writ.

Proverbs 6:6 says,

6 Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, 7 Which,
having no chief, Officer or ruler, 8 Prepares her food in the summer And
gathers her provision in the harvest. 9 How long will you lie down, O
sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 10 "A little sleep, a little
slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest" 11 Your poverty will come
in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man.

Scripture rebukes those who are lazy and says, "Go and look at an ant and see how the ant labors to provide for himself and learn a lesson from how you are to approach life yourself." And don't be deceived by the incremental compromises that people so easily make, just a little rest right here, I'll sleep in today, and sleeping in today leads into sleeping tomorrow and on it goes, and those little individual compromises become a pattern of life, develop habits and character patterns that are utterly contrary to what God intended us to be like.

So work is woven into the created order and that bears on our understanding ultimately on the eighth commandment but for now we'll leave it there and we'll move on to a second aspect that Scripture teaches us and that's the moral order. The moral order of God. As you move into the moral law that we are studying here in the 10 Commandments, you can turn now to Exodus 20, the 10 Commandments being a divine summary of the moral law that God intends to govern the lives of humanity, universally applying to all men everywhere at all times, you come to Exodus 20:8-10 and you read this,

8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. [Look at verse 9,] 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.

Now endless discussion has taken place over the meaning of the sabbath and the role that it has or does not have in the Christian church. When is the sabbath? What is permissible on it? We addressed all of those matters earlier in this series on the 10 Commandments and I'm not going to repeat them here. What I just want to remind you is that in the 10 Commandments themselves and in the fourth commandment in particular, the opening statement is on the principle of work.

Look at it there in verse 9 and I think that a lot of commentators just kind of pass over this in order to get to the controversies of verse 10, but it says right there in verse 9, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." It presupposes that a man is working. It commands that a man be working. So what I want you to see is that there is a consistent thread running through the revelation of God. In creation before the fall, there is a principle that man should work. After the fall, man still had to work but now it got difficult. Now it brings sweat. Now it would be toilsome. Now it would be difficult as the consequence and the punishment for the fall of man, but there was to be this work and then you read on and you continue reading in the book of Moses, those first five books of our English Bibles, and you realize that the principle of work, a positive command, a positive duty to work is laid upon man in the 10 Commandments themselves so that you see in the created order God's intention for man to work, and you see in the moral law the command of God that man is to be one who works.

And the rest of Scripture supports that assertion as well. It's not just an Old Testament principle. Proverbs 14:23, you don't need to turn there, Proverbs 14:23 says,

23 In all labor there is profit, But mere talk leads only to poverty.

Then you turn into the New Testament and you find this, you find that the Apostle Paul himself embodied this principle by his personal example and by what he taught. The Apostle Paul lived this and the Apostle Paul taught this. The Apostle Paul being a direct appointed representative of the Lord Jesus Christ laid emphasis on this principle of work.

Look at the book of Acts 20 and you can see how the principles of work and coveting are related to one another, they are two sides of the same coin. Let's begin in verse 31 as Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders. Acts 20:31. You see the time frame with which he was with these men.

31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands [speaking of his own hands] You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul points to his own life which they had observed over a period of three years and he draws out this same biblical principle that we've been talking about here this morning. He said, "A man is to work and I exemplified that before you. I did not depend upon others to provide for me. I supported myself with my own hands and that is a lesson for you," he says to them, "This is how you are to work. This is how believers are to operate, they are to work hard in this manner to provide for themselves and not merely provide for themselves but to have that which they can use to be a blessing to others as well." And as he said this, he contrasts it with the sin of greed and covetousness. He says, "I was not after anyone's gold or silver while I was here. I did not covet that. Instead what I did was I worked with my own hands, I supplied for my needs and those who were with me, and you are to take from my example and realize this is how you too are also to live." He had given a positive example to them of working hard in the course of his service with the Lord.

I had a boss back in Chicago many years ago, he said something that has always stuck with me as he observed people working in his firm over a number of years. He told me one time, he said, "People think they're working hard but they're really not. They don't realize that they're not beginning to work nearly as hard as they could." I've heard coaches of basketball teams say the same thing, guys think they're working hard on the team but they're not, and one of the responsibilities of organizational leadership is to help people understand that there's more effort that they can give, there's more effort that can be done and you can work harder than what you think that you actually can. We all have sinful hearts that flatter us, and I include myself in what I'm saying here. We flatter ourselves and think that we're doing such a great job and, "Oh, I'm working so hard in what I do," but perhaps we're a little softer on ourselves than what we actually need to be.

Look over at 2 Thessalonians 3 where we see the precept of the Apostle Paul. The precept of the Apostle Paul. We saw his example, we see his precept, and actually his

example is laid out before us also so let's go back to chapter 3, verse 7. 2 Thessalonians 3:7.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

So the New Testament pattern is not for a church to simply to give to everyone who asks without regard to their lifestyle. You know, people come and ask for, you know, ask for money, ask for food or whatever, you know, the New Testament answer to that is to ask prior questions. You know, "Well, are you working? Have you been working? How did you get into this position?" And there is accountability that takes place. It is not righteous for a church to simply give to everybody who asks without regard to this principle. It is not righteous for a church or for an individual to support someone and to enable them to live an undisciplined, ungodly life where they are simply living off the means of others when they have the physical ability to work and to support themselves. So this governs the way that we respond to benevolent requests and it's made a lot of people who are not members of our church, who don't even attend our church, it's made a lot of people angry but there's a reason why we respond in this way. Scripture speaks to this very point and if a man is lazy, if he refuses to work, if he does not support himself when he has the ability to do so, Scripture says he's not to eat and his appetite becomes that which motivates him to live a comparatively more righteous life by responding to the needs. You know, if you want to eat, then go work so that you can eat.

This isn't difficult to understand and so what we see is that work is woven into the created order by the way that God established creation; we see it woven into the moral order as it's expressed explicitly in the 10 Commandments and exemplified and taught by the Apostle Paul; you start to get the impression that our work matters to God, you start to get the impression that what we do with our hands and what do with our lives Monday through Saturday matters and you can't place a veneer of spirituality over common basic laziness. You know, you can read in church history of people who tried to make a virtue out of not working and they're going to live by faith and just live by what people give them. That's not faith, that's sin, that's disobedience to the principle of God. We are to work to support ourselves in whatever God has given us the talent and the ability to do.

To state it positively, to state it positively what this means is that those of you, you know, that there is virtue in a man earning his living working with his hands, there is virtue in a man earning his living through his intellectual talents. You know, God gifts us, God gives

us different abilities. We are to take those and to use those in order to support ourselves and to support our families. This is what God intends. I've never seen this done but it would certainly be a legitimate exercise of church discipline for a member to be expelled from the church if they were so lazy and unwilling to work. This is that significant.

So we see the created order and the moral order and let me move now, thirdly, to the social order. The social order and when I use the word "social" here, I'm referring to the principle of love. The principle of love. We have frequently said that the goal of the law is to teach us how to love God and to love our neighbor. Jesus said in Matthew 7:12, he said,

12 In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Treat others the way you want to be treated. Do to them what you would like for them to do to you. Don't do what you wouldn't want them to do to yourself. It's pretty basic and Scripture says it sums up the law and the prophets in terms of how to love your neighbor is to act by that basic principle. Well, beloved, biblical love calls us to work not only for our needs so that we are able to provide for the needs of others.

Look over at Ephesians 4 past the letters of the Corinthians, the letter of Galatians, you come to Ephesians and we're looking at Ephesians 4:28 and we're starting to come back full circle to where we started, "You shall not steal." Ephesians 4:28, the Apostle Paul applying the outworkings of the salvation that he had described in the first three chapters of Ephesians says this,

28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

Here you see the positive and the negative side of the eighth commandment. Paul says, "He who steals has to stop and he has to do something else instead, he has to labor in order to support himself, and not merely to support himself but so that he might be in a position to share with someone who has need." You know, one of the problems with our credit-driven debt-riddled society is and this takes place even within the church, I know, is that people are so much in debt by having financed their consumer approach to life that they don't have the money to pay their own bills let alone to support and share with someone who has need. Their greedy approach and their materialistic approach to life prevents them from living in this manner and recognizing that it is an obligation of God to manage your resources in a way that gives you a little bit left over to share with those in the body of Christ who have need or those that God might otherwise bring to you.

Look at it there again with me in verse 28. This is the word of God. This is the command of God consequent upon the eighth commandment. "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." We've made this whole point today

about the prevalence of work and the principle of work in order to lay a foundation to see that the commandment for stealing is wrapped up around the commandment to labor. The created order, the moral order, the social order of God all points to work as what a primary responsibility of an able-bodied man and an able-bodied woman is to be.

Now what does that mean? What's the outworking of this? Beloved, as you're sitting here today, you have the life that God has given to you, included in that is that you have the time and the talents and the opportunities and the responsibilities that God has given to you. If you've chosen to have a large family, my wife and I did, you've got a lot of responsibilities, there's a lot of mouths to feed. Perhaps you haven't been married but you have other responsibilities. Whatever the case may be, all of those aspects of your responsibility of care are part of what God has given to you, and the commandment to work, the commandment of stewardship upon you tells you to take those talents, take those opportunities and develop them and to work with what God has given to you just as Adam was to work with what God had given to him. And we do this to meet our own needs and those who depend upon us, and even further we do what we can and we manage things so that there's some left over so that we can help others who have legitimate needs. What Scripture calls you to see is this, is that love could do nothing less than that. Love could do nothing less than to see, "I have this opportunity. I have these talents. I manage them in a way so that I have something to share with others in addition to meeting the responsibilities that God has given to me." This is of most basic consequence in the Christian life. So this commandment about not stealing ultimately points us in the direction of God's order for work, and takes us even further into teaching us how we are to love. We need to step back and think about the totality of what we're spending our money on, what we're doing with our time, and evaluating is this all about what gratifies me or have I calculated in somehow being able to be a blessing to others as well.

We only understand theft against the backdrop of work. What does a thief do? A thief attempts to bypass God's appointed order of working for his own needs in order to take advantage of someone else. Rather than to work for his own needs, he takes from someone else. Rather than to give to another in love, he takes in greed. This idea of theft, you start to see how vulgar and putrid it is in the sight of God. It violates what he commanded man to do and it violates the principle of love. No thief, and we'll see next week or the week after that, I can't remember the sequence, every one of us is a thief. Every one of us is guilty of theft in one way or another. The commandment is very broad and very searching. But the laziness and the greed that leads people to violate work are the same inner sins that lead people to take from others, and in the final analysis it's all a violation of love. Not one of you would want someone to take what is yours and appropriate it to themselves. Not one of you who pay a man to labor would want him to be lazy on the job that you're paying him to do. And yet how many of us have taken advantage of our employers by not giving our best effort day by day by day. Every one of us falls short in that manner and what we need to see and what the Scriptures lead us to understand is that that kind of theft, that kind of greed, that kind of discontented covetous heart are all sins of rebellion and ingratitude against the order and provision of God.

The command not to steal ultimately tests whether we are satisfied with what God has given us or not, and to sin against that is a sin of incalculable enormity and it is a sin that is far more pervasive than we realize. What's true of theft is true of all the other sin in our lives. We have violated God's created order, his moral order, and his social order, and at a time like this all we can do is ask God, "Help me to see my own guilt truly. Help me to see it the way that You do so that I might truly repent." And as we pray that way, as we search our hearts that way, we trust the Lord that he would lead us to Christ, that this conviction from the law would lead us to Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected, ascended and coming again for the sake of guilty sinners like you and me, and to recognize that Christ came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. And beloved, it's only in that work of Christ that there is atonement for our sins. Look at the law of God, see how far you fall short and then in the language of Galatians 3, flee to the Lord Jesus Christ where alone forgiveness and righteousness can be found.

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, we bow before the majesty of Your law. We acknowledge the fact that we are sinners who have fallen short of Your glory. We pray that You might for those of us that are Christians as we confess our sins, Father, that You might cleanse us from our sins, forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We thank You for the salvation and the cleansing that is available in the Lord Jesus Christ and we rest in Him afresh today. Father, for those that have been convicted by Your word, having a dawning sense of their lostness, we pray that You would bring even greater clarity to their minds and to their hearts that they might turn with full knowledge, with a full repentance, turn to Christ that they might be saved. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.