

Respect Other People's Property

Text : Eph. 4: 20-32



INTRODUCTION :

A. The Ten Commandments were given by God as the constitution of a new government.

1. God called the Israelites out of Egypt to be HIS special nation.
2. They were chosen because of God's relationship with Abraham.
3. God was to rule over His new nation directly. (**Theocracy**)
 - a. It was His desire to bless them above all other nations.
 - b. In return, they were to obey His law, to be holy and to represent Him on the earth.

B. In that sense, Israel was a foreshadowing of the church.

1. **Col. 2: 16**- Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— **17**- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.
2. Compare : **Heb. 8:4-5 , 10:1**

C. The truth is always and eternally true.

1. The principles set forth in the Ten Commandments are universally accepted as true.
2. Those same principles are embodied in civil codes around the globe.
3. They are also at the core of the teaching of Jesus the Christ.

Matt. 22: 36 - "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" **37**- And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. **38**- This is the great and foremost commandment. **39**- The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

- a. The first four commands explain how to love God. (Vs. **37**)
- b. The next six commands explain how to love one's neighbor. (Vs. **39**)
- c. Thus, the Ten Commandments remain at the heart of the Law of Christ.

3. Of the six, we have thus far seen :

a. Society relies upon a strong family unit.

- 1) It transmits the values of society from one generation to the next. (**socialization**)
- 2) The knowledge of God is passed on from one generation to the next.

b. The most basic element in human relations is to acknowledge the other's right to exist.

c. Procreation requires coupling so the union of a couple must be honored and preserved.

TRANSITION :

The eighth command “**You shall not steal.**” establishes the right of each person to possess personal property.

I. Can you imagine a world in which a person's right to possess things was not secured ?

A. It would be a world filled with violence.

1. Such was the case before the great universal flood. (**Gen. 6: 11**)
2. That same attitude was why Abraham had to rescue Lot from the kings. (**Gen 14**)
3. In a world where “*Might makes right*” no one is secure.

B. That kind of insecurity gave rise to the “clan” or tribal system in uncivilized places.

1. Relatives band together to protect themselves against other families.
2. Survival depends upon the strength, the numbers and the loyalty of the clan.

C. What would your life be like if you could :

1. Harvest a crop only to have a more powerful neighbor come truck it away. (**Gideon**)
2. Build a house only to have someone take it away from you.
3. What would happen to our economy if the strong could take whatever they wanted ?
 - a. It could not flourish.
 - b. It would be a cash culture. No one would loan money for fear of loss.
3. We define one of the functions of government as to secure one's possessions, to protect the weak from the strong.

D. Thus, one way we love our neighbor as our self is to respect his property.

II. Stealing is also condemned in the New Testament.

- A. **Eph. 4: 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.
- B. **I Cor. 6: 9**- Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, **10**- nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. **11**- Such were drunkards, some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. **In Christ a thief can be forgiven, but he must stop stealing.**
- C. To steal is the opposite of love.
1. It puts one's self above another. (**It gratifies one's self at the expense of another.**)
 2. **Phil. 2: 3**- Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; **4**- do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

III. Christianity does not advocate communism or even socialism.

- A. Some twist the scriptures erroneously postulating that Christianity condemns wealth and having personal possessions.
1. They point to the instructions given by Jesus to the wealthy young man.
Matt. 19: 21- Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." **22**- But when the young man heard

this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. 23- And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

- a. Jesus did not condemn the rich man for being wealthy.
- b. He demonstrated the fact that the young man’s wealth was an obstacle to his faith.
- c. Those who are rich are strongly tempted to trust in their resources more than in God.

I Tim. 6: 17- Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. (Compare : Vs. 10)

*** It’s worth noting that Timothy was NOT instructed to teach the rich to give away their wealth, but to use it to serve God.**

2. They also point to the example of the members of the church having all things in common

a. **Acts 2: 40-45 ; 4: 32-37**

b. Their sharing was a spontaneous act of love.

c. They were NOT commanded to sell their possessions and share the proceeds.

3. The wisdom of God can never be discarded. **Communism does not work.**

a. **ILL.— In the first four year of the Jamestown colony socialism failed.**

b. Communist countries are now reverting to a free market system.

B. The Apostles instructed the Christians that they could do whatever they wanted with their property.

1. **Acts 5: 1-11 (Esp. 11) ... “And after it was sold, was it not under your control?”**

2. Ananias and Sapphira were punished for lying, not for keeping part of the proceeds.

C. There were wealthy members in the New Testament church.

1. Philemon owned slaves and a house big enough to host a church. **Philemon**

2. Mary, the sister of Barnabas, had a large house and servants. (Rhoda) **Acts 12: 12-13**

3. Philip the evangelist had a large house.

*** The wealthy women who supported Jesus were not condemned. Luke 8: 3**

IV. The Christian's attitude toward things prevents him from stealing.

A. The Christian is warned not to love money.

1. **I John 2: 15**- Do not love the world nor the things in the world.
2. **I Tim. 6: 10**- For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
3. Compare : **Heb. 13: 5** ; **I Tim. 3: 3**

B. The Christian is forbidden to devote his life to the accumulation of wealth.

1. **Matt. 6: 19**- Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20**- But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; **21**- for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
2. **I Tim. 6: 17**- Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. **18**- *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, **19**- storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

C. Even so, the Christian is instructed to work hard to get things to :

1. Care for his physical needs and those of his family.
 - a. **I Thes. 4: 11**- and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, **12**- so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
 - b. **I Tim. 5: 8**- But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

2. Have to share with others who have need.

- a. **Eph. 4: 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.
- b. **Rom. 12: 9-** Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. **10-** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; **11-** not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; **12-** rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, **13-** contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

1) Compare : **Acts 6: 1ff**

2) It should never be left to the government to care for the needy saints.

3. Have to support the mission of the church (**Phil. 4: 10-20** - cf - **Luke 8: 1-3**)

- a. **I Thes. 2: 9-** For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*
- b. **Acts 20: 33-35** ... **Paul worked as an example to all Christians.**

D. When a Christian is able to share with others, he feels blessed by doing so.

1. People of the world feel blessed when they improve their own circumstances.
2. The Christian realizes that life is a stewardship. **Everything is an opportunity.**
3. The Christian feels a moral obligation to earn so he can give, minister to the weak.

V. Temptations come in a few general categories.

A. Overtly taking that which belongs to another.

1. Shoplifting (Alton Howard had “Christian” employees steal as much as others.)
2. Taking things home from work.

B. Failure to give full value.

1. Corrupted scales ... **Deut. 25: 13-16** (cf. - **Hos. 12: 6**)

ILL.- Purchased cow by pound, found it tethered by a trough of salt water.

2. Do not work the time paid for working. (**ILL.- Personal shopping on line**)

C. Cheating

1. Keeping the money when a clerk makes a mistake in your favor.
2. Misrepresent item being sold. (**Uncle Bethel bought contents of crib ... seller cheated**)
3. Not paying one's taxes. **Rom. 13: 6** / **Mark 12: 17** (**Excuse : Everyone does it.**)

D. Non-payment of debt. (**This is a growing problem in America.**)

1. **Rom. 13:8- Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another;**
for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.
2. Bankruptcy is legalized theft.

E. Failure to give what we can.

1. To refer to a “stingy” Christian is a contradiction in terms. **He is one or the other.**
2. **I Jn 3 / Jas 2 / II Cor 8** ... Remind us that love requires we minister to other's needs.
3. **Malachi 3: 8** asks “**Will a man rob God.**” Referring to those who do not give to God.
4. **I Cor. 16:2** - cf - **II Cor. 9** ... Christians gladly give the percentage of their income.

CONCLUSION :

A. Christians are to be :

1. Honest
2. Just
3. Generous

B. We don't :

1. Take what does not belong to us.
2. Cheat other people.
3. Withhold that which we are obligated by love to give.

C. The greatest theft of all is to rob someone of their right to hear the gospel.

1. **Jer. 23: 30-** “Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the LORD, “who steal My words from each other.”
2. Jesus died to purchase Christians and sent them out to proclaim His name.
3. The greatest robbery of all is not to give to the lost what Jesus purchased for them.

INVITATION :

The Law was good, but we just could not keep it.

The system of grace through faith provides for our weakness.

Will you choose Grace over law.