

TEN | Do Not Steal

Rob Rogers July 25, 2021

Introduction

Each week of our series on the Ten Commandments shows us from a different angle that the Law of God is not evidence of God's anger or a demand for obedience—the Law of God is evidence of God's **LOVE**.

Now, as a reminder, God gave these laws to a brand new nation. The commandments aren't only individualistic admonitions—these are rules for an entire nation of people. One thing laws inevitably do is reveal what the person giving the rules cares about. When God gave the Ten Commandments, He revealed what He cares about, for individuals and for nations.

Today we move into commandment number eight—do not steal.

Exodus 20:15

You shall not steal.

Before you dismiss this commandment—because we all know stealing is wrong, and there is something in us that says, “Of course you shouldn't steal! I don't steal! I don't take things that don't belong to me”—I want you to understand that God takes the issue of theft seriously.

If you step back and look at all of the commandments, they reveal a broader principle about what matters to God. That principle is this: **God has a problem with takers**.

- Don't murder. **Don't take** someone's life.
- Don't commit adultery. **Don't take** someone's spouse.
- **Don't take** glory that belongs to God alone.
- **Don't take** God's name and misuse it for selfish purposes.
- Don't steal. **Don't take** what doesn't belong to you.

God has a problem with takers

Consider the following examples:

1. When the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, the king didn't think it would be a big deal to take some of the gold and silver vessels from the Jewish temple to bring back to his own temple in Babylon. After all, when you lay siege to a city, you take the plunder. But Nebuchadnezzar wasn't messing with just anyone's stuff; he was messing with God's stuff, and God takes the sin of theft very seriously. Daniel tells us what happened next:

Daniel 4:33

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Moral of the story: Don't steal in general, but definitely don't steal from God or you might find yourself eating grass like a cow.

2. When Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar became king over Babylon, he had an opportunity to return the stolen items to the temple in Jerusalem, but he didn't. Instead, he threw an enormous feast. Here's what happened:

Daniel 5:2-4

While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

- Belshazzar violated many of the commandments: he had multiple wives and concubines and he used items that were stolen from God's house to worship pagan gods.

Daniel 5:30

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

Moral of the story: Don't mess with God's stuff.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) are another testament to this moral. They took from God what they had promised to give to Him, and when they lied about it, they both fell down dead.

Now, I don't want you to hear that if you steal, God is going to kill you on the spot. But I do want you to understand that God takes the sin of stealing very seriously.

Let's talk about the types of things we steal.

Things we steal from others

RESOURCES

Pens: People steal so many pens that doctor offices and banks chain their pens to their desks and clipboards.

Restaurant condiments: The CEO of Jim n' Nicks BBQ said in a *USA Today* article that the amount of condiments stolen from his restaurant on a yearly basis equates to about \$900,000 per year.¹ That's only 1 percent of the chain's yearly supply cost, but it's not nothing!

Hotel amenities: Thirty-five percent of hotel guests admit to stealing things like towels and linens.² Of all countries surveyed, people from Denmark steal the least from hotels and people from Colombia admit to stealing the most, which means those people either steal a whole lot of hotel swag or they're just more honest than some of the other people who took this survey.

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2014/08/16/things-almost-everyone-steals/14056185/>

² Ibid

Things borrowed or owed: Have you ever borrowed something from a friend and never returned it? Perhaps a book now sitting on your shelf or a tool you're hoping your friend might forget about? Have you ever withheld payment from someone who has already done the work you hired them to do?

TIME

According to a survey done more than 5 years ago, 57 percent of people admit to calling in sick when they felt completely fine.³ That's stealing time by neglecting your work.

Objection—Isn't this being a little nitpicky? What does it matter if I take a sick day as a vacation day?

When you call in sick without actually being sick:

- You lie to your employer.
- You either have to admit to your coworkers that you lied to your employer or you have to lie to your coworkers.
- You're stealing time, productivity, money, from your employer.
- As followers of Christ, we are called to approach our work not as if we are working for people, but as if we are working for God Himself. You're not fooling God when you fake a sick day.

CREDIT

Question—Have you ever taken someone else's work and passed it off as if it was yours?

If so, you're stealing credit or honor.

If you're in a position of authority, give credit away as much as possible. In God's economy, the more you try to make yourself look more productive or smarter or better than the people around you, while you might move up in the world's economy, you're moving down in God's.

Jesus spent His whole ministry elevating the people around Him at His own expense, not elevating Himself at other people's expense. The purpose of leadership is servanthood and self-sacrifice, NOT self-aggrandizement and exaltation.

Things we steal from God

One of the most sobering passages of Scripture is found in the book of Malachi. This passage is about tithing, but it's also one of the few passages in Scripture that addresses how people steal from God.

Malachi 3:7–8

"Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings."

- "How did we rob you, God?" *By withholding from Me a portion what is rightfully Mine!*
- The word tithe literally means 10 percent, but in the Old Testament, the Israelites actually gave far more than that. It was likely around 26 percent—for upkeep of the temple, Jewish feasts and festivals, and caring for the poor, widows, and orphans. In the New Testament, 10 percent isn't the ceiling—it's the floor. It's not the goal—it's the starting line.

³ <https://www.wsls.com/health/2015/11/10/survey-57-percent-of-people-admit-to-calling-in-sick-when-they-were-not-actually-ill/>

- Malachi shows us that withholding the tithe from God is robbery. God owns it all, and He tells us to bring Him our tithes and offerings. In fact, He says to test Him in this.

Malachi 3:10

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try 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 such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

When a thief stops being a thief

The apostle Paul gives us some insight into when a thief stops being a thief.

Ephesians 4:28

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

- A thief stops being a thief not when they stop taking but when they *start giving*.
- In fact, the entirety of the Scripture calls us not just to abstain from bad things, but to be active in doing good things!

**The 8th commandment doesn't just tell us
that God has a problem with takers,
it also tells us
that God wants to see His people live a life of generosity!**

It's not about your money—it's about **your motive**.

It's not about your wealth—it's about **your worship**.

It's not your dollars—it's about **your devotion**.

See, God is not saying, “Do not steal” as if that's the measure of an impactful life. He's saying, “Be generous! Give your life away! Serve others! Bless people! When you do, you model for the world the type of God that I am.”

Personal—After I had come to Christ, one of the first things I felt God impressing on me to do was to go back to the people that I'd stolen from in order to support my drug addiction. One family in particular had been very kind to me—they trusted me, and I took full advantage of that trust to steal about \$400 from them over the course of several months. It'd been a number of years since I'd seen them, and I'd earned enough money to pay them back and to confess to them why I'd stolen it. I was so nervous to face the consequences. I worried that these people would never view me the same way again. I went to their home and confessed everything. They were shocked and appalled, but eventually they began to forgive me.

I could have said nothing and kept the \$400. They never would have known. But because I confessed by theft, I had the opportunity to share with them that Jesus had changed my life and that I was doing my best to be obedient to the God Who saved me, cleaned me up, and gave me purpose and direction in life. Unfortunately, they were not open to that message at all. I think they just said, “Well, good for you! Thanks for paying us back, and we'll see you later.”

Who knows what impact that had on them? All I know is this: I drove away from their house completely enveloped in the presence and pleasure of God. I could hear God saying to me, “Well done.”

Application—For those of you who are already thinking of items, resources, or relationships that you’ve stolen, here’s what the enemy would love to do right now: Condemn you. “You failed. How could you? I can’t believe you would do such a thing!” But Scripture says there is no condemnation in Christ.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

- There is a big difference between condemnation and conviction.
- **Condemnation** is about shame. It offers hopelessness.
- **Conviction** is about change. It offers hope.

Conclusion

Here’s the **challenge** for you this week: Go make it right. Do the right thing. Make restitution. While I can’t promise that everything will go beautifully, or that you won’t lose your job, I can promise that God will go with you, and when that conversation is over, you will feel the presence and pleasure of God.

You know what I’m expecting to happen this week? I’m expecting a wave of stuff to just show up in Williamson County! I can see the *Williamson Source* front-page headline: “Wave of honesty sweeps through Middle TN.”

Question—How do you gain the power and the courage to confess and make it right?

You can’t do it by self-effort or out of guilt. Making restitution and living generously are byproducts of being overwhelmed by God’s generosity toward you.

There is nowhere that generosity is seen more clearly than on the cross. On the cross, Jesus emptied Himself so that you could be filled. When you empty yourself, He fills you again. He gave His life away for you, and when you give yours away for Him, He fills you again. He is the endless Source, and He’s not short on resources. He’s a God of abundance! There’s nothing you need that He can’t give.

The more you see the generosity of this all-powerful God Who loves you, the more you give yourself away and model His love and generosity to the world around you.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss: God has a problem with takers. How does Scripture affirm this statement?
2. Reflect on the list of things we steal. Are you convicted about any of these things? How are you resolved to “make it right”?
3. What does Malachi say about withholding our tithes and offerings?
4. When does a thief stop being a thief?
5. What is the measure of an impactful life? How do we live this way?

NOTES