



The Seventh Commandment by Pastor Glenn Huebel

You shall not steal.

Our series on the Ten Commandments continues this month with the seventh. Almost everyone agrees that this commandment is relevant today - so long as it is not applied to the particular forms of stealing that each one has justified. The various forms of stealing are too numerous to count or codify. Luther commented on this commandment, saying that if we executed every thief there would not be enough hangmen or enough gallows to do the job. Stealing is a very natural fruit of the

sinful human heart (Matt. 15:19), and is therefore hidden to our eyes in its most pernicious forms. Every government in history has fostered, practiced or endorsed stealing in one form or another. Karl Marx summarized the theory of communism in one simple phrase: abolition of private property. By abolishing the right of private property, Communism nullifies the seventh commandment, and allows the State to become the biggest thief of all through its power to confiscate property. Was

taken. Did the aristocracy of Russia gain its wealth justly? The serfs might argue against that one. They would probably say that the aristocrats were getting their just desserts and that injustices of centuries were being righted through the revolution. We could trace these arguments all the way back in history and never come to a conclusion about who started it all. Actually, Adam did.

Stealing permeates our life together as sinners. Did the Church of the Middle Ages justify stealing? It not only justified it, it was immersed in it. Church offices were sold for very high prices, because they were positions by which massive wealth could be obtained. The Papacy robbed all of Europe through the sale of God's free gifts and by the abuse of power. Indulgences were but the tip of the iceberg.

Does Capitalism justify stealing? Some of the greatest thieves in American history used the capitalist system to rob millions of people, often through government support.

Ahab's theft of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) more unjust than the Communist's confiscation of private property? It is true that Ahab's murder of Naboth made it particularly heinous but the body count in the Russian Revolution and its aftermath staggers the imagination.

The simple fact is that we all recognize stealing when it's our property being

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Rembrandt, *Moses With the Ten Commandments*. 1659. Oil on canvas, 168.5 cm x 136.5 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

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That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. —John 20:31

Seventh Commandment, cont.

I am astonished today that so many people can point the finger at one entity and ignore the others. Some people point to “big business” as a corrupt and unjust boogey man, and seem to think quite sincerely that big government can restore justice and equity. Are they serious? Are we to believe that big business breeds corruption and theft, but massive government (compared to any business) doesn’t? Dishonesty, theft, and corruption infect every earthly institution, and in time become rife. Stealing is a way of life with rich people and poor people, big business and unions, government and revolutionaries, students and teachers, tax payers and tax collectors, and everyone else. The question of St. Paul needs to be considered by all of us: “You who teach others, do you not each yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? (Rom 2:21).” Paul’s conclusion is correct: “All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good” (Rom 3:12). The commandments do not justify us before man or God. They lead us to repentance that we may obtain mercy and forgiveness in Christ who alone lived in perfect honesty before God and man.

Even after repentance and faith we can’t perfectly obey this commandment because of the sinful flesh, but it does provide guidance for the new man created in Christ Jesus. The flesh is always looking out for the self and seeking to gather the treasures of the world – this is the temptation to steal. The new man is just the opposite, but what is the opposite? St. Paul, speaking to the new man in Ephesians 4, writes, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of

their minds . . . Let the thief no longer steal, but rather, let him labor, doing honest work, with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Eph 4:17, 28). The opposite of stealing is giving. St. Paul quotes Jesus as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” The flesh is consumed with taking, the new man with giving. The new man is set free from the lie that life consists in the abundance of possessions. He is set free from thinking that he owns his possessions and regards them for what they really are, entrusted gifts of God. The new man is set free from the value system of the world, and sees the true value of things, the value God places upon them – namely, that people are more important than material things, eternal things more important than temporal, etc. With this new mindset, founded upon the security of God’s forgiveness, and the power of God’s love in Christ, the new man becomes a steward of the gifts he has received from God and uses them in love to bless others. In Paul’s example above, we cease trying to get our neighbor’s property and begin to employ our God given gifts to produce something to give to those who need it.

This new way of life puts everything into a different perspective. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Faith puts a new perspective on our view of work, our spending priorities, our generosity, our view of our own talents, our view of poverty, and our view of personal responsibilities toward the Kingdom of God (God also can also be robbed – Malachi 3:8). The new man looks for opportunities to give and to bless

rather than to gather and consume, opportunities to serve rather than to be served, opportunities to enrich others rather than use them for selfish gain. Jesus did not come to steal from us, but to “give His flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:51). “Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor that we, through His poverty, might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9) The new man in Christ is eager to follow that pattern of life.

Are we teaching our children to see life as a gift of grace to be given away, or as a black hole to take and devour? Are we teaching them to be rich in Christ, or to gain the riches of the world? Are we teaching them that vocation is the joy of using one’s gifts, talents, and possessions in service to others, or that vocation is primarily a means to get money? Are we teaching them that the end of education is to become rich, or to develop our gifts for blessing others? The happy irony is that when we teach them to give and bless rather than take and consume, God usually blesses them with even more. “Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). But the flesh is only too eager to wrest this passage away and use it get even more, so we best not dwell too long upon it. If you are occupied with giving your life away, stealing will not occur to you. The opposite of taking is giving.

Blessings,

Pastor Huebel

We as parents bear the responsibility of faithfully teaching our children God's Word to help nurture the development of our children's faith. By exposing our children early to God's Words and teachings, we equip them with the tools they need to grow in their faith and knowledge of the Bible and eventually grow up to be God-loving, responsible adults. This is why it is critically important that the child sees consistent family participation to help strengthen our bond through a common faith and understanding of our spiritual wellbeing.

I realize this may be easier said than done. As many of you know, my wife and I have 3 children under the age of 4, and we can certainly relate to the difficulty and stress that comes with worshipping with young children. We know about that feeling you get when it seems that everyone's eyes are upon you when your child feels compelled to scream as loud as he can during a worship service... Perhaps in the frustration of it all, you may even ask yourself "Is it even worth coming to church with my kids??" Remember what Jesus said to his apostles when they got annoyed with all the children present: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them. For the Kingdom of heaven is theirs!" (Matthew 19:14)

It is important to know that even when we are overcome with that hopeless feeling when our children misbehave, we must remember that there are also many instances of affirmation. It may not be perfect, but we should be encouraged by progress. Even in the midst of the cries, whines, giggles and the crinkling bag of chips, you may be able to hear the "joyful noise" of a

child who loudly announces that they colored the cross the same color as the cross in the sanctuary, perhaps the beautiful voice of the little girl we have all wondered and asked about who sings along with the rest of the congregation, maybe a child who proudly and loudly sounds out the words in the hymn or maybe the sound of a young child proudly reciting "The Lord's Prayer" in unison. These are signs that progress is being made, assurances that we are not alone and we too can look forward to our child also participating in a similar way and sharing that moment of pride just as those parents have done before us. Even on weeks when our own children struggle to behave themselves, we must take comfort that someone else's child is learning.

If we are able to remain faithful with regular family worship, I have faith that with a lot of patience, prayers, and some **really, really** deep cleansing breaths, that worshipping with our entire family will become easier and in turn our pews will be filled with even more children whom have also learned to appreciate to take joy in the privilege of being in the Lord's house. We can then revisit the, "Is it even worth it?" question and I am hopeful that we will share the feeling of pride and relief and come to the realization that this is a relatively small sacrifice that will prove to be a very worthwhile cause...

As you know, many of us learn by repetition and predictability so I invite our members with children to develop and follow a ritual of predictability with their entire families on Sundays. Experts say that a primary reason for following

rituals is that it helps our younger children understand that there is something very important going on. Rituals communicate that what's being done is out of the ordinary and is therefore, worthy of a special ceremony. Rituals also create an environment of predictability. For our younger children, even the opportunity to regularly participate in prayer by folding their hands is a powerful point of entry into liturgy of the Church. For others, the presence of familiar hymns and responses sung by the congregation are an excellent opportunity for children to participate.

In closing, children learn from watching their parents participate in worship. It is we who influence our child's life, so it is important that we play an active role in our children's education. Children learn best when God's Word is an important part of daily life at home as well as at our church. So the next time you struggle with your child, keep in mind that behind that screeching "joyful noise", our children possess an intelligence that we as adults take for granted. They certainly absorb more than we think, so our challenge is to form good habits as early as possible so that as our influence on our children wanes, their participation will remain strong and continue for many years to come.

To those parents with young children, I know it's difficult, but I thank you for bringing your child to church. Your family with all its noise, screaming, struggles, commotion and/or joy is not simply tolerated, you are a vital part of our organization and we look forward to continuing to worship with you and your joyful little noises!



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Youth Retreat 2013



In one of our best attended youth trips ever, 25 youth and 6 adults spent four days in Port Aransas. Our study was based on the book *Broken* by Pastor Jonathan Fisk. In between, we played on the beach and in the pool, and took a trip to the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi. At the end, we sadly bid good-bye to our four seniors: Sarah

Blaschke, Spencer Boyd, Nathan Burk, and David Sweet. Thanks to Randy and Joan Burk, Mark Blaschke, and Sandi Wachsmann for chaperoning. It truly was a great trip!

