

THE STUFF OF LIFE IN THE LAND

THIS WEEK: The 8th of 10 Commandments **Exodus 20:15** "You shall not steal."

TO GET OUR BEARINGS: **Living requires stuff:** food and shelter, stuff to cook the food on, a place to store the stuff to cook the food on, etc. **Living well requires more stuff.** (Books! And an iPod! And of course a nice canoe. And good camping equipment...)

Christianity is NOT a non-material, stuff-hating, way of life.

1 Timothy 4:4-5 For everything created by God is good, and **nothing is to be rejected** if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

1 Timothy 6:17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on **God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.**

NOTES:

1. **The commandment against stealing guarantees the right to personal property** (as the ban on adultery guarantees the right to marital faithfulness.)

2. **The commandment against stealing forbids stealing anything that belongs to anyone else.** Stealing is a crime against our God-given rights of ownership.

And this commandment directs us about **more issues than just our obligation to respect other people's stuff.**

For example, failing to follow copyright laws is stealing from the people who own the copyrights. ("Don't be a pirate! Arrrrr!")

Failing to work honestly (and so hard) for the money you earn is stealing from your employer.

And failing to give 10% of your earnings to God ("A *tithe*") is stealing from God.

Malachi 3:7-9 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. (*"Don't rob God!"*) By the same principle: "*This is mine!*"

NOTE: The tithe is the Old Testament standard. My view is that we are to follow all of the OT commandments except those that the NT changes: for example, the Sabbath laws. In many cases, the NT upgrades the OT law by readdressing the issue positively.

3. **The "positive opposite" of stealing is working hard.** As the "positive opposite" of murder is "loving your enemies."

Ephesians 4:28 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. This is the New Testament intensifying our obligations regarding "the right to personal property." But notice, it's not a general positive. It's not "*Thou shall share all you have all the time with everyone.*" This NT instruction calls for *honest work* that creates *the opportunity to share*: it's about living your life in such a way that you become, and remain, empowered to meet the needs of others.

ACTIONS: → to make the changes in "the life you live" that will enable to do your share of "the work we share."

a) **Give to God what you owe him.**

This is a concept that is clarified as the Scriptures reveal to us the mind of God. **1 Samuel 15:22-23** And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry..."

Psalms 50:10-14 For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving... God doesn't need and doesn't want your stuff. Some of it you need.

Micah 6:6-8 "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?" ... He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly

with your God? God doesn't need and doesn't want your stuff. Some of it you need. Some of it you need to give away for the good it will do someone else and for the good it will do you to give it away.

b) Give what you owe to everyone else.

Proverbs 3:27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Romans 13:7-10 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. **Notice** some connections between these commandments... Adultery murders someone's marriage. Murder is stealing someone's life. Stealing is acting out covetousness.

Notice that the opposite of all these disobediences is the obedience of love, and so love is the fulfillment of the law. **Mark 12:31** The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

c) Get going on making the changes in your life required to "have something to share with anyone in need."

To get going on tithing probably means some significant changes to your life: rebudgeting your money. Similarly, changes will be required here... **Ephesians 4:28** 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. There's a wider application to this instruction than for the shoplifters among us to stop shoplifting. To disobey God in regard to what we owe him is to steal: to be a thief. And so we have the word of God telling us "Let the thief no longer steal..." There are implications here for all of us to think through. This means making the changes necessary to accomplish things that otherwise won't ever be possible for you to do → *things that God means for you to do!*

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This is advance warning of what happens once we have concluded this present series on the Ten Commandments. A three week short series (April 18-May 2). A consideration of what we have learned from these two series: the sequel to **Liberty for Life** (and **Exiting Egypt**) → regarding "the work we share." → "Time To Sow"

Really getting going on "having no other Gods before us."

Really getting going on putting away our idols, being free from "covetousness, which is idolatry."

More of this at the **Annual Meeting** tonight: Looking at 2009 and 2010 → great untapped potential!!!"

This is good news as well as bad news. *Don't you think that we as a church ought to be accomplishing more? We as a church are set up to accomplish more. That's good news. And we WANT to accomplish more, don't we! Don't we????* If we really do, that's even more good news! So watch for it, starting the Sunday following the conclusion of The Ten Commandments.

But for now...

a) Give to God exactly what you owe him.

Mark 12:29-30 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Can you say this this morning: that you really are interested/determined/committed to living your life for God? Presenting your body to God? Being the person that God made you to be, that Christ died for you to be? Do you know of anything stopping you from doing so? If you do, then you know what idol, what other god, you are keeping between yourself and God! *Can you see it?* Can you see this? Can you put it behind you so as to live your life 'presented to God' as your "spiritual worship"? Will you do so today? Right now?

Next commandment: (March 14) **Exodus 20:16** The law against "bearing false witness." (Chris Postma)