
The 8th Law of Life - part 1 of 2

"You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15).

There are very few people who need to be told that it is wrong to break into a shop and rob a cash-box; that burglary, house-breaking, pocket-picking, and so forth, are criminal and sinful acts. These are all recognized as vulgar crimes, and because of this many suppose the commandments that forbid such things are out of date so far as Christians are concerned, and that Christianity has outgrown them. Many people have said: "What do we need of the commandment, 'You shall not steal'? Everybody knows that stealing is wrong. Even a savage shows, by his attempt to conceal a theft, that he knows that it is not the right thing." But we must again repeat that the commandment is exceedingly broad, surpassing man's highest thought of perfection. While all, with the possible exception of some who from infancy have been trained to theft, know that the grosser acts, of which the civil law takes notice, are sinful, there are very many professed Christians who in their daily business violate the eighth commandment without the slightest compunction.

The Practice of the Majority

It is not an uncommon thing for people to charge different prices for the same goods; to expose one class of goods for inspection, and to deliver an inferior quality; to take advantage of a customer's ignorance; or in various other ways to get more than the annual worth of a thing sold. Everything of this kind is just as really stealing as to pick one's pocket or his purse; yet it is continually condoned on the ground that it is "business." The fact that "everybody does it" seems to many business men, even though they be professed Christians, to be sufficient justification for any act. They seem to have the idea that if the majority of people are united in any practice, the Lord will regard it as right, even though it is wrong in itself.

Indeed, not only with respect to this commandment, but with all the others, the general custom of the people is of paramount weight with very many. Call attention to a wrong practice, and the reply will be, "Everybody does it;" or present some requirement of the Divine law, and they will say, "Nobody does that nowadays," thinking that they have thereby settled the matter. But the Lord says, "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil" (Ex. 23:2); and, "Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished" (Prov. 11:21). Much of the "business" that is done in this world is the devil's business, and will not stand the test of heaven: "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12).

“Business Methods - Making a Living”

The false idea that it is the business of every man to “make a living,” leads to many thefts, both small and great. Competition is very keen, and there are many engaged in business, who have no conscience of right or wrong, who fear not God, neither regard man, The unscrupulous customs which they have introduced into various lines of business, have led many Christian people little by little to lower their own standard. The desire to compete with their rivals, and to keep business, has blunted their fine perception of right and wrong, until things that would once have shocked them, now seem to be right and necessary.

By the term “business methods,” men commonly understand something different from the somewhat old-fashioned principles laid down in the Bible. Business and religion are thought to be two separate things; and inasmuch as men are exhorted to be “diligent in business,” men persuade themselves that whatever is “business” is correct. They forget that at the same time that they are “diligent in business” they are to be “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11). **The sole business of all man is to serve the Lord.** “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13, 14).

God makes it His business to give us a living, and He alone can do it. It is a grave error to suppose that a living can be made out of methods which have death in them. Every sin, every deviation from the law of God, has death in it, and can end only in death. Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Therefore only the way of truth, Christ’s own way, can give life, or in other words, give one “a living.”

Non-Payment of Debts

If one puts his hand into another’s pocket or cashbox and takes money, that is universally recognized as stealing. It must be evident that there is no less sin if one finds money belonging to another, and appropriates it. Likewise if one is entrusted with money to deliver to another, and he fails to do it, but uses it himself, this is also stealing, equally with the other, although it is sometimes designated by a milder term. What is the difference, then, if one has received from another goods or service, for which he owes a certain amount of money, and he fails to pay the debt? No matter how men may regard it, or what the law of the land may say about it, the fact remains that it is a direct violation of the eighth commandment. The Savior’s quotation of this commandment was, “Do not defraud,”—deprive no one of that which is his due; so the convenient way some people have of forgetting to pay their debts is a transgression of this commandment. **The Bible way is to pay a thing just as soon as it is due.**

Someone will say, "One cannot always have by him the means wherewith to pay a debt." Very true, and this emphasizes the necessity for the apostolic injunction, "Owe no one anything" (Rom. 13:8). **If people realized that failure to pay a just debt is a violation of God's law, and if they had a proper sense of the sacredness of the law, they would not order things for which they cannot pay.** You again might say, "I go in debt only for the actual necessities of life; if I have no food in the house, and no money, I cannot see my children crying for bread, when the baker will trust me." That is exactly the argument that some people use for taking money without leave. In either case it is lack of trust in God. Anyone who, because he is in need, incurs a debt which he has no prospect of paying, cannot condemn the act of stealing under pressure of need.

If people would, in fear of the commandment which says, "You shall not steal," refuse to incur a debt, no matter what the need, they would enjoy some wonderful experiences of what God could do in supplying their need. He knows what His children need, and He says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). **But when men reverse the order, seeking first to provide for themselves, they shut God off from bestowing upon them the riches of the kingdom. It is impossible to lay too much stress on this feature of the violation of the commandment.**

If one has money laid aside for some specific purpose, it is very tempting and very easy to use it for something else. Of course this would be all right if it were simply that one were purposing to purchase a certain thing, and should use that money for something else instead; but it is far from being right; when the money thus laid aside is due to another. Thus: When one's rent is due, the only way that people with small incomes can be prepared to pay it, is by laying aside each week the weekly proportion. Even though the rent technically be not due until the end of the month, it is really due each week; and if the money be used for food or clothing, or worse yet, for pleasure, so that the sum is not ready, there is a direct transgression of the commandment. One has appropriated that which is not his own. The money laid aside week by week belongs to the landlord, as much as though it were already in his pocket. The fact that we are allowed to keep it in our possession for a time, does not give us any more right to use it than we would have to use an equal amount that some other tenant had entrusted to us to pay to the landlord on his account.

What We Owe to the World

To all of us the Scripture says, "You are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19). The whole law of which the eighth commandment is a part, is summed up in these words: "You shall love

the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). Love means service. The fact that we are not our own, but belong to the Lord, who not only has made us, but who has redeemed us, shows that our service belongs to Him. The Apostle Paul recognized this when he said, "There stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23). So the law requires that we shall serve the Lord with all our soul and strength and mind.

But we cannot do anything directly for the Lord. He is not in need of food or clothing, and we could not supply Him if He were. But He has shown us how to render service to Him. His life is given to the world; therefore He says that every service rendered to man is done to Him. We are exhorted, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." To perform our daily labor with all the strength of body and mind that we have is, if done in the fear of God, to love and serve the Lord with all our strength. So the Apostle's exhortation is, "Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:22–24).

Strength is more than money; therefore if one serves with less than his full strength, or is content to do poor work, on any pretext whatever, he is just as surely guilty of fraud as though he kept back money that belonged to another. The commandment, "You shall not steal," requires us always to give our best strength, and to do our best work. It is a sin and disgrace for a professed Christian to do poor work.

This does not mean that anybody can at once be master of his business, but it does mean that one should always do his best, and always be striving to improve himself, and that he should not assume to be able to do what he is not. If a man be a carpenter, for instance, and someone entrusts work to him expecting him to be a skilled laborer, and he spoils the job, putting his employer to additional expense because of his incapacity, it is fraud.

People often excuse themselves for slack work, on the ground that they are receiving very small pay; but this is no excuse whatever. Our duty is to do with our might, in the best possible way, whatever we have to do, regardless of the wages received. We owe ourselves to God, and through Him to the world. If we hold back any part of ourselves, we are guilty of robbery. The debt has already been incurred, and we are to work in

recognition of it. **The wages we receive are not to be considered an equivalent for our labor, but as a gift from God.**

Labor is life, and money is no equivalent for life. He who works only for what he gets, and who says that he is rendering sufficient service for the small wages he receives, has a very low estimate of the value of his life. If his work is really worth no more than the money he receives, he is robbing God of strength due Him, and so is robbing the world of service that he ought to render; for, contrary to the common idea, "the world owes me a living," we owe to the world the living which God has already given us in advance.

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The 8th Law of Life - *part 2 of 2*

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Robbing God

There is another feature of this question that few people think of. The commandment is continually broken by men who would no more think of taking money from another man than of cutting off their own right hand. You might leave any amount of money with them, uncounted, and they would return it all; yet they are guilty of robbery.

God asks this plain question: "Will a man rob God?" The people of whom He asks it think that they are innocent, for they reply, "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" and the Lord says, "In tithes and offerings." And then He continues, "You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. 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. "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the Lord of hosts; and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3:9–12).

This reproof and promise have special application at this time, for the message has reference to the speedy coming of the day of the Lord. It is not local in its application, but reaches to the end of time. It is addressed specially to those who think they are serving the Lord, but who in a most important particular are not. If it is a grievous sin to steal from man, what can be said of robbing God!

One can rob another only by appropriating something that belongs to that other. So the fact that God charges us with robbing Him with respect to the tithe proves that the tithe belongs to Him. This is plainly stated in the Scripture. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord" (Lev. 27:30). It may be said that this is only under the Levitical law. But truth is truth forever: **that which is the Lord's once, remains His always**. The tithe of all that we receive belongs to the Lord, and not to us, even though technically we have earned it, and it is paid to us in wages. To one tenth of our income we have no more right than we have to our neighbor's money. God lets it come into our possession for a test as to whether or not we really regard the rights of property, and recognize Him as the owner of all things.

Christ's Teaching Concerning Tithe Paying

"But did not the Lord reprove the Scribes and Pharisees for their scrupulous payment of tithes?" No, He did not; hear His own words: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matt. 23:23). Instead of saying that they ought not to have paid tithe, Jesus says that they ought to have done it, but they ought not to have made their strictness in this matter an excuse for neglecting something else. "You ought," means, You owe it. The Savior recognized the tithe as belonging to the Lord, by saying that we owe it to Him. He says also that we ought to be very strict in this matter; for the Scribes and Pharisees tithed herbs that were of trifling value, and He says they ought to have done it.

Tithe Before the Days of Moses

The payment of the tithes was long before the days of Moses. When Jacob had his vision of God, as he was fleeing homeless and desolate from the wrath of his brother, he said, "of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Gen. 28:22). And many years before this, Abraham returning with the recovered spoil, taken from the city of Sodom, was met by God's priest, Melchizedek, to whom he gave the tenth of all. Abraham had sworn that he would not take so much as a shoelace of that which belonged to the king of Sodom, so he returned the goods which he had recovered to their proper owners,—the tenth to the Lord, and nine-tenths to the king, to use as he thought fit.

All who are Christ's are Abraham's seed, and heirs with him of the promise. The oath of God to Abraham supports us in fleeing for refuge to the most holy place where Christ is priest after the order of Melchizedek. Therefore the obligation to pay tithe is the same

upon us as it was upon Abraham. And since the tithe belongs to the Lord, it should no more be considered a hardship to return it to Him, than it would be to pay to a neighbor some money that was given us in trust for him.

The Tithe and the Sabbath

The tithe rests on the same basis as the Sabbath; the same expression is used of both: "the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God." It is God's holy day. "The tithe is the Lord's." "It is holy to the Lord." Both serve the same purpose. The Sabbath is not a burden, but it teaches us God's power, in which we may rest. The payment of tithe is not a burden, because it does not belong to us; but God has arranged that it should come into our hands, in order that in returning it to Him we may be reminded that "He gives us richly all things to enjoy." **The curse that follows the withholding of the tithe is not an arbitrary exhibition of God's wrath, but is the natural result of our shutting God out of our lives.** The abundant blessing that is promised if all the tithes are brought in, inevitably follows the recognition of Him which keeps us ever in His presence.

Honor God with the First-Fruits

Many who do not deny the obligation to pay tithe, do not pay it, excusing themselves by saying, "I have nothing with which to pay; after I have fed and clothed my family, I have nothing left." But whoever has wherewith to get food and clothing, has wherewith to pay the tithe; for the principle taught by the tithe is this: **that nine-tenths of what we receive will, with the blessing of God, go further than the whole of it without His blessing.** God is to come first in all our considerations; we are to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first-fruits of all your increase" (Prov. 3:9).

It makes no difference to us what is done with the tithe after we have paid it into the Lord's treasury. There our responsibility ends. We are to pay, even though it be destroyed. Think of the multitude of offerings that were brought to the Lord merely to be burnt up. By this God would show the people that He did not need their gifts, and would remind them that He could support them even though all their property were destroyed. This is especially necessary for us to remember in these days, just before the day of the Lord, when the seed shall be "rotten under their clods," the garners laid desolate, the barns broken down, and the corn withered; when the rivers of water shall be dried up, and the fire devour the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame burn all the trees of the field; when the dust shall be turned into brimstone, and the land into burning pitch. Then it will be a grand thing to have learned that God alone is the hope and stay of His people.

The Basis of Stealing

Why is it that people steal? It is because they think that they have not enough, and they cannot trust God to supply their needs. Some do not know the Lord, and they suppose that they are obliged to look out for themselves. Others who profess to know the Lord, lose their supposed trust as soon as they see difficulty. Therefore **we see that the basis of what is generally recognized as stealing is identical with all distrust of God.**

There are many who do not pay tithe, because they have never realized that it was a duty. "Will a man rob God?" Many do, who have never robbed their fellow-men, and who have a reputation for honesty. The Lord says that the tenth belongs to Him. Then He ought to have it. But if I keep it and use it, knowing what the Bible says about it, how can my neighbor have confidence enough in me to trust me with what belongs to him? If a man will rob God, will he not rob his fellow-man? Dare anyone trust such an one? Yes; because there is a law against theft, and the man who steals from his neighbor is not only punished, but he loses credit and reputation. The Lord does not demand His own immediately; He does not call for a settlement every month and every year; so in our blind selfishness we take liberties with Him, persuading ourselves that He does not see nor care. "Yet they say, "The Lord does not see" (Ps. 94:7). And as nobody knows whether we pay tithe or not, we do not lose standing with men; or we may get the credit of paying tithe by paying a fragment of it, and calling it the tithe. That is, we are honest for appearance sake, and because of fear of the law. Let us ask ourselves, is our supposed honesty only a sham, an outside show, and are we honest only because there is danger of being found out and punished?

The Secret of All Honesty

One thing more. The Apostle Paul bears witness to the great liberality of the churches of Macedonia, in spite of their "great trial of affliction," and "their deep poverty." He did not need to plead with them to make an offering to the cause of God, but says, "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift." The reason for this is that "they first gave themselves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:1-5). This is the secret of all honesty; for whoever is honest with the Lord will never defraud any man.

Not simply our property, but we ourselves belong to the Lord, and we are to render to Him His own. When we recognize that we are not our own, but that our whole being belongs to Him, we shall also recognize that we can have no property in our own right. Strength is more than money; and the commandment "You shall not steal" forbids our robbing God of the strength that is His due. If I wantonly destroy my neighbor's property

it is the same as though I steal his goods. All our members belong to the Lord, as instruments of righteousness. If we misuse them in any way, making them serve our own personal gratification, we are guilty of theft. We owe to the Lord, not merely all the strength we may have at this present moment, but all that we might have if we lived according to the law of life in Christ Jesus.

And here we see again that the commandment is life everlasting. **All God's requirements are really statements of His promises. He asks nothing from us that He does not first give to us;** and in asking for it of us He does not ask that we give it to Him, in the sense that we ourselves are deprived of it, but that we always have it in possession to render to Him. So the commandment "You shall not steal" requiring us to give all the strength of our soul and body to the Lord, means that if we heed His word He will see that we have perfect strength to give to Him. His commandments are not grievous, but on the contrary they assure us all blessings. Everything grows with use, so as we keep the commandment, yielding to God all the strength which His own everlasting power works in us, we shall go from strength to strength, until at last we appear in Zion before God.

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