

(Mark 7:21-23) 12 Evil Things – Part 2 : Theft

Introduction

God gave his people 10 commandments. The eight of these 10 states simply and tersely- “Thou shalt not steal”. It is closely related to its neighbors in the list, #'s 7 and 9 which forbid taking another person’s wife or husband and sitting around “wishing” your neighbor’s property were your own.

To steal is to take something or someone from someone else without their consent or the consent of the law.

Stealing, to put it in child-like terms is taking by force, deception or secrecy that which is not rightfully yours.

Often theft is thought to pertain only taking or stealing another person’s stuff but the Bible extends the prohibition of theft to cover human relationships and intangibles like reputation.

Taking what does not belong to you is theft and theft is a sin.

Theft is a sin regardless of “what” is being stolen.

Ephesians 4:28-32

(ESV)

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.

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Mark 7:21-23

(ESV)

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

OBJECTS OF THEFT

- Praise/credit deserved by others
- Knowledge/Intellectual property
- Currency/Money
- Objects of value
- Relationships

[WHAT DO PEOPLE STEAL?]

According to the Associated Press, in October 1994, agent Steven Sepulveda of the U.S. Secret Service reported that the biggest thief in calling-card history had been caught. The bandit stole more than one hundred thousand telephone calling-card numbers, sold them to computer hackers around the country, who in turn sold them to people overseas, who in turn made more than fifty million dollars worth of free phone calls to the United States.

The alleged thief, who was known as “Knightshadow” to computer hackers, worked as a switch engineer for MCI. He wrote a software program that diverted and held the calling-card numbers that ran through MCI’s switching equipment. The Secret Service said this crime was by far the most sophisticated theft of numbers in history and was part of an international ring operating in Los Angeles, Chicago, and other U.S. cities.

Technology advances, but our sinful nature remains the same. Man continually invents new ways to sin, but God’s hatred of sin remains the same.¹

With very rare exceptions, theft is a sin regardless of “why” a person is stealing.

COMMON JUSTIFICATIONS FOR STEALING

- The “man” won’t miss it (PLENTY)
- The “man” doesn’t pay me what I’m worth (EQUITY)
- If the owner didn’t want it stolen he should not have left it unattended in my path (STUPIDITY)

¹ Craig Brian Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers & Writers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 548.

[WHY DO CHRISTIANS STEAL?]

Why? Why do the people that you speak to—why do they steal even though they know it’s wrong? I think they do it for all kinds of reasons. I think people steal from their office place because they think they’re owed it. “I worked overtime; they don’t pay me what I’m worth.” They come with all kinds of reasons. [These are] excuses—they’re not good enough, they don’t justify it—but there’s no sin so great you and I are not capable of justifying it, and I think we rationalize it. We steal even when we know we’re not supposed to, because we think we have the right to, because “They owe us, and we’re just getting what we deserve.”²

Thief Can’t Wait To Get Home

In Strasbourg, France, a sweet-toothed thief stole cognac, cookies, chocolates and caramels from his ex-employer, but couldn’t wait to enjoy his loot. Police followed a trail of caramel wrappers to his hideout and arrested the litterbug.

—Philadelphia *Inquirer*³

Cat Did Not Cooperate

From Tokyo comes this report: A cat followed his master in a neighborhood burglary attempt, but when the man fled the cat did not, leading to the man’s arrest, police said.

“I loved that cat and always took him with me, but I didn’t know he was with me then,” police quoted Masakazu Kodama, 22, as saying.⁴

The “man” steals from the people

Bilking consumers out of pennies has now become a billion-dollar business. The *National Observer* noted that short weighing on food, gasoline, home fuel oil, packaged hardware items, and pills cost the American public some six to twelve billion dollars per year. In an effort to curb this swindle, whether accidental or intentional, many states are spot-checking weighs and measures.

Pennsylvania investigators discovered that 15.5 percent of all prepackaged foods checked were short-weighted, with some stores shorting on 25 percent of the packages checked. A three-day Kansas investigation turned up evidence that 30 percent of all meat packaged in eleven stores were short-weighted.

² J. Kent Edwards, *CM103 Invitation to Biblical Preaching II: Preaching Biblical Sermons*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 360–361.

⁴ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 134.

In Arkansas, officials checked one-pound cans of vegetables to find none that contained sixteen ounces. And Tennessee officials found prepackaged pork chops short-weighted by up to thirty-one cents. Officials have tabulated forty-eight ways to cheat in weighing meat in front of customers, and many markets are apparently using some of them.

—C. R. Hembree⁵

Theft involves—

- I. A wrong view of others (too low a view of others)
- II. A wrong view oneself (too high a view of oneself)
- III. A wrong view of God (an inaccurate assessment of God's provision and plan)

Though we try to remediate our sinful actions of taking what doesn't belong to us by raising our view of others and lowering our view of ourselves, perhaps, we should focus more intently on God's provision and plan for us.

What we deserve is death and hell but God does not give His people what they deserve. Instead He gives them grace, forgiveness and eternal life. When we ponder, even for a millisecond, the cost that God paid to secure our salvation, the resulting gratitude, should make us immune to the idea that God hasn't given us enough so we should TAKE more for ourselves, even to the point of stealing.

STOP! Think about what we are saying when we resort to theft. We are saying we desire more than God has seen fit to give us. But do you grasp the ridiculousness of such a thought. We are bought with a price; God gave Jesus in exchange for our forgiveness from sin; sins that include theft.

So when we, God's people, are thieves we are completely disconnected from the core reality that not only have we not been slighted but quite the opposite we have, even in our most poverty stricken moments, been given more than we could EVER deserve in a million lifetimes.

Stealing is a denial of the fundamental understanding that we have received a priceless, matchless gift—forgiveness through Jesus' shed blood and sacrificial death.

We can't go around taking what doesn't belong to us because we have already been given what doesn't belong to us; and it was given freely by choice, by Jesus for our benefit.

To TAKE something that is not our own is a statement about our view of ourselves. And the statement is that we deserve more than we have and that God has NOT given us enough which by correlation is statement that forgiveness isn't of value and that we are not blessed beyond measure by Jesus' death on the cross.

Do you get it! God gave us what we didn't deserve; forgiveness, love, grace, His son.

⁵ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 558–559.

You are never further from where you need to be than when you are taking something that doesn't belong to you.

CONCLUSION — *Our sermon today is part of a 12 part series based on the words of Jesus in Mark 7.*

What Makes A Thief? — *Stealing is an issue of the heart not just a psychological or physiological one.*

In 1947 a prison inmate by the name of Willard Wright consented to an experimental operation involving the cutting of nerve pathways in the forebrain. It was an attempt to discover a cure for his urge to steal.... He behaved so well that he was paroled after two-and-a-half years. He secured a job, got married, and gave every evidence of going straight. Five years later, in Pittsburgh, Wright was identified as the man who had passed some stolen goods. Police found thousands of dollars' worth stored in his home. Back in prison, Wright simply said, "With me, it just didn't work."

Dr. Edward E. Mayer, Allegheny County court behavior expert, said that in his opinion there never was any reason to believe it would work, because a lobotomy reduces self-control. When detectives asked Wright why he had gone back to crime, he shrugged and said, "You fellows know the questions, so you ought to know the answers." In commenting on this story, *Time* magazine said, "The truth was that neither the detective nor the neurosurgeons were any nearer to knowing what makes an incurable thief, let alone how to cure one." The Bible has the answers to both problems.—Albert Mygatt⁶.

Let us pray.

⁶ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 1350.