

Command 8: “You shall not steal.” (Exod. 20:15)

- I. Not stealing implies private property and human flourishing on the earth
 - A. Extended reflection on words of Bible will often yield deeper insight than what is evident on a first reading.
 1. Bible is product of infinite wisdom of God, contains more wisdom than we will ever fully understand.
 3. First impression: the 8th Commandment is quite simple: 4 words in English, only 2 in Hebrew (*lo’ tignob*)
 4. However, upon deeper reflection:
 - i. The 8th Commandment provides the necessary foundation for all human flourishing on the face of the earth.
 - ii. Governments and cultural traditions violate the 8th Commandment at their peril, for wherever this commandment is ignored, entire nations remain trapped in poverty forever.
 - B. Not stealing implies private property
 1. 8th Commandment assumes that there is something to steal, i.e it assumes private ownership of property.
 2. Other laws protected property rights (see Ex 21:28-36; Lev 25:10; Deut 22:1-4; 23:24-25;).
Deut 19:14 You shall not move your neighbor’s landmark, which the men of old have set (also Prov 22:28)
 3. OT shows an awareness that government could wrongly use their immense power to violate property rights.
1 Kings 21 King Ahab wrongfully stole Naboth’s vineyard
1 Sam 8:10-18 (a king) will take ... take ... take
 4. Does Acts 2:44 teach that the early church practiced a form of “early communism”? No.
 - i. giving was voluntary and not compelled by government.
 - ii. People still had personal possessions and owned property.
 - a. They still met in “their homes” (Acts 2:46), and many other Christians still owned homes (Acts 12:12; 17:5; 18:7; 20:20; 21:8; 21:16; Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philm 2; 2 John 10).
 - b. Peter told Ananias and Sapphira: they did not have to sell land and give away the money (see Acts 5:4).
 5. The focus of the 8th Commandment is different from the other nine
 - i. Commandments 1-4 (Ex. 20:3-11) focus primarily on our relationship to God and duties we owe to God.
 - ii. Commandment 5 protects family (“Honor your father and your mother,” Ex. 20:12).
 - iii. Commandment 6 protects life (“You shall not murder,” Ex. 20:13).
 - iv. Commandment 7 protects marriage (“You shall not commit adultery,” Ex. 20:14).
 - v. Commandment 9 protects truth (“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” Ex. 20:16).
 - vi. Commandment 10 requires purity of heart (“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife . . . or anything that is your neighbors,” Ex.20:17).
 - vii. Commandment 8 is unique.
 - a. It protects property and possessions, as well as another person’s time and talents and opportunities—everything over which people have been given stewardship.
 - b. Without the 8th Commandment, the Ten Commandments would not cover all aspects of life.
 - c. The 8th Commandment sets us apart from the animal kingdom as property owners and stewards.
 - d. The 8th Commandment relates to most of our work activity for most of our earthly lifetimes.
 - C. Private property implies stewardship
 1. If there is no God, then...
 - i. People might assume that private ownership of property carried no obligations with it.
 - ii. People might assume that “society” or government should take the property away, lest people use it for their own selfish purposes (i.e. communism).
 2. But if God *himself* has commanded, “You shall not steal,” and if in that commandment *God himself* establishes a system of private property, then...
 - i. We are accountable to him for how we use that property (it is ultimately his!)
Ps 24:1 The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and all those who dwell therein.
 - ii. We have been *entrusted* with these things by the God who created the universe, and we must act as faithful “stewards” to manage what he has entrusted to us.
 3. We have been entrusted with much more than merely physical possessions and land.
 - i. time, talents, and opportunities
 4. This stewardship is diminished or taken away when...
 - i. Government takes away the right to own property. (or decide how to use our time)
 - ii. government places burdensome restrictions on how private property can be used.
 - D. Stewardship implies an expectation of human achievement
 1. If God *entrusts* me with something, then he expects me to do something with it, something worthwhile, something that he finds valuable: Gen 1:28 And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth *and subdue it* and have dominion . . . over every living thing that moves on the earth"
→ “subdue” in Hebrew (*kabash*) means to make the earth useful for human beings’ benefit

2. The 8th Commandment gives both...
 - i. the *opportunity* for human achievement (by entrusting property to us)
 - ii. the *expectation* of human achievement (by making us accountable stewards).
3. What is meant by human achievement?
 - i. The range of human activity for which we have been entrusted with stewardship
 - a. arts, sciences, technology, industry, commerce, and all the social sciences
 - b. the relationships we find in family, community, nation, and church
4. The human drive to understand and to create from the world is *unlimited*.
 - i. Animals are content to live in same kinds of homes and eat same kinds of food for thousands of generations.
 - ii. Human beings have an innate desire to explore, to discover, to understand, to invent, to create, to produce – and then to enjoy the products that can be made from the earth.
 - iii. The innate human drive to subdue the earth has never been satisfied throughout the history of mankind.
 - iv. This is because *God created us not merely to survive on the earth but to flourish*.
 - v. God created us with limited needs but unlimited wants.
 - vi. Human beings glorify God by *achieving* much more than mere survival. We glorify God by...
 - a. understanding and ruling over the creation
 - b. producing more and more wonderful goods from it, for our enjoyment
 - c. giving thanks to God for this
 - 1 Tim 6:17 God is the one who “richly provides us with everything to enjoy”
 - 1 Tim 4:4 “...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”
- E. Therefore, the 8th Commandment is God’s wonderful gift that leads to human flourishing
- F. The immense challenge of the 8th Commandment
 1. Obedience to the 8th Commandment requires more than abstaining from theft.
 2. Obedience to the 8th Commandment requires faithful stewardship
 - i. Requires use of immense wisdom and mature judgment in the complex balancing of multiple factors such as love of neighbor, care for family, wise planning for future, fear of God, desire to advance God’s Kingdom, and a desire to subdue the earth to the glory of God..
 - ii. Avoiding temptations/ sins connected w/ possessions (e.g. gluttony, greed, selfishness, materialism, waste).
 5. The stewardship requirements implied by the 8th Commandment are life-long.
 6. Who among us can say we have fully fulfilled the stewardship requirement of the 8th Commandment?
 - 1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
- G. Governments break the 8th commandment when they steal private property
 1. Governments have a proper authority to collect taxes for legitimate government functions.
 - Rom 13:4 Civil authority is “God’s servant for your good.”
 - Rom 13:7 you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed...
 2. Too often in history governments have gone far beyond these legitimate functions.
 - i. Communist countries prohibit private ownership of land. Karl Marx said “The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property.”
 - ii. Socialism is a form of government where individuals can own private homes and have other possessions, but the government owns all of the businesses and factories (what are called the “means of production”).
 - iii. Tribal ownership: Some nations prevent private ownership of property because private property is owned by the tribe, not by individuals.
 - iv. Economic historian David Landes, in his book, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* points out some other examples of nations in past history that prevented private ownership of property.
 - a. India prior to the advent of British rule in 1757 – mogul princes took what they wanted
 - b. In China, for many centuries, the Emperor had absolute rule and took whatever he wanted
 - c. In Eastern Europe for several centuries the feudal system meant that a few wealthy lords would own all the property and the vast majority of the population were therefore trapped in poverty.
 - v. Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto: many poor countries
- I. Conclusion: The 8th Commandment is wonderful! It lays the foundation for human flourishing on the earth

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