

The Eighth Commandment YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

“For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity.” Isaiah 61:8

The Eighth Commandment cuts across the thieving spirit of our age.

Recent surveys have found that three out of ten prospective employees admit to having stolen from their previous employer!

24% of taxpayers admit to having lied and cheated on their income tax returns.

22% of workers feel that stealing from their company is *“sometimes justified.”*

33% of employees surveyed confessed to falsely phoning in sick and collecting pay for days they pretended to be sick but weren't.

One third of college students admitted that they would cheat on an exam if they were sure that they could get away with it. One in seven graduates defaults on their university loans.

A survey of a number of large organisations revealed that the average employee stole six weeks per year from their employer by consistently coming in late, leaving early, taking extended lunches, spending extra time on coffee breaks, and neglecting their duties. All of this amounted to over \$150 billion lost to the economy each year.

A recent survey of 500 products chosen at random revealed that approximately 50% of them contained less items in the packaging than advertised on the label. For example a bottle of 100 headache tablets actually contained 60, etc!

According to a study by the American Management Association, US businesses alone annually lose over \$10 billion to employee theft, over \$4 billion to embezzlement, over \$2,5 billion to burglary, over \$2 billion to shop lifting, over \$1,3 billion to arson and over half a million dollars per incident of computer fraud.

According the US Department of Commerce, approximately one third of all business failures each year can be traced to employee theft. When businesses close down, employees lose their jobs and families suffer.

Law enforcement officials estimate that almost half of all employees are guilty of stealing. Retailers in South Africa report that they lose many billions of rands each year to shop lifting, and even more to *“shrinkage”* - theft by employees.

The South African Police Services reports 395,296 cases of shoplifting and *“commercial crime”* registered for 2007. 14,201 carjacking, 1,245 truck jackings and 77,984 public robbing in the streets were reported last year.

What has caused this pandemic of stealing? Some would like to say that poverty causes theft, however some of the richest people in the world have been guilty of theft, and many spoiled children from wealthy homes engage in shoplifting. By way of contrast there are many millions of poor people who never steal. Even during the Great Depression, when millions of families were destitute, God-fearing people did not steal.

The Bible gives a very straightforward answer to this question in Ecclesiastes 8:11 ***“Why do people commit crimes so readily? Because crime is not punished quickly enough.”***

One political cartoon depicted the regression in ethics with three political personalities.

The left hand panel represented a caricature of George Washington saying: *“I cannot tell a lie.”*
In the centre was Richard Nixon saying: *“I cannot tell the truth.”*
The right hand panel contained a picture of Bill Clinton saying: *“I cannot tell the difference.”*

The situation has deteriorated so badly that in South Africa we now have to have special campaigns and TV film series trying to teach basic principles to the general population. *Heartlines* billboards declare rather ambiguously: *“We believe in the value of values: Do you?”*

Some shops have felt compelled to place prominent posters declaring: *“Shoplifting is stealing!”* One would have thought that that was rather obvious, but all too many people don't seem to see anything wrong with blatant theft. There are many black ministers who actually teach their congregations that to steal from white people isn't theft!

Muhammad taught his followers to steal from the *“infidel.”* *“The messenger of Allah said: to whichever village you go...it's one fifth is for Allah and his messenger and the remainder is for you.”* (Mishkat II, page 412).

“...the soldiers of Islam fought tooth and nail. They would get paradise in case of death in a holy war, and booty in case of conquest. Jihad is therefore the best source of all acquisitions.” (Mishkat II, Page 440).

“Jihad is one of the most meritorious acts in the eye of Islam and it is the best source of earnings.” (Mishkat II, Page 340).

“This is the best method of earning both spiritual and temporal. If victory is won, there is enormous booty and conquest of a country, which cannot be equaled to any other source of earning. If there is defeat or death, there is everlasting paradise.” (Mishkat II, Page 253).

The Quran permits plunder in Surah 24:29 *“There shall be no harm in your entering houses...for the supply of your needs.”*

While Muhammad decreed the chopping off of hands for theft from Muslims, he personally engaged in bandit armed robbery raids of caravans, and he commanded his followers to steal the goods of infidels, to kidnap their merchants and to hold them for ransom.

Theft is saturated with pride, deceit and hypocrisy. Thieves, con-artists and perpetrators of fraud are hypocrites. They would not want anything to be stolen from them or from their children. Yet they arrogantly suspend the basic rules of society and exempt themselves from these rules. They would expect their own comforts and possessions to be protected, yet they lie, steal and cheat from others. There is no worse level of arrogance and selfishness than this.

Stealing is a callous crime because the thief does not seem to care about the effects of his crime upon the person who is deprived. The extortioner who charges excessive rent does not seem to care about the hardship that he is causing to his tenant. The person who sells a defective product does not seem to care what trouble his fraud may cause the buyer.

There are many imaginative excuses that people come up with to justify their theft:

“I've worked hard and I haven't been fairly rewarded for my efforts.”

“I need it more than they do.”

“I can't help myself.”

“They don't appreciate it, I will.”

“It's easier to steal something than to work for it.”

“I'm jealous of them, and I think I deserve their possessions more than they do!”

To all of this God responds with four words: **“You shall not steal.”** (Exodus 20:15)

When Telkom launched their 087 *Dial-a-Porn* the Old Mutual reported that their phone bills went up over five million rand in one month. Now, at that time there were approximately 5,000 employees in the Old Mutual

headquarters in Pinelands. Assuming that approximately half of the Old Mutual employees used the telephones at their place of employment to access 087 *Dial-a-Porn*, that would mean that the average employee ran up R2,000 of unauthorized phone bills in just one month! These people broke both the Seventh and the Eighth Commandments.

Government policy also steals. When the Law of God declares: ***“You shall not steal...you shall not covet...”*** this entrenches private ownership of property. Socialism is legalised theft and institutionalized envy. Any taxation of ten percent or higher is defined in the Scriptures as oppression (1 Samuel 8:10-18). Any taxation of property, or of inheritance, is strictly forbidden (1 Kings 21:3). Institutions and individuals involved in the fulltime service of the Lord are not allowed to be taxed (Ezra 7:23-24). Those involved in the fulltime service of the Lord are supported by free will offerings by people who have already paid their taxes. To tax money consecrated to the Lord’s service is to steal from God. Any unequal or progressive system of taxation is expressly forbidden in the Scriptures (Exodus 30:14-15; Leviticus 19:15).

Biblical economics also forbids unjust weights (unbacked currency) and measures (inflation) Leviticus 19:35-36; Proverbs 11:1; 20:10; Amos 8:5-7; Micah 6:11-12).

Many people violate the Eighth Commandment by voting for political parties that steal through excessive taxation and socialist policies. Governments that increase taxes without providing equal services are stealing.

In cases of theft, arson or malicious damage to property, the Bible decrees Restitution. Restitution is the restoration of a thing to its proper place or owner. It is reparation for injury or damage to property. The Bible requires that the Restitution goes entirely to the victim of the crime. Restitution is also required for culpable negligence.

“...he should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or a donkey or sheep, he shall restore double. If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed and lets loose his animal, and it feeds on another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or a field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.” Exodus 22:3-6

God’s Law is clear: The criminal is held accountable and he is responsible to pay for his crime. He is to work and earn, in money or kind, that which is required for the reparation of what he stole, damaged or destroyed.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* lists under the Duties Required in the Eighth Commandment: The duty to be truthful, faithful and just in our contracts and commerce (***“He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart...in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honours those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change...”*** Psalm 15:2-4 ***“Then the Word of the Lord of Hosts came to me saying...do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you have evil in your heart against his brother.”*** Zechariah 7:4-10 ***“These are the things you should do: ‘Speak each man the truth to his neighbour; give Judgement in your gates for truth, justice and peace; let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbour; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate’, says the Lord.”*** Zechariah 8:16-17)

The duty to render to everyone his due (***“Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.”*** Romans 13:7) Publishing without acknowledging sources, plagiarism, false claims and fraudulent claims in publications are a violation of this law.

The duty to make restitution of goods unlawfully obtained (***“If a person sins and commits trespass against the Lord by lying to his neighbour about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbour, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely – in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: then it shall be, because he has sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or which was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn***

falsely. He shall restore it in full, add one fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs on the day of his trespass offering.” Leviticus 6:2-5) If you receive too much change – return it.

The duty to give and lend freely, according to our abilities and the necessities of others (“*Give to everyone who asks of you....give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*” Luke 6:30, 38.

“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in you?” 1 John 3:17

“Therefore as we have opportunity, let us give good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:10).

The duty to be frugal (“*So when they were filled, he said to His disciples, ‘gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’*” John 6:12

“There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it.” Proverbs 21:20) Recycle. Don’t be wasteful.

The duty to further, by lawful means, the wealth of others, as well as our own (“*If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.*” Leviticus 25:35

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him again.” Exodus 23:4

“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Philippians 2:4)

Under the Sins Forbidden in the Eighth Commandment the *Westminster Larger Catechism* includes:

The sin of theft or robbery (“*Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*” Psalm 62:10)

The sin of receiving anything that is stolen (“*Whoever is partner with a thief hates his own life.*” Proverbs 29:24)

The sin of using false weights and measures (“*Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.*” Proverbs 11:1

“Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord.” Proverbs 20:10)

The sin of unfaithfulness in contracts (“*The wicked borrows and does not repay.*” Psalm 37:21)

The sin of extortion (“*Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! For you...are full of extortion...*” Matthew 23:25

“In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbours by extortion, and have forgotten Me, says the Lord God.” Ezekiel 22:12)

The sin of usury (Psalm 15:5)

The sin of bribery (“*Fire will consume the tents of bribery.*” Job 15:34)

The sin of taking, or withholding, from our neighbour what belongs to him (“*For he has oppressed and forsaken the poor, he has violently seized the house which he did not build.*” Job 20:19

“Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord...” James 5:4

“Getting treasure by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death.” Proverbs 21:6)

The sin of idleness (“*For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*” 2 Thessalonians 2:11

“He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” Proverbs 18:9)

Have you ever stolen? Have you ever taken something that did not belong to you? Have you borrowed things that you have failed to return, for months or years? Have you used the telephone at work, for personal and private calls without permission? If so, that is theft. It is theft for me to use someone else’s phone without his permission and run up a bill for him. It is as good as going and taking the money out of their wallet. It is also one of the easiest ways to steal.

I must confess, that as a new Christian, at the first mission that I went to work for, I stole by using the telephone. And God later brought this to my conscience and convicted me heavily that I had rung up hundreds of rands of

phone bills, without any permission, and in this way I had stolen from the mission that I had gone to help. And when God convicted me of this, I had absolutely no money, my only transport was hitchhiking and I had no means of repaying the debt. I was a missionary living by faith. So I took on extra work, actually working at the Newlands cricket grounds for my father, so that I could earn enough money to repay the mission double because this was a matter of Restitution before God. Only once I had settled this debt did I feel free to go back into the mission field.

Zacchaeus is an example in the Scriptures of one who did Restitution. ***“Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘today Salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.’”*** Luke 19:8-9

Forgiveness of sin is not a substitute for restitution, but rather a foundation of it. Forgiveness of sin is not a redefinition of sin. We are forgiven – free from the guilt and penalty of sin – in order to do what is right. Forgiveness is not a cloak for sin. It is a solution to sin.

Forgiveness does not transfer property rights to the thief. When God commanded: ***“You shall not steal...you shall not covet...”*** He ordained and blessed private ownership of property. Man has no right to abolish what God has ordained in any area – neither in the institution of marriage, nor in the institution of private property. Theft is not only a sin against the victim, theft is a sin against God. God’s Law is violated.

Repentance from sin and Restitution are inseparable. If a sin involved damage to, or theft of, the property of another, then Restitution is necessary before forgiveness can be enjoyed. Grace makes true Repentance possible; it does not eliminate the need for Restitution. Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, loves righteousness. Theft is unrighteousness. So true Restitution is made possible by a true understanding of what true grace is.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not die on the Cross in order to allow us to steal other peoples property and get away with it. As one who has confessed that sin before you, may I challenge you to do restitution. Do not rest until you have returned what you have borrowed. Pay back what you have damaged or broken and pay for those telephone calls that you had no permission to make. That is Biblical. That is what the Bible requires in Restitution.

Many of you may know the testimony of Uncle George Oesche. He had worked in the diamond mines and over the years had succeeded in stealing a large number of those valuable gems. He had a very nice house and comfortable lifestyle. But then when he was converted and learned about the importance of Restitution he went and confessed his crimes to the authorities. Although he had not been caught, and no longer worked for the mines, he began the painful process of repaying everything he had stolen. This involved a lot of sacrifice. And the Lord has mightily blessed him as a result.

“Fools mock at making amends for sin, but among the upright there is favour.” Proverbs 14:9

I also know of another brother, Lawrence Temfwe, who is the head of Prison Fellowship in Zambia. As a clerk in Standard Bank he stole a lot of money. When he was caught, he was thrown in prison. In prison he came to Christ. After he had served his full prison term, he worked to repay what he had stolen from Standard Bank. Now, he was not legally required to do so. He had done the crime and he had done the time. However, as a Christian, he understood that he had to do Restitution. Can you imagine the shock when he returned to the bank that he had defrauded and made full Restitution to them? What a tremendous testimony to the power of the Gospel.

“If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live.” Ezekiel 33:15-16

There are many people who steal from their employers by agreeing to work for so many hours, for so much pay, but they don’t work the agreed hours. They come late, they leave early, and they only work when the supervisor

is watching. They don't put the 40 hours or whatever amount of work is required into the given week. However, at the end of each month, they would be very unhappy if they received less than the agreed on salary. Is that not theft? Are you taking 100% of the pay for only 40% of the work? Laziness is a form of theft. We steal from people when we do less than what we agreed on.

Imagine what a testimony it would be if when an employer handed over the salary at the end of the month, an employee responded: *“Actually I've only earned 40% of this, you must take the other 60% back!”*

Littering is also a breach of the Eighth Commandment. We are stealing from the time of other people who must take the effort to go and clean up what we have dropped. We are damaging other people's property by our carelessness. If we had to do unto others as we want to be done unto, then we must not be litterbugs. The Eighth Commandment requires us to respect other peoples property.

Stealing includes government corruption, inflation, excessive taxation, defaulting on loans, failing to pay bills, cheating on tests, loafing at work, cheating on income taxes, taking sick leave when we are not sick, illegally downloading or copying software, violating copyrights, and failing to tithe to God.

The prophet Malachi wrote that when people don't bring their full tithes and offerings to God they are stealing directly from God.

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘in what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 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 delight for land, says the Lord of Hosts.” Malachi 3:8-12

Theft can only benefit a thief for a very short time. Our Creator and Eternal Judge sees everything we do. So no one can possibly get away with stealing. The punishment God hands out to unrepentant thieves will last for all eternity.

By God's grace, one of the first fruits of our Lord's Redemption was enjoyed by the thief crucified alongside our Lord. When he, in repentance, turned to the Lord and asked: *“Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”* Our Lord Jesus replied: *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”* Luke 23:42-43

The Word of the Lord comes to each one of us this day: *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give Him who is in need.”* Ephesians 4:28

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