

### The Law of God, Part 9: The God of Everything, Everything from God

**Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35)** And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** You shall have no other gods before me. **4** You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. **7** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. **8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. **11** For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. **12** Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. **13** You shall not murder. **14** You shall not commit adultery **15** You shall not steal.”

- I. When you consider the last two commandments (You shall not kill or commit adultery), it's easy to see that these commandments constitute a basic morality, essential for societal order. Generally, people all across the political spectrum, from every socio-economic starting point, and all ethnic origins agree with this.
  - A. But it is true that some people occupy the outer fringes of this assumption, like serial killers and pornographers. Others might justify certain varieties of these offenses, like people involved in extra-marital affairs or abortion providers.
    1. Nevertheless, **almost** all people believe (in theory, at least) that we should not kill other people, and that we should be at least reasonably faithful sexually, not just taking any partner, anytime, whenever the urge strikes us.
    2. But interestingly, when it comes to the 8th commandment, “**You shall not steal**”, it seems many more people are guilty of that crime than either murder or adultery. Worse yet, while many people casually steal without a second thought, those who do may find it unusually easy to justify their theft.
  - B. I'm not talking about people who commit bank heists or liquor store robberies, but the small, careless and subtle thefts that occur in many places every day.
    1. In the grocery store, I've seen many people eat a grape or two in the produce section that they didn't pay for. If you were to protest, they would say, “It's just a grape!” The 8th commandment, however, does just prohibit stealing really big things, but taking anything that is not mine in general.
    2. Some people take office supplies home from their workplace, or print personal documents while at work; justifying it by the fact that nobody's going to miss it, or that they are paid so little that they deserve to do so.
    3. Many people have such a hatred and mistrust for the federal government that they have no problem whatsoever with small, but questionable deductions each year at tax time, saving money by sticking it to the man!

- C. From home burglaries and armed robberies, to the seemingly petty but constant trickle of small-time stealing by average joe's, theft is a bigger problem than you might have previously imagined!
  - 1. Some of you might have seen the news story this week, of how the door of an armored car in Atlanta flew open while it was driving down the highway. Immediately, almost \$175,000 spilled out on the busy thoroughfare<sup>1</sup>.
  - 2. Amateur video shows 15 cars pulled to the side of the cash-covered road, their drivers quickly grabbing as much as possible. No one bothered to think or ask, "Who does this belong to?" but instead, "How much can I take?"
- II. "You shall not steal" was a revolutionary idea for the Israelites as they came out of Egypt. The ancient world was governed by a "might makes right" mentality; where stronger, conquering nations would take everything belonging to another, weaker one; and killing or enslaving its people. Even if you were fortunate enough to be a native of the stronger nation, the king could still demand your crops, your labor, your land and your children to fight his wars. Private property did not exist.
  - A. But when Israel was delivered from slavery and came to Mount Sinai, one of the 10 governing commandments handed down to them was "do not steal".
    - 1. This law not only applied to them in their dealings with each other as individuals and tribes, but they were to even treat the resident aliens and foreigners living among them with the same respect.
    - 2. **Leviticus 19:33 ESV** "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, **you shall not do him wrong.** 34 You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you **as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.**
  - B. Theft was so detestable among the ancient Israelites, that the law carried steep penalties and restitutions required for those condemned of it. In some cases, a man could be obligated to pay back 5 times what he had stolen.<sup>2</sup> Proverbs actually mentions how even petty thefts required sevenfold restitution!<sup>3</sup>
    - 1. All of this demonstrated, at the foundational level, God's approval of the concept of private property. What someone earned, built, or produced should be regarded as belonging to them. Again, the book of Proverbs is chock full of promises about the material blessings that diligence provides.
    - 2. **Proverbs 13:4 ESV** The soul of the sluggard craves and gets **nothing**, while the soul of the diligent is **richly supplied.**
  - C. God is saying in the 8th commandment that a person has certain rights over his own possessions that must not be violated by the selfishness, greed or laziness of another individual. This has ramifications not only for blatant criminals, but for the whole of any society that would desire to be fundamentally just.
    - 1. In his commentary on the eighth commandment, John Gill, the 18th Century Baptist Bible Commentator and Pastor, says that theft is defined as taking "away another man's property by force or fraud, without the knowledge, and against the will of the owner thereof."<sup>4</sup>
    - 2. But he also notes that it includes things like overcharging your customers or cheating in business dealings, not paying your debts and withholding

- someone's wages, the charging or exorbitant interest, neglecting to care for the things borrowed or entrusted to you, or benefitting from another's theft.<sup>5</sup>
- D. If everyone subscribed to the highest form of these ideals, how would the American economy be revolutionized? Think about the impact on banking, the loan and insurance industries, and the way the government taxes its citizens.
1. In the case of the government, that is not to say that a government should not tax its citizens. Jesus made that clear when he commanded us to **Matthew 22:21b ESV** "...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's..." In fact, the tithe of the Old Testament was more of a tax than a freewill offering!
  2. But governments should tax the people fairly, and not place the majority of the burden on a minority of people.
    - a) They also should not have welfare policies that encourage laziness and irresponsible living, for this too is theft.
    - b) The communism of the 20th century was a prime example of this. The government confiscated all the means of production, and stripped people of their fundamental, God-given right to ownership. This was theft.
- III. But by far the highest form of stealing is when a person willfully robs God. **Malachi 3:8 ESV** Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' **In your tithes and contributions. 9** You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. **10** Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. **11** I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. **12** Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.
- A. Sadly this verse has been used to hurt and manipulate people in churches for years. Heavy, old covenant burdens have been strapped to them to try to elicit more financial giving.
1. If you struggle with giving, you may read these words and fear that you are under a curse, but I assure you that our bad habits and wrong thinking are rarely ever changed by our fear. We are transformed by hoping in Christ.
  2. More importantly, remember that if you trust in Christ you are not under a curse! Why? Because **Galatians 3:13 ESV** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree".
- B. So your faithlessness in giving doesn't mean that you're under a curse because of the effective work of Jesus on the cross; but it does mean that you are robbing God by your fearful, faithless lack of generosity. It may not result in you being under a curse, but it's clearly a sin of which you need to repent.
1. 2nd Corinthians says that "God loves a cheerful giver", and that we shouldn't have to give "reluctantly or under compulsion"<sup>6</sup>. This should tell us that the first step of repentance is realizing that giving isn't a duty, it's a joy!
  2. While the curse of Malachi 3 died with Jesus on the cross, the promise is alive and well!

- a) “put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts.”
  - b) Giving to get something because you think you’ve got the blessing formula figured out is just a mask for ugly, sinful greed; especially if what you hope to get are just more material comforts and easy living! But giving because you love Jesus, you know he loves you, and you trust completely in the goodness and provision of God is a beautiful thing!
- IV. So let’s ask the “why” question that we asked of the previous 7 commandments. What does obeying this commandment mean for New Covenant, Christ-following, “grace not law” 21st century disciples of Jesus? Two things: 1.) That we acknowledge that God is really the owner of everything. 2.) He alone is the one who supplies all of our needs, so that we never need to fear lacking anything.
- A. While it’s true that I said that personal property and private ownership was God’s idea in the first place, we must realize that all our ownership is only a temporary stewardship at the very best and will someday come to an end. The old adage remains true: “You can’t take it with you.”
    - 1. **Psalm 89:11 ESV** The heavens are *yours*; the earth also is *yours*; the world and *all that is in it*, you have founded them. This Psalm says that the ultimate right of ownership of everything that exists stops with God on the simple basis that he was the creator and founder of it all. Our ownership, in any lasting sense, is merely a dream and an illusion.
    - 2. To remove all doubt, various other scriptures declare that the land<sup>7</sup> is his, the sea<sup>8</sup> is his, the peaks of the mountains<sup>9</sup> are his; even the beasts of the forest and everything that moves in the field<sup>10</sup> is his. What about all that gold and silver that we’re all always chasing after? **Haggai 2:8 ESV** The silver is *mine*, and the gold is *mine*, declares the Lord of hosts.
  - B. Jesus told a parable about a rich man who had a bumper crop one year, so he decided to build bigger barns to sock it all away so that he could retire early, kick back, and enjoy the good life. But that very night God calls him a fool and demands his life from him immediately. God hands down his sentence with this question: “...the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” Jesus’ concludes by saying, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”<sup>11</sup>
    - 1. A day is coming when all of the resources we’ve been given will be returned to their ultimate owner. So if that’s really true, what should we all be doing now with all of the stuff that we’ve been given?
    - 2. **Matthew 6:19 ESV** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but *lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus is saying that you can continue in the illusion of ownership, or you can become a wise investor in eternal things.

- C. If God is the owner of everything, what sense does it make for me to cheat and steal to get more? I must be content with what the owner gives me. The scriptures teach that it is his great delight to provide what his children need!  
**Psalm 23:1 ESV** The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
1. Theft, whether it be of another person or of God himself, whether a blatant criminal act, or theft of a more “socially acceptable” variety, is a declaration that I do not trust God to give me everything I need, and nothing I don’t.
  2. **James 1:16 ESV** Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. **17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
- D. Until we realize that God is the fountain of every blessing, great and small, our fallen instinct will be to steal, to cheat, to manipulate, and take advantage of others. We will rot in our stinginess and our hoarding, becoming dry and lifeless.
1. Do you know why the Dead Sea in southern Israel is dead? Because water only flows into it, none flows out. It stockpiles salt and other minerals but has no way to release them back, so nothing can live in its waters.
  2. That’s what we are like when we only take and never give. And I’m not just talking about giving to the church or other ministries, but a life of holistic and joyful generosity, which should be the hallmark of every believer.
    - a) This should effect the way we give gifts and leave tips, how we offer to help our friends and others in their times of need, **and** the way we give to churches and charities, among many other things.
    - b) But this kind of life is impossible if you are not fully convinced that **Philippians 4:19 ESV** And my God will supply **every need** of yours according to **his riches** in glory in Christ Jesus. Your need. His riches!
- E. So like I said about the commandment last week, we can actually look at “You shall not steal” as a promise! We have a God, who though he owns everything, has promised not to withhold anything that we truly need. That is where our confidence lies, not in what we can grab for ourselves. It is this alone that lets a man or woman have peaceful days and restful nights.

V.

<sup>1</sup> <https://people.com/human-interest/flying-money-armored-truck-highway-atlanta/>

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 22, especially verse 1

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 6:30-31

<sup>4</sup> <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/exodus/20.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. In Gill's own words: "...besides what have been observed, there are many other things that may be reduced to it and are breaches of it; as all overreaching and circumventing in trade and commerce, unjust contracts, not making good and performing payments, detention of servants' wages, unlawful usury, unfaithfulness with respect to anything deposited in a man's hands, advising and encouraging thieves, and receiving from them..."

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:7

<sup>7</sup> Leviticus 25:23

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 95:5

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 95:4

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 50:10-11

<sup>11</sup> Luke 12:16-21