
The Eighth Commandment: Thou Shall Not Steal

by: Ronald L. Dart

The Ten Commandments are truly a remarkable collection. I know that is stating the obvious, since God is the one who handed them down, but when you think about them altogether, a fascinating picture comes forward. These are not merely good things for an individual to do, a prescription for right and wrong conduct by a single person. These are the building blocks of civil society.

The last six of the Ten Commandments are said to be summarized by the statement "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And that's well enough, but I want to take another look at them from the community standpoint.

God's Ten Commandments Are the Building Blocks of a Civil Society

In this series on the Ten Commandments, we've recently been through Commandment number five and six and seven. Now we come to number eight, and for some reason, it really struck me, as I was preparing for this, how important these laws are to society.

The Fifth Commandment, for example, "Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land which the LORD your God has given you," establishes the importance of family ties. Jesus interpreted this commandment to include taking care of your elderly parents if they could not take care of themselves.

I think I mentioned earlier, I asked some elderly friends of mine, "What did people do before Social Security?" They said, "Families took care of them." People who got old, and if they were infirmed and couldn't take care of themselves, their children took care of them. Their brother or sister would take them in. Somebody in their family would look after them.

The Fifth Commandment is the one that establishes and maintains family ties. It is a fundamental need of any society, that families take care of their own. It's the fragmentation of the family that leaves people sleeping on grates in the wintertime in the cities.

One poor fellow was parked in a wheelchair in the hall of the VA Hospital and left there and nobody would pay any attention to him. It's a loss of family that leaves people like that.

It's fundamental! Society needs families to take care of their own. And here we are in an absolutely unprecedented breakup and destruction of the family in our society. Everything in civil society depends on keeping families together and when families start coming apart, society will not be far behind.

The Sixth Commandment establishes a right to life, "Thou shalt not kill," says God, and that includes manslaughter and any other unlawful or immoral destruction of human life. Any society that diminishes the right to life has set itself on the road to the trash heap of history. This one, especially, is a part of the building blocks of civil society.

The Seventh Commandment establishes the sanctity of marriage and it establishes who has the rights to whose body, somebody else's love, time and attention. Who do we belong to as persons? Like the Fifth Commandment, this is about one of the fundamental building blocks of society. It is to tie the family together for the sake of the children, and of course, the children in turn are to tie themselves to the parents in terms of taking care of them if they have to be taken care of.

Then there is the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." This fundamental building block acknowledges the right to private property. "That cow is mine, it is not yours! That car is mine, it is not yours! That computer is mine, it is not yours!"

We need to know the difference between what ours is and what is not ours, and it's in this fundamental principle, one of the building blocks of a stable society that it is established. One of the biggest problems that exists in many nations around this world is that they do not acknowledge the right to private property, they do not protect the right of private property, they don't protect the rights to your intellectual property, the things that you have created out of your mind and your creativity. They don't protect your rights to your land that you live on and so on it goes. This is a fundamental building block of society.

The Ninth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," is the most fundamental principle of justice. Think about it. If we can have witnesses who come into court, swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and then not tell us the truth, our whole legal system can come apart. And we will never know who's telling the truth and who is lying, and we will not know where the truth is. The failure of society can't possibly be very far behind.

The Tenth Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," is the one that deals with the soul of man. Here at last we have a commandment that addresses the heart of a man. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or his maidservant, you shall not covet his ox, or his donkey. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor."

You know it is another expression of the Eighth Commandment, who owns what? Who has what rights and you are not only forbidden to infringe on those rights, you are forbidden by the Tenth Commandment to even think about it.

God Guarantees Our Rights

Not only are the Ten Commandments the pillars of civil society upon which our most important rights rest. They were handed down by God Himself. God, whom the founding fathers of our country, recognized as the guarantor of our rights and of our freedoms, for without God we don't have any rights and we don't have any freedoms.

Our founding fathers signed their names to a document that said, "We do hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Who guarantees our rights? God guarantees our rights and it is a curious thing, those rights are implicit in the Ten Commandments and the remainder of the law of the Old Testament.

The Biblical word for 'law' is "torah" and it means instruction. The law is far more a matter of the instructing of the mind and the heart, the educating of the conscience, the teaching of right and wrong, than it is shackles and chains to be sure that a person does the right thing.

You may get that impression occasionally in the Old Testament, but the reason for that is, these laws were being applied in a civil society that had to use these laws to structure their society so that it would not come apart.

The law provides the instruction and the discipline to teach a man respect. The first four commandments are about respect for God. If you respect God, if you love God, you're going to worship Him His way, and not some other way. The Fifth and Seventh Commandments are about respect for marriage and the family. The Six Commandment is about respect for life. The Eighth about respect for the property rights of other people. The Ninth is about respect for the truth and the Tenth Commandment, oddly enough, is about respect for your neighbor and incidentally, respect for yourself!

The Eighth Commandment

This article is about the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal."

There is a psalm, the 50th Psalm, that lays some important groundwork in this that I think we should understand. It begins by saying, "The mighty God, even the LORD, has spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, {2} Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shined." God is beautiful. God is shining. {3} "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him," God is powerful. {4} "He shall call the heavens above, and the earth, that he

may judge his people. {5} Gather my Saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. {6} And the heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is judge himself."

Alright, now we have the principle. God is judge. He is beautiful. He's fearful at the same time.

God Doesn't Need Us

Continuing in Psalms 50 verse 7, "Listen, O my people, and I'll testify against you. I am God, even your God. {8} I'm not going to reprove you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings. {9} I will take no bullock out of your house, I don't want any goats out of your fields. {10} For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. {11} I know all the fowls in the mountains, the wild beasts of the field are mine,"

Then He says an important thing, He says, understand this, folks, {12} "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof."

Now what is He talking about here? The underlying principle that we need to understand is that God doesn't need us. He doesn't need our obedience. He doesn't need our offerings. We cannot touch him. We cannot hurt Him. We can't help Him. Our obedience does nothing for Him. Well, then, what is it for? It is for us! Of course!

God says in verse 14, "Offer unto God Thanksgiving, pay your vows to the most high, {15} And call upon me in the day of trouble and I'll deliver you and you will glorify me."

All of this is to establish the fact that our obedience to the law does nothing for God. We cannot provide Him with food and drink and we can't enrich him. Now God goes on to say, "Having established the fact that, this is not about Me."

Why Do You Hate Instruction?

Let's continue in Psalms 50 and verse 16, "To the wicked God says. "What are you doing declaring my statutes, or that you take my covenant in your mouth? {17} Seeing that you hate instruction and you cast my words behind you."

God could ask, "What on earth are you doing talking about my law or my covenant? How can you say that you hate instruction?" The wicked could answer, "What do you mean? We don't hate instruction! We don't cast your words behind us."

And God replies, {18} "When you saw a thief, then you consented with him, and you have been a partaker with adulterers."

Do you mean that if I'm wandering down the store and I see a shoplifter, actually take something and put it under his coat and walk away with it and I say nothing and do nothing, that I have

consented with him? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But if you condone shoplifting or theft of any kind, you are consenting with a thief. You have been partaker with adulterers and I can't think of very many things besides violence that's more prominent in our entertainment than fornication, adultery and sexual uncleanness. It is everywhere!

God is saying, {17} "You don't like instruction. You throw My words behind you, {18} When you see a thief, you consent with him, and you are a partaker with adulterers, {19} You give your mouth to evil and your tongue frames deceit, {20} You sit and speak against your brother, you slander your own mother's son." And then God says this, {21} "These things you have done, and I kept silent, and you thought that I was altogether such a one as yourself."

Folks, this is one of the biggest mistakes human beings have ever made. We do these things. We slide on by them and nothing happens. God doesn't say anything. He doesn't do anything. We suffer the consequences of our stupidity. If we get caught shoplifting we may wind up maybe going to jail, but God doesn't do anything about it.

Why Does God Keeps Silent?

God says in Psalms 50 verse 21, "These things you have done, and I kept silent, and you made a terrible mistake. You thought that I was like you are."

You misinterpreted God's silence. Do you know why God keeps silent on these things? Why does He allow us to go so far down the road of disobedience before He ever steps in and does anything? Because He's giving us room. Sometimes it takes a little room to turn ourselves around, but sooner or later, we hit a point where there is no longer room to turn.

God says, "I will reprove you and I will set these things in order before your eyes. {22} Now think about this, you that forget God."

Because you have, haven't you? Whenever you're doing whatever sin it is you are committing, you are shoplifting or stealing, if you are stealing somebody else's intellectual property, you do all these things and you never have God cross your mind. You never have His word, His law, cross your mind.

Verse 22, "Consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be no one to deliver you. {23} Whoever offers praise, glorifies me and to him that orders his conduct right, I will show the salvation of God."

No, we can't save ourselves with our conduct, but it does say, "To him that orders his conduct right, him, I will show the salvation of God."

You Can't Trust in The Lord and Be a Thief

There's a proverb that is interesting and very similar to this. It is Proverbs 29 verse 24, "The accomplice of a thief is his own enemy. He's put under oath and dare not testify. {25} The fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe,"

You can't trust in the LORD and be an accomplice of the thief at the same time.

Now there is an interesting little incident in the ministry of Jesus, not long before the Passover. "Jesus had come to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had been dead, whom Jesus had raised from the dead." You will find this in John chapter 12 verse 2, "They made him supper and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat at table with him. {3} And Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. {4} Then said one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, the one who betrayed Jesus, said this, {5} "Why wasn't this ointment sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor." {6} This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag and carried what was put into it."

This is such a sad story. This is a man who was one of the 12 disciples, who walked right along with Jesus, shared in His entire ministry. This was a man who saw Jesus do incredible healings. He saw men born blind who could now see. Men who had never walked, who could get up and leap and run. He saw all of this, but he was a thief.

You know, just being in church, just being with Jesus, just being around Christian people is not good enough. You have to live the life.

Here's a man, who had been stealing from the bag that he carried, What for? I don't know. I have no idea what he would have had need of when he was walking around with Jesus. They were sharing all their food together. They slept on the ground together. What in the world did he need to steal for?

You know there's an interesting correlation between this, of not caring about the poor and being a thief. We will come back to it, but Judas didn't care about the poor. He was just a thief. He carried the bag and had all the money that was at hand.

Give Me Neither Poverty nor Riches

There's a short prayer in Proverbs that I thought was interesting. The writer in chapter 30 verse five says this, "Every word of God is pure. He is a shield of them that put their trust in him. {6} And don't add to his words, lest he reprove you and you be found a liar. {7} Two things have I required of you, "Don't deny them to me God before I die. {8} Remove far from me vanity and lies and give me neither poverty nor riches."

This is an interesting request. Don't give me poverty. Don't give me riches, "Feed me with food convenient for me." but why? He answers in verse 9, "Lest I be full, and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of the LORD my God in vain."

Now that's an interesting connection, "Lest I steal and take the name of the LORD my God in vain." The only thing I can think about here is that being poor and stealing, he would then be tempted to lie, perhaps even under oath.

Let's continue in verse 10, "Don't accuse a servant to his master, lest he curse you and you be found guilty. {11} There is a generation that curses their father and does not bless their mother." That's the Fifth Commandment, right? {12} "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness."

They look at themselves in the mirror and say, "I am fine, I'm doing okay," and yet they don't bless their father. They don't bless their mother. They actually would be a companion of thieves and adulterers and yet they think they're just fine.

{13} "There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids are lifted up. {14} There's a generation, whose teeth are like swords, and their jaw teeth like knives to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men." And at the same time, they think they're doing just fine.

Verse 15, "The leech has two daughters, crying, "Give! give!" There are three things that are never satisfied, yes, four things that never say, "It's enough," {16} The grave, the barren womb, the earth that is not filled with water, and the fire that says, "It is not enough!" {17} The eye that mocks his father and despises to obey his mother, the ravens of the Valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

Well, most of us get buried in our caskets and that never happens to us, but at least the warning is here. Don't mock your father and don't disobey your mother. Keep the Fifth Commandment in mind!

A Message from God

A lot of us find it disturbing that religious people are oftentimes involved in a kind of misconduct and they keep right on being religious, while they keep on doing things they really shouldn't do. It's very easy to stand up and preach and thunder about these things, but the truth is, all of us are human, all of us make mistakes, and all of us have room in which to turn it around.

The prophet Jeremiah on one occasion gives us a message from God, chapter 7 verse five says, "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, {6} If you don't oppress the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, and you don't shed innocent blood in this place, and you don't walk after other gods to your hurt."

Just change your life. Get this thing turned around, {7} "Then I will cause you to dwell in this place in the land that I gave your fathers, for ever and ever."

Your country, your nation, your people can go on and on and on, but you're going to have to amend your ways, your justice. Your courts are going to have to do the right thing. You're going to have to do right by the stranger, and the fatherless and the widow. Okay?

Verse 8, "Behold," he said, "You trust in lying words that cannot profit, {9} Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods

whom you know not, {10} And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say "We are delivered to do all this stuff." What? How could that possibly be? Well, in fact, there is a fairly large element of religion, of Christianity, that would say precisely that. "We are delivered from the law." We don't have to take it into account.

The Unrighteous Shall Not Inherit the Kingdom of God

Now I know that Christians believe in moral conduct, and I know that stealing, murdering, committing adultery, and swearing falsely are contrary to every Christian's expectation of the way Christians are supposed to live their lives. And yet, when we teach that the law was abolished, when we teach that we have to take no account of the Old Testament law whatsoever, we have sown the seeds that is likely to reap fruits that we just were not going to like them when they come, because the fact is, Christian people do some terrible things and then come right back to church again.

The apostle Paul had somewhat to say about this in a letter he wrote to the Corinthians. He said in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 9, "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," You really ought to know better, "neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, {10} nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

So, understand this, just because you go to church, just because you have so-called accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior, if you fall in these categories you are not going to inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul says this to the Corinthians, {11} "And such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

The Ten Commandments Can Make You Uncomfortable

The truth is, that the study of the Ten Commandments is very uncomfortable, because there is not a person among us who is not guilty of one or many violations of the Ten Commandments. And so consequently when you get up and stand and preach and talk about these things, well, I'll be honest, my own transgressions make it somewhat painful for me to talk about these things. I can't talk down to anyone about the Ten Commandments.

We have to understand what Paul was saying. He says, "Such were some of you." This has to be in your past and if it isn't in your past, you had better put it in your past.

"Because now we are sanctified, washed, and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are not supposed to live that way anymore.

Zacchaeus

There is a side to this that is best illustrated by the response of one particular sinner to Jesus. He's very popular for some reason in Sunday School and Sabbath School programs of teaching to little children, maybe because he was a little man. His name was Zacchaeus.

Let's begin reading in Luke chapter 19, "Jesus entered and passed through Jericho {2} and behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was chief among the publicans, and he was rich, {3} And he sought to see Jesus but being a short man, he could not see him for the crowd. {4} He ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree to see him for Jesus was passing by, {5} And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him, and he said, "Hello Zacchaeus, come down immediately out of the tree. I want to abide in your house today. {6} So he came down at once and received him joyfully. {7} When all the crowd saw it, they murmured, saying "He is going to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.""

They tell us, by the way, that the publicans, tax collectors, were notorious thieves, and probably this one was no exception.

Verse 8, "Zacchaeus stood and said, "Lord, behold half of my goods I give to the poor and if I've taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore it to him fourfold." {9} And Jesus said to him, "This day has salvation come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. {10} For the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save that which was lost."

You know, his response to Jesus. "I will restore what I've stolen fourfold" comes out of the law which required restitution. But the truth is, much of what Zacchaeus owned had been gained by theft, and there was no way to trace a lot of it. Thus, half of all he owned, he would give to the poor. He would not hold it in his house because he shouldn't have it.

So, if you have been a thief and there is no way to make restitution to the person you stole from, give that restitution to the poor!

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it amazing how simplistic God's Commands are, yet they pack such a huge impact on how well a society can function if they are followed?
2. It is very elementary to understand "Thou Shalt Not Steal," yet many ignore the command which causes great pain for the one betrayed. Why do you think it is so hard for someone to follow this command?

3. What are your thoughts on Mr. Dart's point that: "The law is far more a matter of the instructing of the mind and the heart, the educating of the conscience, the teaching of right and wrong, than it is shackles and chains to be sure that a person does the right thing."?
4. Are there subtle ways that break God's Eighth Commandment?
5. Are there spiritual ways that break this commandment?
6. Why is it that it is easier to do the right thing when we know someone is watching us than it is to do the right thing when no human is watching, even though, we know God is always watching?
7. Is it possible to steal from God?
8. What are your thoughts about Proverbs 30:7-9?
9. If we were to believe that the law was abolished through the sacrifice of Jesus, then, why is the Bible full of morality? Is it possible to have a moral code without God's law?
10. Grace and salvation are a gift from God. However, if the "unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9), doesn't that mean we have a standard to uphold in order to enter God's Kingdom?