



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: **THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT**

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Today we turn our attention to the seventh commandment, "You shall not steal." As far as commandments go, I think this is one that we mostly feel good about. For some reason, this commandment and the one that forbids murder are the two that just about everybody world-wide can get on board with.

So, you might be wondering what more I could have to say on the topic. Well, we're going to look at this commandment from two angles. First, we're going to really take a good look at the breadth of this commandment. After all, there is always room for improvement when it comes to obeying God. Then, I want to turn things around, and look at the promises and blessings tied into this command.

But, like I said, since we've all got some room for growth let's talk about what all goes into "not stealing." I don't see any reason to reinvent the wheel, so here's what Luther says on the matter: "We should fear and love God that we may not take our neighbor's money or property, nor get them by false ware or dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and business."

So, obviously taking other people's belongings is theft, but Luther pushes the bar up a little farther. So things like fraud and scams and cheating are all included. Again, most of us probably don't have too big an issue on this point - except maybe when it comes to tax season...

What about overcharging and price-gouging? We call these things "highway-robbery" in jest, but this is the very practice that Zacchaeus repented for. He wasn't a burglar or con-artist. He was just a guy that over-charged people he did business with.

Or, think about all those folks on the Antiques Roadshow who are so proud for buying their \$25,000 rug at a garage sale for \$100. Ever wish you could be in that place? So, imagine yourself there at the garage sale. And there it is, the limited edition, mint condition collectable plate with the picture of Elvis shaking hands with Captain Kirk. You know it's worth a fortune. And there it is for a mere \$3.95.

It's a serious dilemma. What do you do when you find yourself having to decide between the "smart" thing and the right thing?

Maybe you're not a garage sale type. Maybe you're more of a music lover or a movie buff. These days, it is so easy to get music or movies or software for free. And who gets hurt, right? In the past, you'd have to go to the record store and snatch a record off the shelf and sneak it home. Now you have it, and the record store owner doesn't. Obviously he's lost property.

But what about when you borrow a friend's CD and rip it to your computer? You give the CD back and everybody wins, right? Or take it a step farther – what if a friend lets you copy their homework? It doesn't feel like stealing.... they're giving it to you... and that's their right, isn't it?

But you know that's not how it really works. Pirated CDs steal money from the very bands that you enjoy. Copied answers steals grades from teachers and robs you of the chance to actually learn. And even if no one ever got hurt, it simply isn't yours.

At the root of theft is discontentment. That's where it all stems from. Stealing happens because people are simply not satisfied with what they have received.

And that is the pivot-point of this whole commandment. The core of this command is to be grateful, to be satisfied with what we have and not to dwell on what we don't.

I found it interesting that in Luther's catechisms – both the large and the small - he spends his whole time talking about how we should take care of our neighbor's property, and virtually no time at all talking about how we should manage our own things.

It took me a while to understand this, but I think I finally do. We don't have to worry about it. That's what Jesus said, isn't it?

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" And again he says, **"Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."**

Those are some powerful words; a powerful and liberating promise. God provides – unconditionally and faithfully. Now, granted, there is no assurance of luxury. God doesn't promise to

give us all we want – after all, most of us want tons of things that are no good for us. But he promises to give us all we need.

And it is that promise that frees us up to protect our neighbor. Wealth is not a competition. Business becomes a way to care for our neighbor's needs. There is a wonderful clarity that follows the revelation that everything we have belongs ultimately to God. We can finally let go, and live.