

Are You Unwittingly Robbing God—And Others?

When God gave the children of Israel the Ten Commandments, it was out of His great love for them. In His great knowledge He was steering His people away from destructive lifestyles and into a life of blessing and peace.

As we look at the eighth commandment, “you shall not steal,” it is important to remember that it is founded on love and blessing, not deprivation or neglect.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, “Thieves respect property, they merely wish the property to become their property that they may respect it more perfectly.” You see, the desire to possess what others have is what we call covetousness. The act of taking by stealth or by force a thing that is desired is called stealing. Stealing is more than just something being taken without permission.

People have had their homes burglarized, purses snatched, cars stolen or may have been victimized by fraud and this oftentimes leaves them feeling violated, traumatized and insecure. They become reluctant to trust or offer help to others for fear that they may be tricked again by some con artist. As people begin to trust less, they withdraw more, which hurts society as a whole. Those people who were once giving and helpful people are becoming suspicious and unwilling to be duped.

As a result, those who are in real need of help are deprived of assistance, and those in a position to help are deprived of the joy or opportunity to give. They begin to enjoy what they have less and less because they live in fear of someone taking it from them or stealing from them possessions that they worked so hard for. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Jesus

commanded His disciples to treasure the things that are in heaven, which can't be stolen even by Satan himself. Satan is the ultimate thief.

In their infamous rock anthem to the devil, "Sympathy For the Devil," the Rolling Stones band played the part of the devil's advocate by presumably introducing the public to Satan's role in history. In this Rolling Stones song, Satan voices his observation concerning the reaction of people to his activity.

A quote from that song says, "What's puzzling you is the nature of my game." If audiences were more knowledgeable about the teachings of Jesus, they wouldn't be so puzzled, because John 10:10 says, concerning this thief, that the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Satan's ultimate goal is to steal the lives and souls of men and women any way he can. In other words, he wants to rip us off. The devil robs people of their capacity for joy, for faith, for overall peace of mind and for giving and receiving love. He plans destruction against people, so they will become discouraged and feel a sense of hopelessness. Satan wants to steal our possessions and to harm or destroy our souls through loss.

What wolf ever broke into a sheepfold to steal the sheep's grass or water? The wolf is only interested in getting to the sheep. But Jesus, the Shepherd of the sheep, came to give them life and protect them from being plundered. He does this by making us aware of Satan's strategies so that we can avoid the excessive desire for earthly things.

I love the Scripture where it says that we should give no place to the devil (Eph. 4:27), but to do that, we have to be aware of the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:11). Once our focus and perspective have been adjusted to desire the spiritual

over the physical, God then can restore the spiritual things the devil has taken from us such as vision, purpose, peace and hope for good in this life, as well as an assurance of eternal life.

When we give in to the wiles of Satan and become covetous of earthly things it is sin. This sin that begins in the heart can eventually lead to theft, if not resisted through the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Less obvious instances of theft can take the form of slacking on the job, failing or procrastinating to pay bills, keeping something that is borrowed, not paying taxes and so on. Anything that disrespects someone else's ownership is a form of covetousness and stealing. If a person takes something without permission or refuses to give something that has been agreed upon, he is guilty of theft.

Another very damaging form of theft takes place when we have reckless and antagonistic speech. Putting a price on a man's reputation is difficult, if not impossible, but dishonoring or impugning his reputation with words is stealing from him. That is why gossip and slander are deadly tools in the hands of Satan.

Also, it seems that we're living in a culture and in a time where even stealing from employers and the government is a common offense. People tend to rationalize this because the victims are large, faceless entities. Some may reason things like "Well, they'll never miss a little bit here and there; after all, they throw away massive amounts anyway in red tape alone. And as for sick days, what are they for if I don't use them? It's not like they don't know people take a little extra time off now and then, and besides, the Lord knows how tired I am."

This is thinking out of a culture, a world system that is governed by Satan, but it is not the thinking of Jesus. As

believers in Christ, we should do things with excellence and as unto the Lord as a testimony of the goodness of God and His kingdom.

Matthew 5:16, which I've quoted many, many times, says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." As believers we should do things as unto the Lord and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things that are important to us will be added.

God is not interested in what we think is fair in our own eyes. He's interested in our faithfulness to our agreements and responsibilities. In Matthew 20 Jesus tells of the vineyard owner who needed workers, and early one morning He hired some laborers who agreed to work for a certain amount of money. Later that morning He hired more labor. He returned to town a third time and recruited still more help. When paychecks were distributed at the end of the day, those who were hired early in the day got angry because those who were hired later received the same amount of pay, but didn't work as long. When they complained to the owner, the owner rebuked them, saying:

"I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matt. 20:11-15, NIV).

The key statement in this passage is this, "What is my own?" The money did not belong to the laborers, but the owner. The wages promised to the first workers seemed fair to them when they first took the jobs, but they got angry only after they saw others getting blessed. They felt they had been treated unfairly even though they received what they had agreed upon.

Today, many people find themselves in similar situations. They

develop a bad attitude and slack off because they feel the company owes them something. But is it stealing? I think at times, even as Christians, we can have a similar attitude toward the things of God. We see in Malachi 1 that this offends the Lord Himself:

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My fear? says the Lord of Hosts to you, O priests, who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ ...

“When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? When you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now to your governor! Would he be pleased with you, or accept you? says the Lord of Hosts. ...

“But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and vows, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the Lord of Hosts, and My name is to be feared among the nations” (Mal. 1:6, 8, 14, MEV).

David Livingstone, a great missionary to southern parts of Africa, used to say this: “Why is it when an earthly king commissions us, we consider it an honor, but when the heavenly King commissions us, we call it a sacrifice?” You see, it’s all about perspective, perception and attitude. If we’re going to have the kind of attitude of the characteristics of the kingdom that emanate from the character of the king then we need to keep the right perspective, keep our perceptions right and most definitely keep a right attitude, especially when it comes to advancing the kingdom of God, because we are a people of an unshakable kingdom. We also represent, as ambassadors of the kingdom of God, another kingdom.

Yes, we live in this world, but we’re not of this world. These Scriptures are a reminder to us that God is displeased with those who deny Him of what is rightfully His by breaking their vows to Him or trying to substitute something inferior to what

they had promised to God. You see, God wants us to give Him our very best. The Bible says that we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1). When we give Him the last of our efforts, the bread crumbs off our table so to speak, we're telling Him that He doesn't deserve the honor that we give to others. Scripture is clear when it says to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, which is the glory due to His name.

The podcast, "What's Yours? Golden Rule part 2," can be found on the Charisma Podcast Network, or any of your favorite podcast outlets on "A Word in Season with Doug Stringer and Friends."

Stay tuned Monday for part two of this article. {eo}

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