

A Thief in the Light

Exodus 20:15

Introduction

My wife and I lived in Dallas, Texas, for a few years, and I will never forget a story that circulated. It was an unusual story, almost too hard to believe, but it came from a very credible source. A man saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a Mercedes that was being sold for twenty-five dollars. He could not believe it and knew that it was either a mistake or some sort of hoax. When the ad was there week after week, he decided to call. He got the lady on the phone and said, "Lady, are you selling a current year model Mercedes Benz for twenty-five dollars or is this some kind of trick?"

She said she was selling the Mercedes for twenty-five dollars. So he asked, "What's the trick?"

She replied, "There's no trick. I'm really selling this barely six month old Mercedes for twenty-five dollars."

He asked, "How many people have called?"

She answered, "No one but you has called. I guess no one believes it."

He said, "Well, I can understand why."

She said, "Why don't you just come on over and see for yourself."

So he said, "Well, it'll be worth the trip, even though I lose twenty-five bucks just to find out what your scheme is."

He drove over and she would not tell him anything. He finally said, "All right, here's twenty-five dollars."

She handed him the keys to the car and made out a receipt. He then said, "Now that it's mine and I'm about to drive off with it, tell me what's going on."

She said, "Well, nothing really. It's an honest sale. But you see, my husband left me. He and his girlfriend are in the Bahamas and he asked that I sell his Mercedes and send him the cash from the sale. And I'm going to – all twenty-five dollars."

Interesting story of theft, is it not?

The next story actually happened. A gentlemen wrote to the IRS and said, "Dear Sirs, I've enclosed a check for one hundred and fifty dollars. I cheated on my income tax last year and I haven't been able to sleep since. If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest of the money next year."

We hear those stories and they are funny, yet they are forms of deceit; they are symptoms of theft. Then, we turn to the scriptures, as we have been in going through the book of Exodus, and we read the eighth commandment.

The Command

Turn in your Bible to Exodus, chapter 20, and read that command with me. It is a command that I hope, by the grace of God, we will all discover that we are threatened with committing and, by His grace, avoid. It is found in verse 15, and says,

You shall not steal.

As I have said before, there is a period on the end of that command – *not* a question mark. It is a simple statement to be exercised and to be believed in because it comes from the authority of scripture.

The Command Violated

Now, you and I probably feel like stealing is not really our sin. We think, “I haven’t stolen anything since that piece of gum way back in elementary school. I’m not a thief.” We think of the most common ways that people steal, such as on their income tax returns, and we know we have been honest on ours.

However, as I discovered this past week, throughout the Bible there are precise, accurate descriptions of things we have failed to observe as stealing. They are synonyms that are throughout the scriptures that I think we will find so accurate that I hope, by God’s grace, if we discover them in our lives, we excise them by His Spirit today.

There are three words that are found throughout scripture that are synonyms of the violation of the eighth command. Let me give them to you.

By deceit – unmasking deception

1. The first word that is synonymous is deceit.

I am going to unmask deception for you as we look at characteristics of deceit in the Bible. Let me give four of them.

Deceit is typical among unbelievers

- First, deceit is typical among unbelievers.

That is really where it ought to stay. The Bible tells us, in no short terminology, that deceit is part of the unbelieving crowd; it is part of a society that is violating the authority of God.

Romans, chapter 1, tells us about a society that violates God’s authority. Let us look at verses 28 and 29, and by the time we get to these verses in that chapter, Paul begins listing all of the sins of this group.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit . . .

The word “deceit” in verse 29, means, “a misrepresentation of someone or something for the purpose of unjust gain”.

That characteristic, ladies and gentlemen, is part and parcel of a society that violates the authority of God. We should assume that a society will be deceitful, unless they follow Jesus Christ.

Deceit is a characteristic of false teachers

- A second characteristic of deceit is that it is a characteristic of false teachers.

Turn to II Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 1 through 5.

I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

But I am afraid, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

What the apostle Paul is saying in these verses is that one of the characteristics of those who will take from you all that I have delivered to you, by the revelation of God; all that I have given to you, by God’s inspiration through His scriptures; all that I have given to you, by His inspiration in my own life, are false teachers and will come along to sap this truth out of your church and out of your personal life.

Now the characteristic by which you can know these false teachers, is given in verse 3b of that passage,

. . . your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

In other words, the teaching of these false teachers will focus your attention on something other than being devoted to Jesus Christ in purity and simplicity; they will focus your attention on other things.

Now turn to Jeremiah, chapter 23. I want to point out one of the simplest ways of discerning false teachers.

In the Old Testament days, according to the prophets of old, there were those who were doing the same thing then as they do today. Take note of verse 9 of Jeremiah, chapter 23, which is talking about false prophets.

As for the [false] prophets: my heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble . . .

Skip to verse 11.

“For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness,” declares the Lord.

Note verse 16.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination . . .”

Look at verse 21.

I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.

Skip to verse 25.

I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, “I had a dream, I had a dream!”

Continue to verses 28 through 30.

“The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?” declares the Lord. “Is not My word like fire?” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock? Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the Lord, “who steal My words from each other.”

I will explain the last phrase of verse 30 in a moment. Note verses 31 and 32.

“Behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the Lord, “who use their tongues and declare, ‘The Lord declares.’ Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the Lord, “and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them . . .”

Note that one common characteristic of false teachers, not only in that day but in our day, is they, in a sense, represent the authority of God, but at some point in their ministry, will say that they represent the voice of God apart from the word of God.

So, the next time someone on television, or someone you are listening to closes their eyes and says, “Oh, I’m hearing a word from God. There’s someone out there starting a business . . . there’s someone over here who is sick . . . there’s someone here who needs advice . . . and God is telling me right now,” turn them off.

Does that sound familiar? Turn them off! They are declaring a vision from their own imagination. They are declaring something apart from the word of God. Anyone who says, “I have received revelation from God apart from the word of God,” no matter how slick, no matter how conservative, no matter how flamboyant – that person is a false teacher.

Now note the last part of verse 32.

“. . . nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,” declares the Lord.

That is powerful. Do you know why? I just sat back in my chair and tried to understand the prophet who said, by revelation, “They don’t benefit the people in the slightest.”

I think it is because false teachers lead us to believe that God is more interested in us receiving His blessings than He is in us receiving His character. They turn our focus away from the person of God to the blessings, the gifts, the things from God. And, in reality, they do not benefit you or I in the least.

There is stealing going on – they are thieves in the light.

Deceit is essential to the strategy of Satan

- Thirdly, deceit is essential to the strategy of Satan.

Would it not follow, obviously and logically, that if false teachers have as their middle name “deceit” that Satan would be engineering it? From Genesis, chapter 3, to Revelation, chapter 20, Satan is called the “master,” in the sense of deception. He is a deceiver.

Deceit is dangerous in the lives of disobedient believers

- Fourthly, deceit is dangerous in the lives of disobedient believers.

It is difficult to discern the counterfeit. If it were easy, men and women, Satan would not be Satan. In fact, in our world, there are twelve *Mona Lisa's* – all of which are supposedly signed by Leonardo da Vinci. All of the owners claim to have the original. There is no way any of us could really tell them apart. That is why Satan is so dangerous; that is why his counterfeiting and his deceit is so wicked. And a believer who becomes disobedient falls into a form of deception called self-deception.

James, chapter 1, verse 22, says to be,

. . . doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

In other words, do not deceive yourselves.

I can become a thief, robbing myself of character, integrity, worship, and obedience. If I get to the point where I read the Bible, I hear it, I see it and yet, I walk away unchanged, I become a thief. It is dangerous.

An example of deception in the early church, and this is not new either, is found in Acts, chapter 5. The first account of thieves in the light is in verses 1 through 11.

You may know the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They had seen Barnabas sell a tract of land and give the money to the apostles. They also saw the celebration. People were patting him on the back, “Oh, you’re wonderful,” as people would often do, and say, “What you’ve done for this early church is fantastic!”

So Ananias and Sapphira, as the first verse of chapter 5 tells us,

. . . sold a piece of property,

However, verse 2 tells us that Ananias,

. . . kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is pre-meditated deceit. It was not wrong that they gave some of the money. What they did wrong was say, in effect, “This is all of it. This is the amount that we got for the entire piece of land.” However, they were lying; they were deceiving.

Look at verses 3 through 6.

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan [the deceiver] filled your heart to lie to the

Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?

“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.”

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

The young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

Now imagine, with me, that you are part of the congregation in that room as Sapphira walks in. Look at verses 7 and 8a.

Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” . . .

All of us would sit on the edge of our seats and say, “Say, ‘No.’ Say, ‘No,’ Sapphira. You don’t know they just buried your husband. Tell the truth!”

Before you can get that out of your mouth, however, Sapphira looks Peter in the eye, as verse 8b tells us,

. . . and she said, “Yes, that was the price.”

Continue to verses 9 and 10.

Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.”

And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Note verse 11.

And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

I guess they were afraid! They probably had a quick huddle and decided it was in their best interest to be honest in the early church.

What is the Lord doing? He is telling the early church the same thing He wants to tell us today, dishonesty is not to be part of people who walk in the light. It is *not* to be a characteristic of those who walk after Jesus Christ – not dishonesty, but honesty; not deception, but truth.

By defraud – uncovering defraud

2. The second word that is synonymous with the eighth command is the word, defraud.

To defraud is to withhold something from someone to whom it is rightfully due. There are four ways to defraud. I want to uncover this for you.

Defraud by withholding honest pay from honest work

- First, there is defraud by withholding honest pay from honest work.

Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 13b, says an interesting thing,

. . . The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.

In other words, if you are an employer, do not go to bed; do not go to sleep at night with the wages of your employee in your hand. Give his wages to him when it is due. Do not put it in the bank and draw interest on it for the next twelve hours – give it to him right away. His wages are not yours, so to withhold them is defrauding.

Defraud by withholding support from parents

- Secondly, there is defraud by withholding support from parents.

Now we have covered this extensively in a former sermon. Briefly, however, do you remember Mark, chapter 10, verse 19b? It says,

. . . do not defraud, honor your father and mother.

The word “honor” is a word that talks about giving respect; giving financial support. If you withhold financial support from a mom or a dad who needs support, you are guilty of defraud. That is the New Testament word that is used in that context.

Defraud by withholding physical intimacy from a spouse

- Thirdly, there is defraud by withholding physical intimacy from a spouse.

I Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 5, uses the word defraud. It makes it very clear that physical intimacy is not a reward; it is not a favor; it is not a weapon, but is something that belongs to someone else – your spouse. In fact, Paul says in that verse, this is the foundation that may help avoid immorality. Do not defraud.

Defraud by withholding a spiritual settlement from believers

- Fourthly, and this is interesting, there is defraud by withholding a spiritual settlement from believers.

Turn to I Corinthians, chapter 6. Verse 1 uses the word defraud in an interesting context. If I told you this, you would not believe it, so I want to read it.

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

I want you to put your thinking cap on and think of the implications of this text. Continue to verses 2 through 8.

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life [civil life]?

So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide . . .

(that is a legal term that could be translated “make judgment”),

. . . between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.

This is when a believer in the church has something against another believer; that is, when a legal right has been violated. Paul is saying, do not take them to court, take them to church.

This goes back to the Old Testament economy where the spiritual leader, that was the king, often made judgments. Paul is saying, I want the same thing to exist today. When there are civil disagreements; when there have been laws violated between believers, this is a family matter. Take it to the church and allow the leadership of the church to reach a settlement.

This has a fascinating implication. Imagine if we actually did this. It would be a fantastic testimony to our society to settle differences, even in civil matters, in the church.

By Theft – unveiling theft

3. The third word that is synonymous with the eighth command is theft.

This is to take something for yourself that rightfully belongs to someone else. It is the common way the eighth commandment is understood. Most people have forgotten all of the other applications that we have just made.

We think of Ivan Boesky, who, in 1986, said, “A little greed is not bad, everybody should be a little greedy.” In 1985, he had made a hundred and fifteen million dollars from two deals. Then, in 1987, he was sentenced to three years for his greed. We think of people like that.

I recently read in *Newsweek* magazine that Hyundai cars are being targeted for theft. Evidently, the doors are easy to rip off and the radio pops out. That car is leading the way in having radios stolen from its doors.

I have talked to two people in our congregation in the last month, who have become victims of theft. One guy had his car stolen, while another was robbed through an investment.

We often think of theft in these terms. And rightfully so, as it does include that world. However, I want you to consider biblically, because we are talking about people who live in the light, other types

of theft that occur. We may not even be aware of these and may need to be confronted with them today.

Theft from God of our worship

- One type of theft is stealing from God our worship.

Worship is declaring worth, which is an honor due Him and only Him. The only way to explain this is to give you three illustrations of people who worshiped Him correctly.

Abraham – Gave God the worship of devotion

I think of Abraham who gave God the worship of devotion. Abraham was a man who would not allow even his son, his most prized possession, to stand between him and obedience. He worshiped by way of devotion to God.

David – Gave God the worship of repentance

I think of David who worshiped by way of repentance. David was a man who had committed sin. The scriptures tell us, in II Samuel, chapter 12, verse 20, that after God confronted him through the prophet Nathan and his baby son, who had been born out of wedlock and was eventually taken by the Lord, David put on new clothes, shaved, and went with a repentant heart and worshiped God.

Any time we are unrepentant, we are stealing from God worship due Him. When we are devoted to something else more than Him, we steal from God devotion due only Him.

Job – Gave God the worship of submission

I think of Job, who gave God the worship of submission. He was a man who lost it all. And in Job, chapter 1, verse 20, it says that he fell down on his face and worshiped God.

Theft from family of our time

- Another type of theft is stealing from family of our time.

Did you ever consider that theft? Is it startling to you that the average five year old spends less than twenty-five minutes a week with his father? Does it shake you up that school age children spend less than sixty seconds a day communicating with their moms

and dads, other than, “Pass the butter. Do your chores. Go to bed. . . .” and that sort of communication?

Christian kids were surveyed. Nearly seventy percent of them spent less than fifteen minutes a week with their mom and dad. I do not mean sitting in the living room watching TV together or sitting at the table eating your food and rushing out, I mean spending some time where that person is the focus of your attention – that is the definition. You can sit in a room and watch television as a family and never spend time together because the focus of your attention is something other than the family members. Kids are only spending minutes a week with their parents.

I read of one fourteen year old girl who came to Josh McDowell. She said, “Mr. McDowell, nobody hugs me anymore. My Mom doesn’t hug me. My Dad doesn’t hug me. Nobody.”

It is about time we call that theft. It is about time we admit that it is stealing from the people in our family.

What about spouses? Did you know that the average spouse spends less than seven minutes a week communicating – other than, “Glad to see you. Have a good day at work. Pick up the dry cleaning. What’s for supper?” Only seven minutes a week of communication with your spouse. That is stealing from our family our time.

Theft from church of our gifts – financial and spiritual

- Another theft is stealing from church of our gifts.

Financial gifts

First, there is the theft from our church of our financial gifts. We could camp on that one.

I have in my pocket something that I have been carrying around for two weeks. I have been waiting for a good time to tell this fantastic story. I have several little Hershey kisses in my pocket. Some kid in children’s church, when the offering plate was passed, made the ultimate sacrifice! I wish I could have been there to see the struggle – “Oh, should I? I’m gonna.” He does not know the pastor is going to eat them after church! It is almost sacrilege! I do not know what to do with them! They are collecting dust on my desk.

Acts, chapter 4, talks about a church in which, not just kids, but adults made that kind of sacrifice among themselves. Read that chapter for yourself sometime, it is fascinating. There are needs that arise in that church and someone says, “No problem, I’ll sell my house.” They are believers who are all together in “heart and soul,” not claiming anything as belonging to themselves but rather as “common property,” and “there was not a needy person among them”. Is it any wonder, with that kind of attitude, that they upturned Jerusalem?

Spiritual gifts

Secondly, I want to talk to you, for just a moment, about something more devastating than stealing financial gifts; than not becoming involved financially, and that is, stealing spiritual gifts.

I view the church as a disabled body. More and more I am becoming vocal with those who come into our church fellowship. In the membership class, we spend thirty minutes to an hour on the subject of spiritual gifts. If we fill our church with people who are spectators and not people exercising their gifts, we become a body without legs; without arms.

If you have the gift of teaching, is your gift beneficial to the body? If you have the gift of giving, or helping, or hospitality, does the church benefit from it?

I Corinthians, chapter 12, makes it very clear that together, we as a local body, not universal but local, make up a body. Are we coordinated? Do we have it together? You can answer that question on the basis of where you sit. Are you utilizing what God has given you and contributing it to the body?

Stealing from God worship; stealing from family time; stealing from church gifts are all forms of theft.

Application – What Does Breaking This Commandment Do?

Let me tie our discussion up with two thoughts. Violating the eighth commandment does a lot of things, but let me give two.

Communion is blockaded

1. First, it blockades communion.

That is obvious. If I am not where I should be before Jesus Christ; if I am not worshiping Him; if I am not devoted to Him; if I am not involved with the saints in serving Him, then there is going to be a loss; there is going to be a blockading of communion and fellowship.

Credibility is destroyed

2. Secondly, breaking the eighth commandment not only blockades communion, but it destroys credibility in the world because the world notices.

The world is looking at a church today that is riddled with corruption. As I said in our last discussion, for 1,900 years we were telling the world to repent of their sins and live a pure life. Now, the world tells the church to repent of our sins and live right. We lose our credibility.

The old English couplet referring to the deception of Judas, who was supposedly a follower of Jesus Christ, says this, "Still, as of old, man by himself is priced. For thirty pieces of silver, Judas sold himself, not Christ."

Dare we have credibility in this society? It is determined by our worship; by our devotion; by our honesty and our integrity. Are there thieves in the light? May it never be.

The solution – the work of Christ in our lives

What is the solution? In Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 28, the apostle Paul wrote that early church in Ephesus, and said,

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands . . . so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

In other words, he is saying that when Jesus Christ invades a person's life and there is submission to Him, He will take that person – He will take us and turn us from people who steal from Him into people who share. We become people who:

- share worship;
- share devotion;
- share love;
- share gifts.

May that be the case for you.

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