

Sunday, July 31, 2022 | Ten

### Exodus 20:15 | "Our Neighbor's Stuff"

At the beginning of the summer, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten." This study unpacks the first commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide Christians today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the Law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** Even without an explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22<sup>nd</sup> context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

We finally got to the titular Decalogue in the second week by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

In the third week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call "idols."

Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). **Idolatry, in all forms, not only downgrades who God is but also diminishes who men and women were made to be.**

In the fourth week, we answered the question, “What did God mean when he said, “Do not take my name in vain”? This is the broadest prohibition within the Decalogue and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. When the Lord commanded this, he expected us to not speak or bear his name in an empty or thoughtless way. Thus, the ways in which this commandment can be broken are numerous. However, just because something is hard does not mean it's not worth doing. After all, **we, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ.** Jesus lives in us and can enable us to bring glory to his name. And only through the Lord are we able to abide by the third commandment.

In the fifth week, we unpacked the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. And that while we, as Christians, no longer observe the Sabbath as the Jews did in the O.T., we still obey the fourth commandment in principle by meeting on Sundays to remember Jesus' resurrection. Thus, not only do we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, but we also have Jesus for our Sundays, and, ultimately, we have God to thank for our entire weekend. **The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest that is set apart to the Lord so that the Christian might be more like Christ.** This is for our good because we were not designed to work all the time. Since the foundation of the world, human beings have been made to rest.

In the sixth week, we dove into the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother." And this commandment comes right after the commandments that dealt with our relationship with God and before the commandments that dealt with everyone else. This implies that a healthy relationship with God and others is forged in the home. How we treat our parents will impact how we treat God and those people who are around us. After all, if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mar. 12:31), who better to start with than those “neighbors” who are closest to us? And **when the parents are honored, the child will be blessed.**

We studied the sixth commandment in the seventh week: "You shall not murder." But this seems unnecessary. Murder is so wicked and awful that most of us don't need to be told not to do something so obviously wrong. But that assumption gives humanity far too much credit. All human beings, great and small, have the capacity to destroy life. To illustrate that principle, we

saw how the Bible speaks about five forms of murder: unintentional killing, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and anger. Somewhere in those five categories, we are all guilty. Unlike every other created thing, human life is sacred because we alone bear the image of our Creator (cf. Gen. 1:27). As a potter signs his work, every man, woman, and child has been stamped by the Giver of Life. And life is that mark, i.e., existence, consciousness, volition, etc. As such, life is a precious gift not to be thrown away or destroyed. **Whether literally or emotionally, we do not commit murder because human life is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, special.**

Last week, we unpacked the commandment regarding adultery. And like the prohibition regarding murder, the seventh commandment isn't so much an effort to stem the tide of sexual infidelity but a commentary on the importance of sexual fidelity. In other words, God is highlighting how much value he puts on sex and marriage. Marriage isn't a communal affair but one of exclusivity. The Lord elevates marital unions far above our base desires so that even though we may be tempted to go astray, we refuse to do so because the vow we made to our spouse in the sight of God is far more important than the feelings we might have towards some would-be adulterous partner. Thus, **whether physically or mentally, we do not commit adultery because, like marriage, sex is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, and special.**

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Today, we turn to the eighth commandment: “you shall not steal.”

**READ:** Exodus 20:15 (ESV)

You shall not steal.

And if what I'm about to say sounds familiar, it is only because God loves repetition. Just like the sixth commandment wasn't so much a rule meant to mitigate murder and the seventh wasn't so much a rule meant to reduce adulteries (both commandments were also principles intended to highlight the importance of human life and marriage), the eighth commandment not only wants to discourage theft it also wants to elevate the importance of another's possessions and labor.

Every known code of Law in every known culture throughout history has had injunctions against theft. The difference with the Israelites is that God didn't require the death of the thief.<sup>1</sup> This means that, while this commandment is still important as its one of the ten foundational principles of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh, a breach of this rule is not as severe as

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Christopher J. H., *Exodus, The Story of God Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2021), p. 375-376.

murder and adultery. Though any offender would be required to not only replace/repay what was taken, they would also be required to give payment to compensate for the crime itself. If they could not repay, they could sell themselves into slavery to pay back their debt (cf. Ex. 22:1-12; Lev. 6:1-7).

Theft violates two principles:

i. **A thief breaks the sanctity of another's possessions.**

Simply put, when someone steals, they're taking something that is not *theirs*. Like someone's life and spouse, a person's stuff is a part of someone's home. The fruit of labor is the ability to provide for one's self. You've earned your stuff, and they are yours to do with them as you see fit. When a thief breaks into a home or takes something that belongs to someone else, they violate the sanctity of a person's property. Ownership that is acquired through just means is sacred.

However, as all Christians know, all ownership is just stewardship of God's resources.

**READ:** Psalm 24:1 (ESV)

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.

**READ:** 1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

**READ:** 1 Timothy 6:17-21 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

<sup>20</sup> O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," <sup>21</sup> for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

Thus, since all ownership is really just stewardship, a thief not only takes that which belongs to another person, but they take something that belongs to God.<sup>2</sup> This is why theft is so abhorrent. A thief infringes upon God's stuff as much as another person's.

Now, we'd be tempted to think that most of us are not thieves. But this would be wrong. In fact, given how the Bible speaks about theft, there are more thieves in the world than we would think. And even though they have different names, broadly speaking, they're all different forms of theft:

- False weights and measurements (cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Pro. 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23).
- Employer's not paying their employees (cf. Lev. 19:13; Mal. 3:5; Ja. 5:4; Col. 4:1; Rom. 4:4).
- Employees not doing the work they've been paid to do (cf. 1 Pet. 2:18-20; 2 Thess. 3:10).
- Countries expanding territory (cf. 1 Ki. 21).
- overpricing goods and services (cf. Deut. 25:13-15; Amos 8:5).
- Exorbitant interest (cf. Ex. 22:25).
- Not paying off one's debts (cf. Psa. 37:21; Ecc. 5:5; Rom. 13:8).
- tax invasion (cf. Mar. 12:14-17; Lu. 3:11-16; Rom. 13:7).

And if all of these are theft, other things like plagiarism and “pirating” entertainment—i.e., music, movies, T.V. shows, etc.—also become theft even though they are not explicitly mentioned in the Scriptures.

ii. **A thief breaks the sanctity of God's design.**

Simply put, when someone steals, they're taking something that is not earned. Though work is not always enjoyable, it is still God's will that all human beings work. We mentioned this briefly in our discussion of the fourth commandment and the Sabbath. Just as we've been made to rest, we have been made to work. Labor is a good thing. And like the sixth and seventh commandments, the eighth also has its roots in Genesis. Just as God worked in creation, so, too, ought we to work.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking in the context of taking care of widows, Paul says to Timothy...

**READ: 1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV)**

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

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<sup>2</sup> Packer, J. I., *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2007), p. 89-90.

<sup>3</sup> Kass, Leon R., *Founding God's Nation*, (London; Yale University Press, 2021), p. 331.

He says in another place that those who refuse to work shouldn't even be given bread to eat.

**READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

<sup>13</sup> As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. <sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Contextually, it is remarkable that we find Paul using the word "command" here. Not that he never used this word. Rather, he opted to use a softer term like "appeal" or "exhort."<sup>4</sup> But his shift in tone is understandable because this is now the ***third time*** he's had to admonish the Thessalonians to work and not be idle/lazy (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14).<sup>5</sup> Before, they were essential but generalized statements. Here, however, the apostle attaches an illustration to highlight just how serious and critical this issue was to him.

Thus, if we are made to work and so work is a good thing, to steal that which not earned besmirches God's designs. A thief looks at the pattern laid down before and decides to blaze his own path, leaving broken homes in his wake. Fruits of labor are a blessing to be enjoyed, but a thief who breaks in and consumes another's fruits is worthy of judgment (cf. Prov. 24:30-34).

So, if theft is a breaking of God's design, and work is the fulfillment of God's plan, what is the purpose of God's design for us to work?

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<sup>4</sup> Weima, Jeffrey A. D., *1-2 Thessalonians*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2014), p. 603.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

**READ: Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)**

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

The opposite of theft is charity (cf. Ezek. 18:7).<sup>6</sup> Those who live within their means and without taking what is not theirs ought to help provide for those in need. In doing so, the charitable person mitigates the need for theft. If some are given what they need, they will be less prone to take what is not theirs. The eighth commandment isn't only about not taking stuff; it's also about working to provide for your needs and the needs of your neighbor. As Kevin DeYoung explains,

“Where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also. But the reverse is also true: where your treasure goes, your heart tends to follow. If you put all of your treasure into your stuff—your toys, your man cave, your exercise room, your car, or your house—then your heart is going to go there. If you’re having a hard time getting your heart in the right place, then send your money ahead of it. Your heart will follow. When you give generously to the church and to other kingdom-minded causes and organizations, you start finding that your heart is interested in what is happening.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in place of theft, we are to work with our hands to not only provide for our needs but to provide for the needs of our neighbors and to further God's kingdom. All of our income is really God's income, and he has the final say regarding how we are to use the resources that he has entrusted to us. Step one is to provide for your needs, and step two is to provide for the needs around you. In this order, you will be praised for your good work and invest in a future that will long outlive you and pay dividends for all eternity.

**So, what’s the takeaway?**

We do not steal because a person’s possessions and work are **sacred**—i.e., set apart, unique, special.

Famously, the Declaration of Independence has this line: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Later, we would codify what we called “The Bill of Rights,” which expanded a person's rights from more than just life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to things such as the freedom of speech and

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<sup>6</sup> Wright (2021), p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> DeYoung, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2018), p. 136-137.

religion, protection from unlawful search and seizure, and the promise of a just and speedy trial, and so on.

Likewise, the Ten Commandments reveal the rights inherent in existence.<sup>8</sup> They are the principles on which the world itself stands. The first four prohibitions give us those things which God is owed—i.e., his preeminence, his uniqueness, his holiness, and respect for his designs. The remaining six commandments give us those things which our fellow human beings are owed—i.e., respect for our neighbor's life, marriage, possessions, reputation, and, ultimately, his whole being. God has laid the parameters for what is and isn't ours. He does this for our good so that we might maintain a healthy standing in the eyes of our neighbors and in the eyes of our God. Because while there are things in this life that we must abstain from, there are innumerable things that are ours for the taking. You just have to work for them. And if you do, you'll be given a life of plenty because the Lord honors a workman's labor (cf. Pro. 12:11; 14:23; Col. 3:23-24).

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<sup>8</sup> Durham, John I., *Exodus*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 1987), p. 194-295.

## Video Description

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Therefore, we do not steal because a person's possessions and work are **sacred**—i.e., set apart, unique, special.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: