

You shall not steal

16 March 2008 - LD 42 (with Lord's Supper)

Ps. 18: 1, 2

Ps. 18: 6, 9

Ps. 22: 11

At table: Doxology and Ps. 16: 1, 5

Ps. 37: 2, 3, 7

Ps. 19: 3 - 6

Ps. 16: 3, 4

Scripture reading: Deut. 25: 13 - 16; 1Tim.6: 6 - 19

Text: LD 42

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Somehow many people in our day have the idea that our salvation in Christ is a golden ticket to heaven: they take the ticket, put it in their pocket, and continue with their daily life as if nothing has changed. The only change is that they have a ticket in their pocket, and that seems to make them happy. And the only thing they have to do is to stick to this ticket and to hand it in on the day of Christ's coming so that they may enter eternal glory. But that, brothers and sisters, is not the gospel.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a power unto salvation, a power that changes our whole life, a power that also continues daily to renew our lives. Our salvation is not something that will take effect somewhere in the future, leaving us unchanged in the present.

We became one with Christ, sharing in all His riches. Our new life in Christ is a reality. And it is this new life in Christ that is now spelled out to us in the law of

God. To live according to these laws is to enjoy the fruit of your salvation. To live according to these commandments is to be alive in Christ. Whoever obeys them experiences the new life unto which Christ restores us.

Within this context of God's salvation we will now look at the eighth commandment:

You shall not steal

I will preach this commandment to you under three points:

1. Be content
2. Be honest and faithful servants
3. Pay to the Lord what you owe Him

In the first place we will note that we are commanded to...

Be content

Theft comes from greed. Greed is to want more than what God has given you. Contentment, on the other hand, is to be fully satisfied with whatever God has allotted to you.

Immediately you notice how this commandment reflects our relationship with God. "You shall not steal" means in the first place that you shall live from God's hand. It means that you will find all your delight in Him, and not desire anything more than that what He gives you. Our new life is a life of contentment, thankful for God's gifts and satisfied with His goodness.

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, saying:

"...godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim.6: 6).

No money can add anything to the great gain of godliness. But if we are not satisfied with God and with all the riches He gives us in Christ, then we will never be content with anything. If we are not thankful and satisfied with the riches of Christ, then we will burn with desire for other things.

Thus, in order to learn contentment, we first need to see and appreciate the riches of God's mercy in Christ. That alone can satisfy all the desires of our soul.

If He is our Shepherd we shall not want. If He is our Bridegroom, the cup of our joy overflows. It is this gain in Christ that sets us free from all greed.

But if anyone doesn't know God to be His Father, then he cannot but distrust God. Such a man will make sure that he cares well for himself. Distrusting God, he will work out his own schemes how to become rich. Maybe God do not think that I need a luxurious motorcar, therefore I will rather care for myself, thank you! And make sure I get what I want! Maybe God don't think that I need to live in the best of houses, therefore I will care for myself and make sure I get what I want! Yes, that is how the unbeliever thinks. Distrusting God, he will rather care for himself. And so his greed will drive him further and further away from God as he seeks to satisfy his desires with his own schemes and skills.

This is the root of greed and theft: to be discontent with God and to distrust Him in unbelief.

If God is not all your riches, the glitter of this world will surely deceive you. It will enslave you, and you will become a servant of greed. And your greed will give birth to theft.

Do you see then how the gospel of our Lord Jesus sets us free from the transgression of the eighth commandment? He who knows God to be His Father will find more delight in little things, than any earthly riches can render to the ungodly. But he who is poor in God will burn for the riches of the world.

In order to be content with our possessions, we also need to understand that our good and faithful Father is governing and upholding all things according to His will and purpose. We need to understand that no one possesses anything by chance, but that God distributes to everyone according to His will.

“The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up” - 1 Sam. 2: 7

He is in control of your possessions. He determines your salary. He decides. He adds, and He takes away. Whatever you have, you received it from His hand alone.

Knowing then that God is the Almighty, ruling in heaven and on earth, we believe according to His Word that **He** distributes to each man according to **His** will.

Therefore we are content with whatever we receive from Him, knowing that it is according to His good will and all-wise purpose.

Add to this the knowledge of His mercy to you in Christ, and you will be content, satisfied and thankful.

But how does this relate to our daily life? How does the eighth commandment regulate everyday life? We note that in the second place, that we are commanded to...

Be honest and faithful servants

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him” - Ex. 23: 4.

No, it is not your fault that his donkey is wondering; neither did you cause his ox to wonder off, yet you will be guilty of theft if you see it happen without doing anything about it. You may be a very busy man, but you must first stop and take that wondering animal back to his owner - even if the owner happens to be your enemy!

You are made a caretaker of your neighbour’s belongings!

If you see that your neighbour is in danger to suffer loss, for whatever reason - you are to act as his neighbour, and shall show your love.

This law is not outdated and expired in the New Testament. And it does not only apply to oxen and donkeys, but to all your neighbour’s belongings and to any situation where you are able to prevent his loss.

We see then that the eighth commandment does not only condemn outright theft and robbery, but that it positively commands us to deal with our neighbour and his belongings in love.

When we consider this, we realise that theft is an extreme example of breaking the eighth commandment; just as adultery is an extreme example of breaking the seventh commandment. Each commandment represents a moral principle. In order to make the moral principle clear to us, each commandment mentions the most extreme transgression of that principle. But you have not obeyed the eighth commandment by refraining yourself from the most extreme transgression. You have not obeyed the eighth commandment by refraining from outright theft and robbery. Positively you are commanded to show active love in the way you deal with your neighbour and his belongings. And so, if you do not *protect* your neighbour's belongings when it is in your power to do so, God reckons you as a thief.

Thus the eighth commandment, just as the other commandments, does two things: it forbids us to do what is evil, and it demands us to do what is good. When we are forbidden to steal, we are commanded to do the opposite.

Now, what is forbidden, and what is demanded?

One of the most common transgressions in the business world is the use of two sets of weights. The Lord says:

“You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God” - Deut.25: 13 - 16.

What does it mean?

When you are buying and selling, you need a measure. In order to determine the price of a product, the product has to be weighed with a just weight, and it should be measured with a just measure.

A product is placed on the one side of the scale and the weights on the other side. When they balance each other, the weights declare how much the product is worth. Now, God forbids unjust profit. He forbids you to use two sets of weights.

To understand this you have to visualise for yourself a tradesman using a scale. The unjust tradesman has **two sets** of weights. Both sets look the same, but their weight differs. The one set is heavy and the other set is light. Both sets include for example a weight stating that it is 10 kg - but the one is actually 10.5 and the other 9.5. With the naked eye the client won't notice the difference. The unjust tradesman will then use the heavy set for buying, and the light set for selling. Thus he will receive more value when he buys, and render less value when he sells. That Scripture calls: "dishonest scales". Then you pay less than the actual value of the product when you purchase, and you ask more than the actual value when you sell. The LORD calls that an abomination.

"Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight" - Prov.11: 1.

"Honest weights and scales are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are His work" - Prov. 16: 11.

"Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the short measure that is an abomination? Shall I count pure those with the wicked scales, and with the bag of deceitful weights?" - Micah 6: 10, 11.

If you buy a product from your neighbour, and you pay him only \$ 10 for the product, reminding him of all the weaknesses of the product, but you go and sell the same product for \$ 20, praising all the good qualities of the product, then you are using a dishonest scale, and then you are busy with unjust profit. Such dealings with your neighbour are contrary to the principle of love. Deal with others in the same way that you would like them to deal with you.

But we know the corruption in the business world.

“‘It’s no good, it’s no good!’, says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase” - Prov. 20: 14.

To the seller you say that his product is worthless, and when you manage to bring the price down below the value of the product, you go home boasting with your bargain. You are glad about your bargain, but you do not care for his loss. Then your scale is crooked. It is an abomination to the Lord. We are not speaking here of comparing prices and asking for discount, but we do speak of the desire to buy a product for less its value.

Instead, our weights have to be tested by love and righteousness.

“You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” - Lev.19: 36.

See how He connects this commandment to our salvation! You shall make no unjust profit - neither when you buy, nor when you sell. For I have set you free from slavery to sin.

See how our salvation in Christ changes our lives.

Our whole view on life changes. The purpose of our life is now totally different. We no longer live to enrich ourselves, but to serve others. It has an immense effect also on our labour. What is now the purpose of your labour? Are you working for money, or are you labouring to serve your neighbour? Of course it is necessary to earn money, but what is the purpose of your labour? What is the motive of your labour? Is it to serve your neighbour in love, or is it to make as much as possible money out of him?

Is your labour loving service, or do you work simply for the sake of money?

This is a very important question, for it determines the very nature of your labour.

When your labour is not directed to seek the benefit of your neighbour, and to serve him in love, but simply to make money, then all your labour is nothing but theft.

We see the result also when we look at the art of advertising - or shall we rather speak of the skill to deceive? The customer has to be caught and trapped. The customer is hunted as if he is a pray. He is flattered. He is robbed from his money in such a way that he even *thinks* it was a bargain! The one thief is outsmarted by the other thief. The question is no longer what is right and just, but who is the smartest deceiver. As long as the customer is not able to see the catch, he even thinks that he has gained something for free! It's a giveaway; you've won something! The robbers and the thieves are praised for their craftiness. And it is all done within the bounds of government laws.

You are well known with these things.

But where does it come from? Is it not because business has become a chase after money? How many people still see their job as a loving service rendered to their neighbour?

We know the slogan: "The customer is king!" But what does that slogan mean? It is used in a way that means: the customer must be kept satisfied, or else **you lose his money!** You make him to feel like a king only with the purpose to make money out of him!

But how many are there who *truly* seek the interest of the customer for the sake of love and honesty? No, all are driven by greed.

When you no longer see your work as rendering a service to the benefit of the community, the customer is no longer viewed as a neighbour, but simply as a pray. That is the very opposite of seeking and protecting his interests. It has become "Each one for himself, and the devil for the rest!"

Such an attitude in business, where each one does his best to enrich himself, trampling on each other, results in nothing else than theft and robbery. Even if it is all done within the limits of the government law, it is still unjust, gaining your riches through the loss of others.

Also with this commandment the Lord demands a pure heart. Do you love your neighbour, or do you simply love yourself?

Now, this commandment does not apply only to tradesmen. It applies to every aspect of our stewardship. We are all stewards of God. God has entrusted us with many possessions.

Let me illustrate the meaning of this commandment further with a few practical examples.

If you are working for a boss and you do your work slothfully and carelessly, you are in fact stealing, because you do not render the service which you are paid for. Or if you cause your company to suffer loss because of your ill management, then your carelessness is theft. We are not speaking here of making mistakes, but of an attitude of carelessness. Each one should be faithful in performing his office, or else he steals from others what he owes them by virtue of his office.

That applies also to a situation where no trade or merchandise is involved. Parents should give their children the love and time and education they need, or else you rob them of that which you owe them as parents. We have to be faithful stewards. It applies to a housewife just as much as to the man in his office at work. Each one should faithfully render to his neighbour the service to which he has been called by the Lord. In that way also laziness and carelessness is condemned by this commandment.

We don't have the time now to look at gambling. We can only mention that gambling is the result of greed, and that it is distrusting God. Gambling is seeking for unjust profit.

We can also mention usury which suppresses the poor, and a lot of other ways of transgressing this commandment, but the principle is clear: we shall be content and thankful for the gifts of the Lord. We shall seek the interest of others, and not selfish gain. And we shall render to our neighbour, according to our gifts and calling, the service that we owe them.

“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” - Eph.4:28.

There you have both that which is forbidden and that which is demanded: do not steal, but work hard, so that you will be able to **give** to others in need. Don't be a thief, but a giver. Don't be a robber, but a faithful servant to your neighbour.

The apostle Paul speaks to the elders in Ephesus, saying:

“I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” - Acts 20: 35

Christ has set us free from slavery to sin. Instead of being thieves and robbers He made us faithful servants, serving God and our neighbour with all our possessions.

In the third place we note that we are commanded to...

Pay to the Lord what we owe Him

We owe the Lord everything. We owe Him all our love and complete devotion. Yes, we owe it to Him to love Him with all our heart, with all our mind and soul, and with all our strength.

If you waste time, you waste the Lord's time. If you waste your gifts, you waste the Lord's gifts. If you waste money, you waste the Lord's money. Nothing is our own. We are only stewards.

What does this mean for our daily life? If you do your work slothfully, you are not only stealing from men, but from God. It is His time and His gifts that you are

wasting. If you are a pleasure hunter, living for entertainment, you are stealing the Lord's time to waste it on your own pleasures.

The same is true for the way in which you spend your money. All your money should be used for the kingdom of God. It does not mean that you have to give all your money to the church, but it does mean that all your money is in service of God and His kingdom.

It is useful for the kingdom that you and your children have food and clothes, therefore you buy them food and clothes. It is useful for the kingdom that you have a car, therefore you buy a car. When you buy a computer, you use it in the service of the Lord. It does not mean that you use the computer only for making introductions for men's club, but it does mean that you and all that you have are in the service of the Lord.

Everything that a Christian does is part of his religion. Even when you go on holiday, you go on holiday for the sake of the kingdom, in order to come back refreshed with new strength. And so, when a Christian buys a computer, it becomes a holy computer - devoted to the Lord. When you buy yourself a pair of shoes, it becomes holy shoes, devoted to the Lord. You and all that you have belong to the Lord.

But if you act as if you are not called to serve the Lord with your whole heart and soul and mind and with all your strength, then you are stealing the gifts of the Lord. Just as the unfaithful steward causes his company to suffer losses, so also do you cause the kingdom losses when you are not with all your heart and with all your time and with all your gifts devoted to the Lord.

Because, we - and all our money - belong to the Lord, therefore extravagance is theft. You need a pair of shoes for church, and a pair of shoes for work, and a pair of shoes for jogging; you may need a pair of open sandals for the summer and also a pair of winter shoes. And so you may go and buy all these shoes for the sake of the kingdom - if you have the money. But dear brothers and sisters, if you have all these pairs of shoes and you go to the shop to buy yet another pair of shoes, and yet another, can you then still say that you buy them for the kingdom?

This morning, when we read the form for the Lord's Supper, there was an invitation to come and sit down at the Lord's Table, and there was also a warning. Those who harden themselves in sin will eat and drink a judgment on themselves. For that purpose the form reminded us of God's law as summarised in the Ten Commandments, and when it came to the eighth commandment, we read that no one may come to the table who live a worldly life:

“...by stealing, greed, or extravagance...”

There you have a short exposition of the eighth commandment. Apart from stealing and greed, extravagance is also mentioned. Extravagance is when you go and buy that pair of shoes which you don't need for the kingdom.

Yes, we may freely enjoy all that the Lord gives us, but extravagance is wastefulness. It is to forget the purpose of life and your calling. It is wasting the Lord's gifts, and wasting His time, and wasting His money.

The Lord has given you a wallet for the sake of the kingdom. Yes, even a wallet becomes holy when it belongs to a Christian.

While it is true that we and everything that we have belongs to the Lord, that does not take away the principle of tithing. While we have to devote **all** our money to the Lord, there still remains a special tithing: money that may not be spend by yourself.

Hear what the Lord says:

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessings that there will not be room enough to receive it” - Mal. 3: 8 - 10.

There are many who would argue with this, saying that it no longer applies to us in the New Testament. They argue that the New Testament simply says that we have to give generously and liberally. But dear brothers and sisters, if you give less than a tenth of your income to the Lord, then you cannot say that you are giving generously. If there is this respect any change in the New Testament, then it is an *increase* in obedience and devotion after Pentecost, and not a decrease. And so, if we want to give generously, then - in the light of God's law - it should at least be a tenth of your income.

In the Old Testament the people of Israel did not only have to bring a tenth of their income to the temple; there was also thank-offerings and burn-offerings and all sorts of offerings added to that, and also the first-fruits. Count it all together and an Israelite had to give much more than a tenth of His income to the Lord. Have we now become poorer in the New Testament? Or has the measurement of liberality become smaller? Do not deceive yourself and boast of Christian liberty, if you give less than a tenth to the Lord.

Others say, yes, I indeed give a tenth of my income to the Lord, but then they detract from that amount all their thank-offerings and other contributions. Some even reckon that their school fees are part of their tithing. And then they excuse this robbery by saying: the school and church belong together, doesn't it?

Are you cheating the Lord? Do you rob Him?

Others say: Yes, I will give generously, but only when the church needs it. And as long as the church is still coping, the church does not need more money!

How foolish! How arrogant! Who are you to decide how much the church needs?

In this way you do not only rob God, but you cause losses for the kingdom. If every family was giving a tenth of their income, then every 10 families would be able to sustain their own fulltime minister! But what happens when people rob the Lord? Churches of over a hundred members are no longer able to sustain one minister. The result is that congregations have to become larger and larger in order to survive. Three hundred members; four hundred members! And we know the result. Ministers are over worked and the members suffer.

If everyone in this congregation was giving a tenth of his income to the Lord, Kelmscott would have been able to sustain four fulltime missionaries! Must I continue to mention the possibilities?

Brothers and sisters, it is not for us to decide how much the church needs; the Lord has made that decision already; and we simply have to obey His word.

Would it not have been to your own benefit if you obeyed the Lord? Yes, the Lord does not need our money. The Lord doesn't need any of us, for He is not dependant on any man. But what a privilege to know that He does make use of us, and that He does receive our tithing! What a mercy and a grace is bestowed upon us to know that He does use us and our belongings in His kingdom!

On the other hand, do not think that only a tenth belongs to the Lord. *All* your money is His; all your gifts, all your time, all your energy.

We are only stewards. And one day we will all have to give account; not to the minister or to the elders, but to the Lord Himself.

Our salvation in Christ is not a golden ticket to heaven, a ticket that we can put in our pocket, and then continue with our own lives. No, the authentic gospel is a power unto salvation changing our lives more and more, sanctifying us unto the glory of God. With regard to the eighth commandment, Christ has set us free from greed, and made us content and satisfied with the riches of His mercy, so that we no longer burn for *more* than we receive from His hand. He made us faithful stewards, serving our neighbour in love. We are no longer cheats and deceivers praying on others. Let us no longer seek selfish gain.

If we see our own sin, let us confess it before the Lord, and He will forgive.

I shall not steal, for He is my Redeemer. Brothers and sisters, *this* is the new life which God has given us in Christ. Amen.