

“A Steward of the Righteousness of God” (Exodus 20:15)

We are in the series of “The Call to Undivided Intimacy,” studying the Ten Commandments. Today we will study the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment “You shall not steal”. The title is “A steward of the righteousness of God.”

## **1. The Laws of respecting dignity**

When the Ten Commandments were given by God, people of Israel were on their way to Canaan after they had left Egypt. They haven't entered Canaan yet, but they are no longer in Egypt. God promised them, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then you will be my treasured possession, a holy nation and a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5-6). And the Ten Commandments are part of this covenant.

They used to be slaves in Egypt. By God's miraculous works, they left Egypt and now they are traveling in the wilderness. Just as he promised, God has been treating them as his treasured possession. God has been graciously providing them food, water and all their needs. It was in a situation like this that the Ten Commandments were given to them.

And the eighth commandment says: “You shall not steal.”

It tells us that we keep righteousness and justice in our dealings with our neighbor because we are created in the image of God. We respect our neighbor's right of having ownership because they are created in the image of God. We must be a steward of the righteousness of God.

## **2. A steward of the righteousness of God**

We are created in the image of God. And once we were lost, but God redeemed us. We were reconciled with God. Now we have peace with God.

### Philippians 3:9

“...I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

We have the righteousness that comes from God. We are given the righteousness of God. God entrusted his righteousness to all Christ followers.

### 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. God entrusted us the message of reconciliation. And we are the message of reconciliation.

Let’s put these two together. We are created in the image of God. And once we were lost, but God redeemed us. We were reconciled with God. We are enjoying peace with God. And we are entrusted his righteousness and sent to the broken world for the ministry of reconciliation. This is who we are.

Biblical justice sought to bring the victim and the criminal closer to each other, face-to-face, so the relationship could be restored. The goal is to restore broken relationships in society.<sup>1</sup>

Just think about this. What kind of society would be built when people steal for whatever reason? What kind of culture or character would be of the relationships in that community? Suspicion, distance, fear, anger, fighting.

God says, “You shall not steal.” Don’t lose who you are, you are entrusted the righteousness of God and sent to the broken world for the ministry of reconciliation. Respect each other because you are created in the image of God. By doing this, trust will be restored among you, acceptance will be rebuilt among you, and peace will be reestablished among you. Trust in me, follow my Words, I will do this through you.<sup>2</sup> Be a steward of the righteousness of God.

### **3. Stealing**

“See, they have a lot of things. They don’t need all these. They may not recognize even if some are missing. But I want to have one. Just one. Why can’t I take just one?” No, you cannot. It’s stealing. You violate righteousness and justice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Horton, “The Law of Perfect Freedom,” Kindle, 2004, Location 3067-3069

<sup>2</sup> Mark Mitchell, “Ten: How the Commandments Set Us Free,” Kindle, 2016, Location 998

“What about our enemy? They did bad things to me. They attacked me. They hurt me. They hate me, and I hate them. What’s the matter if I take from them? We are fighting already.” No, you cannot. It’s stealing. And you shouldn’t. It hurts you when you violate righteousness and justice. It damages your dignity. And the situation will get worse when you violate righteousness and justice.

People steal for different reasons. Some people steal for the thrill of it. Some steal because they’re lazy. Some steal because they think everyone does it. Some steal because they know they won’t get caught. Or they don’t care if they will get caught. Some steal because they think it is the only way of survival. Some steal due to greed and selfishness that is a part of our consumer culture. Some steal because they feel a sense of entitlement. For some reason, they think they have the right to steal.<sup>3</sup> You can add more.

The bottom line is this. “We steal when we believe we deserve something more than another person does.”<sup>4</sup>

But God says, “You shall not steal. If you violate righteousness and justice, you damage your dignity. Be a steward of the righteousness of God.”

What do people steal? First, we think of things. The Israelites used to be slaves in Egypt, so they didn’t have things. But now they do have things. Where do these things come from?

When the Israelites were about to make a hurried departure from Egypt, God, as he promised, had made the Egyptians favorably disposed towards them, so they received many things from the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21; 12:36).

So what they had at that point were not theirs in the first place. They were all given by God. However, as time passed, and as they lived with these things, they soon forgot this.

Before they enter Canaan and enjoy prosperity, God is reminding Israelites that they can’t take what they have now for granted, it’s by His grace that they have all these things. They may think these are their possessions, but they used to be slaves, they had nothing at all. All they have now are entrusted by God.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 961,972, 973, 975, 968

<sup>4</sup> Christina Hergenrader, “Love Rules: A Study of the Ten Commandments,” Kindle, 2016, p136

It's not just for Israel, but the same for all people. Because the world and all that is in it is God's (Psalm 50:12). What they have are entrusted by God. So we shouldn't steal it. We shouldn't take it.

To take something from others is not only to steal from a person, but essentially to steal from God who entrusted it to the person. The same principle applies to us who live today.

Let's think about stealing in the context of our present age.

Man can steal physical possessions, including money. Burglary, robbery, and shoplifting. It also includes fraud, extortion, embezzlement.<sup>5</sup> And oppression is violent robbery.<sup>6</sup>

Man can steal people. Deuteronomy 24:7 says: "If someone is caught kidnapping a fellow Israelite and treating or selling them as a slave, the kidnapper must die."

Man can steal intangibles.<sup>7</sup> Person's good name or reputation can be stolen by gossip and slander.<sup>8</sup>

People's hearts can be stolen. 2 Samuel 15:6 says, "He [Absalom] stole the hearts of the people of Israel."

Absalom would wait for people who would come to King David asking for justice, and he would listen to them. And he would say to them, "Your claim is valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you. If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then I would see that everyone receives justice." By doing this, he stole the hearts of the people.

Man can even steal from God. Man steal honor from God when they misuse God's name. Man steal worship from God when they turn God-centered worship into human-centered entertainment or excitement.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, we are surrounded by different forms of stealing. We can see these stealing everywhere in our society.

So, God says, "Guard your heart. Don't follow them. You shall not steal. Remember you are entrusted the righteousness of God and sent to the broken world for the ministry of reconciliation. Be a steward of the righteousness of God."

---

<sup>5</sup> Mark Mitchell, 931

<sup>6</sup> Jayakumar Christian, "God of the Empty-Handed," Acorn Press Ltd (Kindle), 1999, 2011, Location 1215

<sup>7</sup> Mark Mitchell, 950

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 953

<sup>9</sup> Michael Horton, 3016

#### 4. Greed is a sin

On 1 February 1984, the Los Angeles Times quoted what Ronald Regan said. He was the President of the United States at that time. It said, "There is really nothing wrong with greed since it turns the engines of the market."<sup>10</sup>

For capitalism, in terms of business and markets, and in a consumeristic culture, provably what he said makes sense. But according to the Bible, greed is not good; it is actually a sin (Eph 5:3).

So God says "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed." (Luke 12:15)

What is greed? It's an excessive desire to acquire or possess more, especially more material wealth than one needs or deserves. Basically, I want to have more and more and more because I want to have more. What is the easiest way to get more? To steal.

For us, Christians, that may not be the case. When there is shortage or lack of something, or we want something, we pray and ask God to meet our needs. That's what we usually do. And sometimes God provides it in a miraculous way, and other times our needs are met somehow, and still other times things don't go the way we wished.

Here I want to examine our hearts. Each time you need something, or want to have something, you come to God and ask him. What does it mean for you to believe in God, a provider?

Here we must think carefully. What do we really seek? Do we seek God or gifts from God? If we seek gifts from God more than him, we put those things above God himself.

In our modern society, "The good life became synonymous with self-seeking and the ability to produce and consume ever increasing quantities of goods and services."<sup>11</sup> We are surrounded by this kind of thoughts. This fuels greed. We must guard our hearts.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3311, 3446

<sup>11</sup> Jayakumar Christian, p.99

God says, “Don’t let greed take over you. It will damage your dignity. Remember you are entrusted the righteousness of God and sent to the broken world for the ministry of reconciliation. Be a steward of the righteousness of God.”

## 5. Taking advantage

Martin Luther commented in his Large Catechism: “Taking advantage of our neighbor in any sort of dealing that results in loss to him” is violation of the eighth commandment. “A person steals not only when he robs a man’s safe or his pocket, but also when he takes advantage of his neighbor at the market.”<sup>12</sup>

Why do people do that? You may have a list of answers. The bottom line is greed, isn’t it? I want to have more. I see the opportunity by taking advantage. Let’s do it.

In capitalism who has more advantages? Capitalism says that the money is yours to do what you want.<sup>13</sup> Generally speaking, the more money you have, the more advantages you have.

“Full of rewards and profits for the rich and strong, but also full of distress and despair for the weak and poor.”<sup>14</sup> This is the air we are breathing. We must guard our heart. Because “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10)”

We must be a good steward. What does it mean? We are responsible for what God entrusted to us (Matt 25:14-30). In other words, we are not responsible for what we don’t have nor for what other people don’t have.

God promised Abraham that He would bless him, and make him a blessing to all peoples on the earth (Gen 12:2-3). Abraham was not asked to change the world, and he was not able to do it anyway. God is the one who blesses people, who gives Shalom, brings peace to the world. Abraham’s part is believing and obeying, to trust God and to be faithful before God.<sup>15</sup> The message is the same for us.

---

<sup>12</sup> Michael Horton, 3161

<sup>13</sup> Mark Mitchell, 988

<sup>14</sup> Jayakumar Christian, p.99

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Wright, “The Mission of God’s People,” Zondervan, 2010, p.78

In reference to “Taking advantage”, I want to mention a bit about “borrowing money”.

Debt with no intention to pay back, or to borrow money when you have no means of paying back is the same as stealing. If society is full of people like this, our economy will become impossible after a period of time. Of course, there wouldn't be any relationships of mutual trust.

And when we lend money, we must be careful, because we can take advantage of the one who borrows. If you just lend because you can get interest, and don't care about the one who borrows as long as you can gain profit, then you are just using the person as a tool to gain profit.

The one who lends also has a certain level of responsibility. To lend an amount of money which a person cannot return is not at all helping the person, but actually giving them trouble and eventual pain.

It's rare for people to be stuck and not be able to pay back from the very beginning. In many cases, they make it a habit to borrow money, and sooner or later, they go beyond the limit in borrowing money.

In some cases, we can damage the dignity of the borrower by lending him money. Moreover, we can damage the dignity of others by giving them money or things. Damaging the dignity of others, damages our dignity. We need wisdom from God. Sometimes we need to be determined not to lend or give because we love the person.

## **6. Don't lose your dignity**

God saved the people of Israel from enslavement. So He says, “Don't make one another slaves again. Don't treat one another as if the other person were a thing. That is to steal his dignity.”

What does it mean to us today? We shouldn't use others to gain benefit for ourselves. We shouldn't treat someone like a tool useful for ourselves. That is to steal the person's dignity. And to make someone dependent on us is to damage the person's dignity.

We not only steal from others, but sometimes we also lose ourselves voluntarily. Or we may choose to act as if we were someone else. This is to lose ourselves voluntarily. By whatever reason, we feel we cannot be accepted as we

are. And we pretend to be someone else. And as we continue to live like this, we start to lose sight of who we really are.

By giving the Ten Commandments, God protects us from losing sight of who we really are. He really wants us to be who we are, to live who we are.

In Christ we are children of God (Eph 1:5). In Christ we have been blessed with the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). Our God will meet all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Phi 4:19).

I'd like to finish the message with this story. I heard this 23, 24 years ago, and I can't remember who shared this. I'll call him Ben. Ben had a rich elder brother who worked for an oil company. The rich brother bought him an expensive new car. One afternoon, Ben wanted to go for a drive, so he went out to the car with the key. Then, he found one poor-looking boy looking into the car. The boy asked him, "Is this your car, uncle?" "Yes, that's right." "How much was it?" "I don't know, because my rich brother gave me this as a gift." Then the poor-looking boy became silent.

Ben thought, "Oh, that was very thoughtless of me. This boy must have wished he also had a rich brother. Poor boy! I shouldn't have said that."

However, the boy said, "Uncle, I also want to be a person who can give things like this as a gift." The boy didn't say he wanted to have it, but he said he wanted to be a person who can give.

Touched by what he said, Ben invited the boy to go for a drive with him. Then the boy asked him to come to his house. Ben thought, "Maybe he wants to boast, showing off what a nice car he rides in." Anyway he drove to the boy's house. "Uncle, please wait a minute." The boy said and went into a dirty building.

After a little while, the boy came down the stairs, carrying his little brother, who was physically handicapped, in his arms. The boy said to his brother, "See, I told you. Today I rode in this high class car. I promise you. In the future, I will give you a car like this as a gift."

Jesus is our big brother (Mark 4:35). He was so rich, but he became poor to make us rich (2 Cor 8:9). He gave us everything he had, even his life. And he is telling us, "Don't forget who you are. You're my brother, my sister. You must live as who you are. Be a steward of the righteous of God.

Today we studied about the eighth commandment. God says, "You shall not steal." Remember you are entrusted the righteousness of God and sent to the broken

world for the ministry of reconciliation. Respect other's right of having ownership, because they are created in the image of God. By doing this, trust will be restored among you, acceptance will be rebuilt among you, and peace will be reestablished among you. Trust me, follow my Words, I will do this through you. Be a steward of the righteousness of God.

It's the call to undivided intimacy.

### **For Lifenet groups and personal reflection**

1. People can steal material possessions, people, good name or reputation, and people's hearts. Give an example for each case.
2. What kind of society would be built when people steal for whatever reason? What kind of culture or character would the relationships in that community have?
3. "There is really nothing wrong with greed since it turns the engines of the market." What do you think about this comment?
4. What has God entrusted you? What is the challenge for you to be a good steward for what God entrusted to you?