

(Devotional #30) **Christian Liberty and the Law – The Ten Commandments:**
The 8th Commandment: Respect for Private Property
(Exodus 20:15)

*If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for **ALL THE EARTH IS MINE** – Exodus 19:5*

*I will spread out my hands to **THE LORD**; the thunder will cease and no longer will there be hail that you may know that **THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S** – Exodus 9:29^B*

*You shall not move your neighbor's boundary stone, which the ancestors have set – **Deuteronomy 19:14** (Divine prohibitions against moving boundary stones¹ occur five times in the Old Testament², establishing clearly **God's endorsement of property ownership by individuals.**)*

THOU SHALT NOT STEAL – Exodus 20:15

(“*Thou Shalt Not Steal*” is the King James translation of the 8th Commandment.)

Starting points³ are of critical importance in understanding the Bible and its relationship to the culture in which we live. As a matter of principle, one of two things take place every time we make moral decisions, when we formulate our worldviews, and as we interact with the culture around us: **EITHER THE SCRIPTURES WILL DETERMINE HOW WE VIEW THE CULTURE, OR THE CULTURE WILL DETERMINE HOW WE VIEW THE SCRIPTURES! (THIS IS TRUE 100% OF THE TIME.)**

The Ten Commandments address both our relationship with God (*our theology*) and our relationships with our fellow man (*our sociology*). Another way to say this is, **the Ten Commandments affect how we worship God and how we live with others**. It is crucial to understand this because there is a great apostasy brewing in the evangelical church that is grounded in Neo-Marxism and Critical Race Theory (*a misdirected sociology*). Tommy Curry, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Texas A&M University, defines **CRITICAL RACE THEORY** as “*the view that the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and that race itself, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of color.*”

Secular Neo-Marxism, (and its first-cousin, Critical Race Theory) has infected the culture in which we live ... and sadly, much of evangelicalism. In both cases, secular, cultural beliefs are becoming ‘starting points³’ for the evangelical church, and as such, these are changing the way many Christians interpret the Scriptures. As a result, too frequently the gospel has been altered – turned from a gospel of grace into a gospel of works-righteousness⁴. This is a trap we cannot allow to take hold in our churches.

¹ John Calvin saw in ‘removing a boundary stone,’ a dual transgression, for it breaks both the 8th Commandment that forbids stealing (in this case, theft of property by deception), and also the 9th Commandment that forbids ‘bearing false witness against a neighbor.’

² Cf. Deuteronomy 19:14, 27:17, Proverbs 22:28; 23:10, and Job 24:2. Furthermore, in 1 Kings 21, Elijah rebuked Ahab and Jezebel for the murder of Naboth in order to steal his vineyard.

³ By ‘starting points’ I am suggesting, if we lay a firm, Scriptural foundation for how we understand the world, culture, and morality, this foundation will provide for us the ability to discern right-from-wrong, the wisdom to separate moral acts from immoral acts, and eventually, create in us a worldview that is governed by divine viewpoint, not by human viewpoint. Conversely, if we begin by letting the world decide what is right and what is wrong, i.e., to determine what morality looks like, we will become trapped in a worldview dominated by human viewpoint.

⁴ In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul is amazed that the Galatians have been deceived by a group of moralists (legalists), who infiltrated the church with a different gospel ... a gospel in which circumcision and the requirement to keep the

Here is an example of how Neo-Marxism is entering into the evangelical church – After asserting that “*political participation has a unique ability to inspire idolatry in people*,”⁵ one so-called evangelical author writes:

*The only way (these) idols can continue to make these promises is by asking from their worshipers what those followers can only get by **exploiting other people**, privilege we can't gain without **exploiting other people**, and wealth we can't gain without **stealing it from others** ... Our idols of power, privilege, and wealth will ask us to gain power we can't get without **taking it from other people**.*⁶

(This is classic Neo-Marxist language.)

Now you may ask, why mention economic and sociological theories in a devotional? Well, the answer is quite simple because, as pointed out above, the Ten Commandments address not only our relationship with God, but also – *how we are to relate to the world* – and because there is a great apostasy brewing in evangelicalism that is grounded in Neo-Marxism and Critical Race Theory, it is imperative that we turn with vigor to the Scriptures in order to identify these threats to our faith⁷ – and then correct them, especially in a day when ‘*soft-Socialism*’ is becoming prevalent in our culture.

The Scriptures represent to us *the way God thinks* ... and it may surprise many, whose world-views have been set in place by the culture, that **God values the concept of private property ownership so significantly that He protected it in the Ten Commandments**. The 8th Commandment sets forth clearly God’s view of this very important subject. So, if we were to form today’s lesson as a question, that question would look something like this: “*Is the ownership of private property endorsed or condemned by the Word of God*”?

The right to own personal property is assumed in the Bible⁸ – a large part of **THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT** (where the moral principles laid out in the Ten Commandments appear as ‘**APPLIED LAW**’), **IS DEDICATED TO ISSUES OF PROPERTY RIGHTS**. **The very concept of ‘STEALING’ subsumes individual ownership of private property, otherwise, ‘THOU SHALT NOT STEAL’ makes absolutely no sense!**

The Book of the Law addresses situations from outright theft to minor domestic disputes, e.g., the injury or death of an animal left in one’s care by a neighbor. Misappropriation of private property that harmed God’s people was not tolerated in Israel, nor can it be allowed by any civil society.

Think about this: **WITHOUT THIS COMMANDMENT, NO SOCIETY COULD FUNCTION**. Unless there is general agreement to respect the property of others, and a generally accepted prohibition against stealing, society as we know it would cease to function. If you feel free to take what is mine, and I feel free to take what is yours, you and I will not be able to live together! We will be enemies, each eyeing the other with suspicion, waiting for the chance to steal from one another.

*Jewish, ceremonial law were **added to the gospel** Paul had preached. Twice in response to this tragic development, Paul said of these moralists, “**Let them be accursed**” (Galatians 1:8-9).*

⁵ *The Liturgy of Politics*, by Kaitlyn Schiess, page 35.

⁶ *The Liturgy of Politics*, by Kaitlyn Schiess, page 36.

⁷ The ‘*new theology*’ that is infecting evangelicalism can be difficult to identify because it is based on emotion and feelings – i.e., it ‘*sounds good*’ and it ‘*feels good*.’

⁸ For a good example of this, read Exodus 22:1-15.

Stealing robs the stability in society, whether the theft is by the individual, or by radical redistribution of wealth by a corrupt government.

This principle is important enough that lethal force is sanctioned to prevent the theft of private property – *Exodus 22:2*

- **John Durham** understands the limits on the use of lethal force to include catching the thief in the very act of stealing and does not see it extending to the process of recovering the stolen property. (*In other words, Durham would not approve of chasing a thief down an alley while brandishing a firearm – and neither do I.*)
- **Umberto Cassuto** more properly, limits the use of lethal force to cases where the homeowner believes his life (*not just his property*) is in danger. Cassuto forms his conclusion based on the limiting factor of ‘*darkness and sunlight*,’ contrasted in the Book of the Law – *Exodus 22:3*. If the thief breaks in at night, at a time when the homeowner cannot assess the full intent of the perpetrator, lethal force is allowed; however, it is not allowed if the crime occurs in daylight, most likely because it is easier to assess the danger to life and limb when you can see. (*Many of our contemporary laws regarding the use of lethal force make this same distinction.*)

Private ownership of property is not limited to the Old Testament; the concept is carried forward into the New Testament. Jesus cites the 8th Commandment in his conversation with the Rich Young Ruler (*Mark 10:9; Luke 18:20*), and Paul mentions respect for private property as part of his explanation of what it means ‘*to love your neighbor*’ (*Romans 13:9*). Zacchaeus promised to make ‘*fourfold restitution*’ for his sin of ‘*over-taxation*’ (*Luke 19:8*). Then in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul lists habitual thieves among those, who will not inherit the Kingdom of God – *1 Corinthians 6:9-10*.

Now to understand why the ownership of private property is sanctioned by Scripture, we must recognize first that **ALL PROPERTY BELONGS ULTIMATELY TO GOD HIMSELF**, and He can do with it as He pleases. As mentioned above, God said in the Book of Exodus, “**ALL THE EARTH IS MINE⁹**.” So, when Scripture uses the phrase, ‘**THE PROMISED LAND**,’ we recognize that ‘**God can promise only what He already possesses**.’ All blessings, whether in the form of property, wealth, a spouse, health, or offspring, come from God and are bestowed solely on the basis of His Grace.

According to Stuart Briscoe, “*we can’t really separate stealing from people and stealing from God. When one person steals another’s property, he not only takes something that person needs, he also takes something God entrusted to him; therefore, the thief has deprived God of it and sinned against him¹⁰*.” **Stealing is an affront to God’s sovereign decision to bestow blessings to whomsoever He pleases**. And because God blesses according to His own good pleasure, receipt of God’s blessings does not imply ‘*taking*’ or ‘*exploiting*’ or ‘*stealing*’ from others as ‘*the new, false theology*’ claims.

‘**STEALING**’ in the Bible does not just mean breaking into a house and stealing property. It also includes kidnapping (*the stealing of a person – Exodus 21:16*) — And less obvious but equally egregious, the 8th Commandment can be broken by employing deceptive trade practices – **theft**

⁹ We can extrapolate from this, ‘and all that is in it.’

¹⁰ *Ten Commandments: God’s Rules for Living*, by Stuart Briscoe, pg. 133.

through business – Deuteronomy 25:13. (Imagine if we had the wherewithal to apply iterations of this simple commandment to politicians and lobbyists!)

Now any discussion of the 8th Commandment cannot avoid addressing Acts 4:32-35 and Acts 5:1-11, two passages that are used frequently to promote the idea that the Bible supports Socialism. Let's look at the key verses:

And the congregation of those, who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed that anything belonged to him, but all things were common property – Acts 4:32

A man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of property and (he) kept back some of the price for himself, this with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet – Acts 5:1-2

Now in the first case, what is stressed is 'attitude.' The congregation was of 'a single heart and mind.' They acted toward one another in a spirit of gratitude for God's blessings and out of concern for one another. The generosity of the community was grounded in gratitude to God and the recognition of Him as the source of material blessings; it was not driven by political coercion. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, we know what happened – God struck them dead on the spot. But He did not strike them dead because they were not communists! He struck them dead for lying.

In the case of Acts Chapters 4 and 5, it is clear that believers retained ownership of their property, while at the same time, they were generous with their possessions. What they shared with one another, they did voluntarily. Had Ananias and Sapphira simply said, "here is a portion of our profits," they would have walked out of the assembly, returned to their house (which they owned) and lived happily ever after.

So how do we put this commandment into practice today? Ephesians 4:28 can guide us in this endeavor: "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."

Simply put, if you are stealing – **STOP!** In whatever area we may be acting as thieves, make a choice to stop. Instead ... do something useful with your hands. This may include work ... manual labor for income. It may involve helping someone who needs your help – examples include such things as, giving someone a ride, helping someone move, shopping for someone, who cannot get to the store. It could mean, reading to a child, mowing the grass of a neighbor, shoveling snow, cleaning someone's house, etc. The solution to 'taking' is 'becoming a giver' – be a giver of your time and abilities. Finally, when appropriate, be a giver of your income; joyful and cheerful giving pleases God.

We are told to love our neighbor¹¹. Love in Scripture is not so much 'an emotion' as it is 'a state-of-mind.' We 'love our neighbor,' by seeking the highest good for our neighbor, without expecting anything in return; it is 'giving without expecting remuneration.' With regard to the 8th Commandment, one way we 'love our neighbor,' is by respecting what is his, without taking it or desiring it for ourselves.

¹¹ See Mark 12:31