

The Ten Commandments:

The Eighth Commandment

The 8th Commandment. Introduction

You shall not steal.

- Exodus 20:15 (NRSV)

The 8th Commandment.

Introduction

Hebrew verb *g-n-v* (steal)

- lacks an explicit object; the object can be a person or object
- has the nuance of taking by stealth
- Rabbinic tradition and some modern scholars suggest kidnapping intended meaning (“You shall not steal a person”): previous two commandments dealt with “capital” offenses, so this one logically should also
- majority: lack of an object intended, giving expansive scope to the Commandment

The 8th Commandment.

Introduction

Brueggemann: “You shall not steal a person” not necessarily limiting. In ancient Israel:

- selfhood understood to “include the necessary ‘goods’ to make a life of dignity possible”
- (Fretheim): property understood “to be an extension of the ‘self’ of its owner, so that theft of property is a violation of person, not just a person’s wealth.”

At the Heart of the Commandment

God's creational intention:

- “God dignifies human beings by giving them work to do, from which they can expect to receive some of the fruits of their labor. . .” (Fretheim)
- Genesis 2:15-16: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; . . .”
- God gives many gifts to us for our enjoyment

At the Heart of the Commandment

Theft is the failure to accept this creational intention of God. It is the failure to accept:

- the fruits of the labors of Others
- the gifts given Others by God

At the Heart of the Commandment

A positive reading of the Commandment:

We should protect, honor, and celebrate:

- the fruits of the labors of Others
- the gifts given Others by God

Theft of Material Property

Examples:

- burglary
- shoplifting
- failing to return lost property
- not reporting all our income on an income tax form
- not returning excess money received from a malfunctioning ATM machine
- not paying for a missing item on a restaurant check
- failing to correct a bank error in our favor
- paying half price for a “child” ticket for a child just turned thirteen

Theft of Material Property

Many such thefts can deceptively appear “victimless” because the theft is spread over a large number of individuals or a large organization.

Theft of Material Property

More Examples:

- Failure to pay a just price for the labor or the fruits of the labor of Another:
 - buying a food item that does not cover the costs of the farmer's labor
 - paying a laborer a wage insufficient for living in dignity
- If charity is an obligation (= distributing in our role as Stewards that which Others need):
 - failure to contribute generously to fight poverty, hunger, famine
 - failure to tithe to the Church

Non-material Thefts

Theft of Creativity

- plagiarism
- failing to credit a felicitous turn of phrase or idea

Theft of Knowledge

- deliberately misleading someone
- flattering a person dishonestly

Theft of Opinion and Feelings

- deceiving another so they have an excessively high opinion of ourselves, or feel grateful to us when we are undeserving

Non-material Thefts

Theft of Time

- keeping Another waiting by being late

Theft of Reputation

- gossiping, engaging in the “language of hurt”

Theft from Future Generations

- wasteful use of Natural Resources

The Victims of Theft

Those we wrong, sin against in a theft are:

- the person we steal from
- God,
 - whose creational intention is that each person enjoy the fruits of their labors and the gifts God has given to them
- who has established methods for the distribution of the divine bounty

Restitution

In Israel

- theft of property a “tort” -- injured party should be restored as much as possible to their original condition
- theft of a person (kidnapping) was punishable by death

Partners in Crime

We become “partners” in a theft if we enjoy the benefits of the theft. *Examples:*

- buy a stolen item
- advance in the company hierarchy after gossip we were not responsible for “steals” the reputation and hence chances for advancement of a rival
- live comfortably, our house, food, clothing, entertainment dependant on the labor of Others who are paid an unjust wage for their work

Ownership

Ownership:

- is not a natural right, but comes from the grace of God
- carries responsibilities to use our wealth as a resource for the needs of Others
(Stewardship)

Ownership

Ownership and the World Economy

It is God's creational intention that:

- We and Others enjoy the fruits of our labors and the gifts God has given to us
- There should be no poverty. "There will, however, be no one in need among you." (Deuteronomy 15:4 NRSV). All selves should have the material goods necessary for a life of dignity

The positive side of the Eighth Commandment calls us to protect and celebrate the fruits of the labors of Others and the gifts given them by God

Ownership

Ownership and the World Economy

Yet the world is rank with poverty, hunger, with enormous disparity between the “haves” and “have-nots.” What does it mean?

Questions we must ask:

- Are we receiving more than what is justified by the “fruits of our labors”?
- Is our wealth based in part on theft from others (unjust wages, exploitation of the resources of other countries)?
- Are we doing our part to protect the fruits of the labor of Others, the gifts God has given to Others in the world?
- Are we good stewards, using our wealth as a resource for the needs of Others?

Ownership

Ownership and the World Economy

Themes on Wealth in the New Testament
include (from Wheeler):

- Wealth as a resource of human needs
- Wealth as a symptom of economic
injustice

Ownership

Wealth as a Resource for Human Needs

Ownership carries concrete and wide-ranging responsibilities

Scripture:

- Matthew 5:42: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” (NRSV)
- Luke 6:30: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” (NRSV)
- Luke 14:12-14
- Romans 12:20: “if your enemies are hungry feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink” (NRSV)

Ownership

Wealth as a Symptom of Economic Injustice

Failing to give help, sharing one's possessions with those in need is culpable. Why?

- we are called to share those gifts that are rightfully ours
- part of our wealth is “stolen.” We must try to restore that which we have stolen or are partners in stealing

Ownership

Wealth as a Symptom of Economic Injustice

Scripture:

- James 5:1-6
- Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus
(Luke 16:19-26)
- Parable of the Sheep and the Goats
(Matthew 25:31-46)

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