

The Commandment Of Property

The Commandments: Guarding Possessions

The final commandments deal with guarding our--and others'--most important possessions. In the Seventh Commandment, God forbids stealing. The Eighth Commandment is designed to protect reputations. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments remind us that protecting property is an issue of the heart. "Do not covet," God commands. God recognizes that the desire to guard our--and others'--possessions must begin in the heart. It is the sin-filled heart which desires to destroy others' possessions. When desire turns to action, the consequences become even more damaging.

The Seventh Commandment

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or goods, or get them by a show of right, but help him to improve and protect his property and business.

The Seventh Commandment calls us to respect others' property. Whether the property is very valuable or of not much value, God's will is clear. We are to respect the property of others.

"Stealing," of course, refers primarily to physically taking something that is not ours. But "stealing" also includes any action which causes a possession to become less valuable. When one breaks something belonging to another, they should replace that possession with an identical item of similar value. If you damage someone's property while using it, God's will in this commandment is to fix it--at your expense.

Stealing can also include things such as shoplifting, keeping change from a cashier who gives you too much change, defacing walls with graffiti, breaking windows...even on vacant buildings and, of course, out-right taking something from someone--by force, deceit or other sinful means.

Perhaps the worst kind of stealing is stealing from God. Numerous times God punished people who stole from God by either withholding offerings or giving Him unsatisfactory offerings. The first brothers Cain and Abel are an excellent example of this. Abel loved the Lord and gave God the very best--and first--portion of what he had. Cain, on the other hand, stole from God by giving God leftovers--and keeping the best things for himself.

What kind of offering do you give God? Is it a generous offering from the heart? Or do you simply give God the leftovers...or, worst, nothing at all! A good benchmark for giving is the Old Testament tithe. A "tithe" is 10 percent of what one has received. If you earn \$20, a tithe would be \$2.00. Is a tithe a lot? Not really. But it is enough to make an impact on our spending. That is why the tithe--and giving--is so important. If we love someone, it should show in our spending. Loving God should also result in an obvious--and generous--gift. Ten percent is a good start. But when we love God we love Him with ALL our heart, soul and mind...and treasures.

When asked, "How much should I give?" one pastor responded,

"Don't give until it hurts. Give until it feels *real* good."

That's how God wants us to love Him: with a generous heart that feels real good.

Paul in II Corinthians 8:5 described how an extremely poor group of Christians gave offerings to God in a remarkably generous, sacrificial way. Why did they do it? The answer is simple:

"They gave themselves *first to the Lord*...in keeping with God 's will." (II Cor. 8:5)

Perhaps what made giving so hard for Cain is that he didn't recognize that everything he had was God's. Without God, Cain would have nothing. Cain--like all of us--are merely managers or "stewards" of what has given. God gives everyone according to His choice, not ours. Whatever God gives to our use, is not ours. It is just something He gives us to manage and care for on His behalf...in a way to honor Him.

Do you steal from God? Those who do have not given themselves to the Lord *FIRST*. In fact, anyone who steals does not worship God first. They worship themselves first. That is the ultimate sin committed when someone steals. They put themselves--not God--first.

Whether stealing from God or others, the Seventh Commandment is very clear. We should not take, destroy or ruin others' property. Instead we should help them improve their property, possessions and all they have. It's not just what friends do; it's what God requires.

The Eighth Commandment

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God that we do not deceitfully lie, betray slander, nor defame our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

How valuable is your reputation?

Your reputation, that is, how others think of you, is the most important earthly possession we can have. People with a reputation that they are truthful and can be trusted have the greatest asset they can have.

Our reputation is what we build our lives on. All of our interactions with others--family, friends, work, and school--are based on our reputation. Our reputation is valuable. If we have a reputation for lying and disrespecting authorities, our chances of getting a good job are slim. If, on the other hand, we have a reputation for trustworthiness and making good decisions, there is virtually no limit to what we can do for others.

When others recognize our good reputation, they want our help and our assistance. They value our advice. They seek our partnership to build their lives and businesses...and invite us to share in their success.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." That's a good attitude to have. Yet this rhyme recognizes that our name is the most important thing we have. The reality in a sinful world is that people will call you names. They will wrongly accuse you. They will falsely lie about you and misrepresent you and your reputation to others. Like it or not, that does *hurt* us. It can cause remarkable and sometimes irreparable injury which can never, ever be outdone.

Imagine if you were applying for a job. Everything is in order. It's a good job, pays well, and you're really excited about it. But someone who doesn't like you tells the boss that you are a thief and can't be trusted. Then, on hearing this, the boss calls you. "We were going to hire you, but then we found out that you have a history of stealing. We're sorry but we just can't hire you."

Though it's an outright lie (you haven't stolen and don't have a history of stealing), you have been hurt in the worst way: someone lied about your reputation. Now, you must pay the price.

Whether they be government officials, teachers, administrators, Pastors and church workers or your friends and peers, God calls everyone--especially Christians--to uphold, defend and protect other's reputations. This means that we must not gossip about others...even when it's true. Instead, Luther reminds us we are to "defend them, speak well of them and put the best construction on everything."

Of course, this does not mean that we shouldn't report sinful conduct to the proper authorities. That is always our responsibility. However, just because someone did something wrong doesn't give us the right to "spread the mud" by ruining others' reputations by telling what they did to everyone.

Instead, we should guard others' reputation as we would have others guard ours. Tell everyone when someone does good. Tell the person directly when they have done something wrong. Jesus gave us this command in Matthew 18.

""If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Matthew 18:15 (NIV)

If someone hurts you, Jesus taught, go directly to him. And if you hurt someone, you go to them and seek forgiveness. Matthew 18 is not only a good guide for Christian relationships. It's one of the best ways to protect reputations.

The Ninth & Tenth Commandments

The Ninth Commandment

You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's House.

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God that we do not craftily seek to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, nor obtain it by a show of right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

The Tenth Commandment

You Shall Not Covet

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God that we do not estrange, force, or entice away from our neighbor our neighbor's wife, servants, or anything that is your neighbors.

"Coveting" is a sin of the heart. Coveting is wanting something that belongs to someone else so badly that all you can think of is having what that other person has.

The Ninth Commandment forbids having an unholy desire for other's property. The Tenth Commandment forbids us from a sinful obsession for the relationships of others.

Have you ever wanted what someone else had so much that you couldn't stop thinking of it? Have you ever been --or seen someone--so obsessed with someone else's boyfriend or girlfriend that it made them angry and jealous?

That's what coveting does: it makes us jealous for what others have. The more envious we are, the angrier we become. Unless stopped, that anger will lash out in ways that are very hurtful. The anger produced by jealousy and coveting can drive us to...

- * hurt or harm our neighbor, thus breaking the Fifth Commandment;
- * steal or ruin our neighbor's property, thus breaking the Seventh Commandment
- * break laws and disobey authority, thus breaking the Fourth Commandment.

The most devastating effect of coveting is not just the pain it causes to others and ourselves. No, the worst consequences of coveting is that it destroys our relationship with God. When we covet, we are rebelling against God's will for us. Instead of being content with what God has given us, we rebel. It is this ingratitude which threatens to destroy our faith and trust in God.

Are you content with what you have? Or are overwhelmed by an obsessive desire to have something you really don't need? St. Paul wrote,

"If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." I Timothy 6:8 (NIV)

Have you ever wanted something so badly you'd do anything to get it? Watch out! If you don't intend to get what you want by holy means (e.g. work, trade, a gift), it is coveting. And coveting, left to grow, will cause us to break other commandments as well.

Close To The Commandments

The Close To The Commandments

What does God say of all these Commandments?

"I, the Lord, Your god, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy to the thousands of them who love Me and keep My commandments."

What Does This Mean?

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we should fear His wrath and not act contrary to them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep His commandments. Therefore we should also love and trust in Him and willingly do according to His commandments.

In the *Close to the Commandments* God underscores the importance of the commandments. To those who follow the commandments, He gives His blessing. To those who don't, He threatens punishment.

In his explanations to each of the Ten Commandments, Luther reminds us that Christians keep God's commandments because "they fear and love God." That's really what the commandments are all about. The Ten Commandments are our response to God's covenant promise to save us. He promised to be our God. He promised to save us through Jesus Christ. And He promised to forgive us. God has performed perfectly in every promise He made to us.

Now it's our turn. We know we can't keep the Ten Commandments perfectly. But as Christians living in the forgiveness in Jesus Christ, we direct all our energies to obeying the Ten Commandments as best as we can.

Why do we keep these Ten Commandments? Not because we *have* to. Nor should we keep these Ten Commandments so that we can go to heaven by our good works.

The most compelling reason Christians keep these commandments is simply to thank God for making us His children. Each time we break them, with ingratitude we turn against God and His love.

Do you love God? Then love Him in return by loving Him with all your heart, soul and mind...and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Creeds: They Say What We Believe

Christians have used creeds from the earliest days of the Church. The Bible contains many examples of creeds. These can be found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the Book of Revelation and elsewhere.

The word "creed" comes from a Latin word which means "I believe...." Creeds are statements of what we believe. There are three major creeds used in the Christian Church: *The Apostles' Creed*, *The Nicene Creed*, and *The Athanasian Creed*. Each of these creeds is based completely on the Bible's

teaching regarding God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a simple, basic manner, these three creeds describe the Christian Faith.

The Creeds Are "Ecumenical"

Because these creeds are so highly regarded by Christians, these creeds are called "Ecumenical" (ek-you-MEN-ik-cal) Creeds. The word "ecumenical" simply means that Christians from many different denominations use them.

In addition to their use by Lutherans, the three Ecumenical Creeds are used by Romans Catholics, Episcopalians and many other mainline Christian Churches.

The Purpose Of Creeds

Creeds have several purposes. Creeds were written to...

- 1) Explain the Christian faith in a simple manner;
- 2) Educate converts and new Christians to learn of the faith;
- 3) Provide an easily-memorized summary of the Christian faith;
- 4) Help define and defend the Christian Faith from errors.

The Three Ecumenical Creeds

The *Apostles' Creed* is the shortest creed. It was not written by the Apostles. Written almost 300 years after the apostles, this creed is called the Apostles' Creed because it expresses the Apostles' faith.

The *Nicene Creed* was written about 325 AD in the city of Nicea. This creed was written in defense of the Christian faith against several early Church errors. That is one reason this creed is longer. It needed to clarify what Christians believed...and what things they did not believe. Jesus is "God of God, Light of Light, truly God" this creed affirms. Because of it's expanded declaration of Jesus' deity, the Nicene Creed is traditionally used in worship services celebrating Holy Communion.

The *Athanasian Creed* is the longest of the three Ecumenical Creeds. Named for Athanasius, this Creed. Also written in the early fourth century AD, this highly-detailed Creed describes the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in great detail. Thus the Nicene Creed's main teaching is "There are not three Gods, but only one God." Because of it's in-depth description of the Trinity, this Creed is often used on Trinity Sunday, celebrated the Sunday after Pentecost.

Creeds...And You

What do you believe about Jesus? The Trinity? The Church? How you are saved? All these questions—and more--the three Ecumenical Creeds answer. These Creeds state what the Church believes about Jesus.

Now the question is: What do **you** believe?