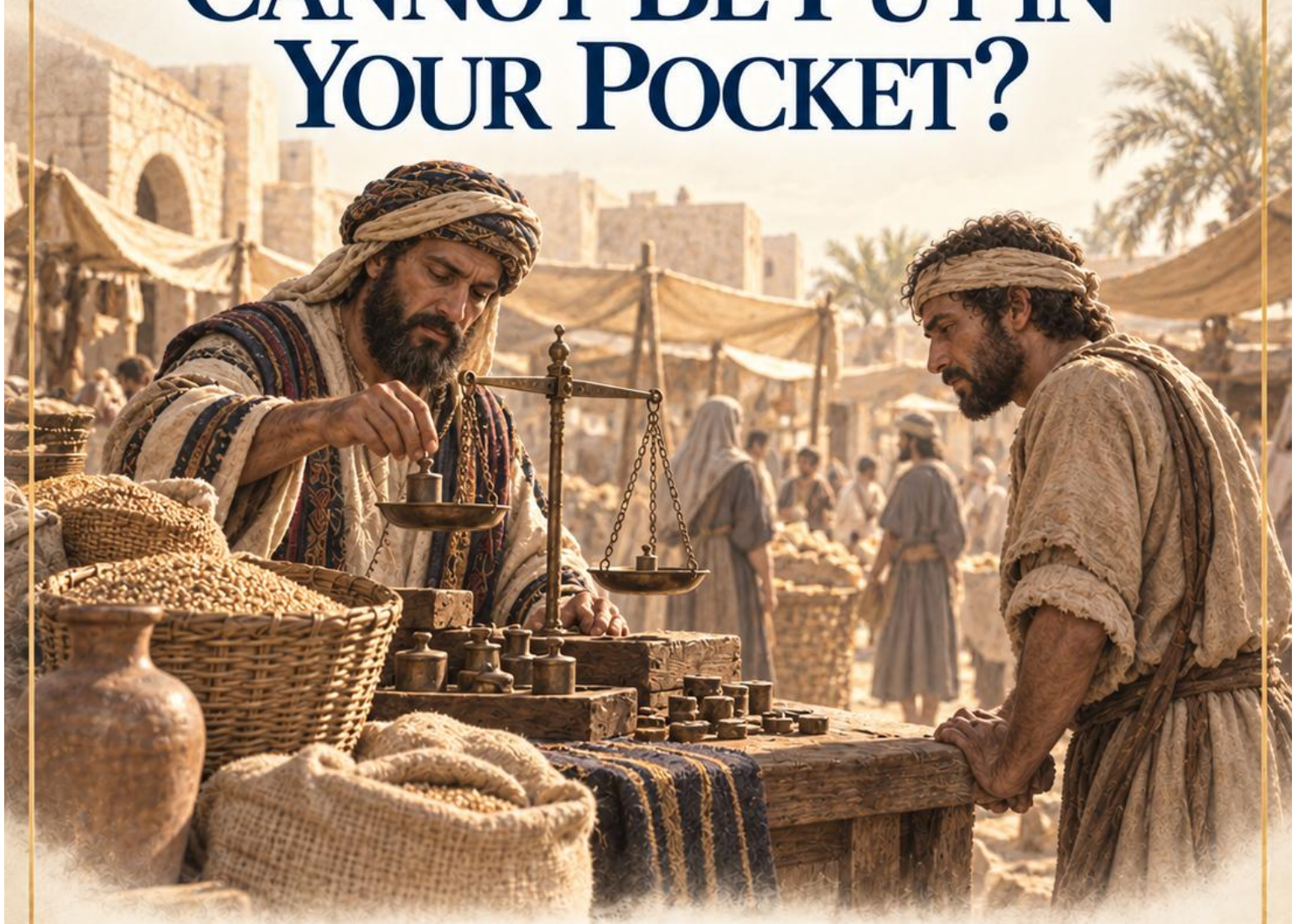


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE TEN WORDS WE THOUGHT WE KNEW

A TEN-PART SERIES | PART EIGHT OF TEN

CAN YOU STEAL SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE PUT IN YOUR POCKET?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

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**CAN YOU STEAL SOMETHING THAT
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HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

Aloha, everyone.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you are here in the room, joining us online or listening later, I am grateful that you have made space for the Word of God today.

Our invitation is simple: Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If you are our guest, we are especially honored that you are with us.

There is a guest card available, and it asks for only your first name and your email address.

We are not looking to crowd your life.

We would simply like the opportunity to thank you for being here and help you stay connected if you choose.

Parents, our Keiki Kids Center is available for your children, and our team is ready to welcome them with care.

After the service, I hope you will join us in the café.

There is coffee, there is conversation and there is always room at the table.

You know our definition of COFFEE by now: Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

That is more than a clever sentence to put near a coffee cup.

That is the good news we gather around.

Today we come to the eighth word in our series, The Ten Words We Thought We Knew.

The first seven words have shown us that the commandments are not a random list of restrictions.

They reveal the shape of a people whom God has rescued.

The God who brought Israel out of slavery taught them how free people live with Him and with one another.

Last time, we considered the seventh commandment and asked whether adultery can begin before anyone touches.

We saw that covenant betrayal can start in the heart long before it becomes visible in the body.

Today the command is shorter still.

Four words in our English Bible:

“Thou shalt not steal.”

Most of us hear that and immediately picture a hand slipping merchandise into a pocket.

That is theft, certainly.

But if that is all we hear, this commandment can become very easy to evade.

We can keep our pockets empty while our contracts, schedules, payrolls, conversations and computer screens tell another story.

So our question is this:

Can you steal something that cannot be put in your pocket?

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for speaking clearly enough to confront us and graciously enough to restore us.

Give us honest hearts as we hear Your Word.

Show us where we have taken what was not ours, withheld what belonged to another or benefited from another person's loss.

Guard us from easy accusations against others while we excuse ourselves.

Teach us the freedom of honest work, faithful stewardship, restitution and generosity.

Above all, lead us to Jesus, who paid a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our principal text is Exodus chapter 20, verse 15.

I am reading from the King James Version.

"Thou shalt not steal."

That is the Word of God.

Before we go farther, let me speak about giving.

At Reason Together Church, we do not pass an offering plate.

If you are our guest, we do not expect you to give.

If you have a home church, support your home church faithfully.

For those who call this church home and want to support its ministry, there is a giving box available.

Giving is voluntary.

It is an act of worship, and Scripture tells us that God loveth a cheerful giver.

No pressure, no performance and no purchase of God's favor.

We give because grace has already given so freely to us.

Now let us return to those four words.

"Thou shalt not steal."

The Hebrew verb is ganav.

It means to steal, to take away secretly or to carry off what belongs to another.

The word can describe taking property, but Scripture uses it in a wider moral world than the small picture we often carry in our minds.

It can involve property.

It can involve a person's freedom.

It can involve wages.

It can involve truth, credit, time and opportunity.

The common thread is not the size of the object.

The common thread is this:

I have treated what belongs to another as though it were mine to take, mine to keep or mine to control.

At Sinai, Israel did not hear this command as comfortable consumers surrounded by mass-produced goods.

They heard it as former slaves forming a covenant community in a demanding land.

A cloak might be someone's warmth through the night.

An ox might pull the plow that fed a household.

A sheep or goat might represent food, clothing, income and the future of a family.

A field was not merely real estate.

It was inheritance, identity, provision and a place within the covenant community.

To take from your neighbor could threaten more than convenience.

It could threaten survival.

This is why the laws that follow Sinai become so specific.

Exodus 22 speaks about stolen oxen and sheep.

It speaks about animals entrusted to another person.

It speaks about property borrowed and damaged.

It speaks about goods lost through negligence or dishonesty.

The commandment is one line, but its application reaches into ordinary life.

God was teaching Israel that freedom cannot last in a community where the strong quietly consume what belongs to the weak.

There is an important discussion among interpreters about whether the eighth commandment, in its narrowest original focus, referred especially to kidnapping.

The same Hebrew verb appears in Exodus 21:16:

“And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.”

Deuteronomy 24:7 uses similar language when an Israelite steals one of his brethren and treats him as merchandise.

Some scholars therefore argue that the command at Sinai points first to stealing a person.

Others understand it as the broad prohibition whose many forms are explained in the covenant laws that follow.

We do not have to pretend the discussion does not exist.

Either way, the Bible is unmistakably clear about both truths.

You must not steal a neighbor's property, and you must never reduce a human being made in God's image to property.

That matters because slavery was not an abstract concept for the people standing at Sinai.

They had just come out of Egypt.

They knew what it meant for a ruler to seize bodies, labor, children and time.

Pharaoh did not need to pick anyone's pocket to be a thief.

He stole the fruit of their labor.

He stole their freedom.

He tried to steal their sons and their future.

The eighth commandment therefore stands as a wall against the return of Egypt inside Israel.

The rescued must not become new Pharaohs to one another.

That is the first great enlargement of this commandment.

Theft is not measured only by what fits in a hand.

A person's liberty can be stolen.

A worker's pay can be stolen.

A family's inheritance can be stolen.

A neighbor's good name, idea or opportunity can be taken and used for someone else's gain.

Listen to Leviticus 19:13:

"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning."

Notice how closely God places these matters together.

Defrauding, robbing and withholding wages belong in the same moral neighborhood.

The employer who refuses to pay honest wages for honest work has not kept his hands clean simply because he never entered a store and hid an item under his coat.

He has taken labor and withheld what was due in return.

Deuteronomy 24:14 and 15 makes the concern even more personal:

"Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it."

The worker is waiting because the household needs that pay today.

God sees the distance between the person who can afford to delay and the person who cannot afford to wait.

He does not call that delay clever cash management.

He calls His people to pay what they owe.

James carries the same moral clarity into the New Testament.

James 5:4 says:

"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth."

Money does not have a voice, but injustice does.

The withheld wage cries before God.

The Lord is not impressed by a polished balance sheet that conceals a worker's loss.

This is a needed word because sermons on stealing have sometimes landed hardest on the person who is poor while giving the powerful a comfortable seat.

Scripture does not excuse stealing because someone is poor.

But neither does Scripture allow wealth, paperwork or institutional authority to disguise theft.

The person who takes a loaf that is not his has stolen.

The company that deliberately removes hours from a worker's time sheet has also stolen.

The employee who is paid for work and knowingly refuses to do it has taken what was not honestly earned.

The employer who demands unpaid labor because a worker is afraid to object has taken what was not freely given.

The commandment faces every direction.

We should also be careful with our language.

Not every price we dislike is theft.

Not every profit is exploitation.

Not every tax is robbery.

Not every mistake is fraud.

If we call every unfair feeling theft, the word loses its moral precision.

The question is whether someone intentionally takes, retains or manipulates what rightly belongs to another.

That requires truth, evidence and humility.

We should not use the eighth commandment as a dramatic label for every disagreement.

We should let it expose real taking wherever real taking occurs.

Israel also heard this commandment in a culture of weights and measures.

There were no electronic scanners at the market.

Grain, oil and other goods were weighed and measured.

A dishonest merchant could use one weight when buying and another when selling.

The difference might be small enough that a customer never noticed.

But repeated across many transactions, hidden fractions became profit.

Leviticus 19:35 and 36 says:

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have.”

Deuteronomy 25 forbids having different weights in the same bag.

Proverbs 11:1 says:

“A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight.”

God cares about the scale.

He cares about the measurement.

He cares about the small number placed where the customer may never look.

Micah 6 speaks of “the scant measure that is abominable” and “the wicked balances.”

Micah is not describing a masked bandit.

He is describing respectable commerce made corrupt by hidden advantage.

The transaction looks ordinary.

The theft lives in the measurement.

Our scales may now be digital, but the temptation has not disappeared.

It lives in a fee concealed in fine print.

It lives in a bill for work that was never performed.

It lives in a product deliberately described as something it is not.

It lives in a mileage claim that was enlarged, a tax figure knowingly invented or an invoice quietly doubled.

It lives whenever information is manipulated so that another person gives more or receives less than the truth requires.

You can steal with a scale.

You can steal with a signature.

You can steal with a spreadsheet.

You can steal with a clock.

You can steal with a sentence.

Nothing has to enter your pocket for something real to leave your neighbor's life.

Think about a boundary stone.

In ancient Israel, the boundaries of family land were marked by stones.

Move a stone a little at night and the field looks almost the same in the morning.

No door was broken.

No animal was carried away.

Yet one family's inheritance had become smaller and another person's estate had become larger.

Deuteronomy 19:14 says:

“Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance.”

Deuteronomy 27:17 pronounces a curse upon the one who removes his neighbor's landmark.

God defends the boundary that the powerful might prefer to blur.

We still move landmarks.

Sometimes the landmark is a contract term changed after trust has been given.

Sometimes it is a responsibility quietly shifted onto someone who has no power to refuse.

Sometimes it is another person's idea presented as our own.

Sometimes it is credit for work that another person performed.

Sometimes it is an opportunity redirected toward ourselves because we controlled the information.

The stone may be invisible, but the territory is real.

Jeremiah 23:30 gives us a surprising use of the language of theft.

The Lord says:

“Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.”

These false prophets borrowed sacred language from one another and presented it as a word from God.

They took words that were not theirs and attached divine authority to them.

That verse reaches beyond property into truth and authorship.

In our day, we might call some of this plagiarism.

It happens when a student submits another person's writing as his own.

It happens when a leader repeats someone's insight without acknowledgment and receives the praise.

It can happen in a pulpit when a preacher takes another pastor's labor, stories and words and presents them as though they came from his own study and life.

Learning from others is not theft.

Quoting, adapting and building on faithful work are part of how knowledge travels.

The moral line is crossed when we hide the source because we want the credit.

This matters in a world where copying is nearly effortless.

A photograph, song, book, course, design or computer program can be duplicated in seconds.

Because the original remains, we can tell ourselves that nothing was taken.

But the labor, permission and lawful use still belong to someone.

Digital does not mean ownerless.

Convenient does not mean permitted.

If I would be embarrassed for the creator to stand beside me while I use the work, that discomfort may be telling me something true.

Laws, licenses and permissions differ, so we should not turn every uncertain use into a confident accusation.

But neither should we pretend that anything visible on a screen is ours.

The honest question is, "Do I have the right to use this in the way I am using it?"

Then there is time.

Time cannot be placed in a pocket, but it can certainly be taken.

An employer can steal time by expecting workers to prepare before clocking in, remain after clocking out or answer constantly without compensation.

An employee can steal time by claiming hours not worked or repeatedly using paid responsibilities for private purposes while others carry the load.

A customer can steal time through deliberate deception and manipulation.

A business can steal time by creating obstacles designed to make a rightful refund or cancellation nearly impossible.

Human beings are not machines, and the commandment is not a weapon for obsessive surveillance.

Grace, rest and ordinary human needs belong in healthy work.

This is a summons to mutual faithfulness.

Workers should give honest labor. Employers should give honest pay, humane expectations and the respect due to people who bear God's image.

What about borrowed things?

Exodus 22 pays careful attention to property entrusted or borrowed.

That tells us that possession and ownership are not the same.

Something can be in my house, garage, inbox or bank account and still not belong to me.

Borrowing creates a duty of care and a duty of return.

Some of us have a private museum of other people's belongings.

A book has been on our shelf so long that we have mentally adopted it.

A tool came home for one project and now seems to live in our garage.

Money was called a loan when we needed it, but it became a gift in our memory once the pressure passed.

The amount may be small.

The habit is not.

One mark of integrity is that we remember the difference between "with me" and "mine."

The same principle applies when money or merchandise arrives by mistake.

The cashier gives too much change.

A refund appears twice.

The shipment contains two items when we paid for one.

The error was not our act, but keeping silent can become our choice.

Honesty does not ask only, "Can they discover this?"

Honesty asks, "Whose is it?"

There is also theft of identity.

In the ancient world, a stolen seal or false witness could redirect property and power.

Today a name, account number, password or personal record can be taken and used without the person ever seeing the thief.

The damage may arrive as debt, lost access, fear and months of labor to restore what was corrupted.

Technology changes the method.

It does not change the command.

At the center of all these examples is a false claim of ownership.

The thief says, openly or silently, “I have the right to decide what happens to this.”

But Scripture begins somewhere deeper.

Psalm 24:1 says:

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”

Everything belongs finally to God.

We are not absolute owners.

We are stewards.

That means the eighth commandment does more than protect my belongings from you.

It places my belongings under God.

My money is not permission to be selfish.

My authority is not permission to exploit.

My skill is not permission to deceive.

My access is not permission to take.

My possession is accountable to the One who owns the earth and all its fullness.

This is where the commandment becomes uncomfortable for people who have never shoplifted.

I may not take cash from your wallet, but do I use my power to make you absorb a cost that belongs to me?

I may not steal your car, but do I keep using what I borrowed after you need it back?

I may not enter your home, but do I take your idea, your labor or your credit?

I may not forge your signature, but do I withhold information so you will agree to something you would reject if you knew the truth?

I may not be a thief under criminal law, but have I learned to benefit from what rightly belongs to another?

Consider Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21.

King Ahab wanted a vineyard beside his palace.

He offered Naboth money or another vineyard.

Naboth refused because the land was the inheritance of his fathers.

His answer was not merely financial.

The land carried covenant and family meaning.

Ahab went home resentful.

Jezebel then arranged false charges against Naboth.

He was killed, and Ahab went down to take possession of the vineyard.

The transaction had the appearance of legality by the time the king arrived.

There was an accusation.

There were witnesses.

There was a judgment.

There was now vacant property.

But God called the entire arrangement what it was.

Through Elijah, the Lord asked Ahab:

"Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?"

Naboth's vineyard shows us that theft can wear official clothing.

Power can organize the paperwork, control the witnesses and still take what it has no right to possess.

The fact that a powerful person can complete the transfer does not make the transfer righteous.

God sees the vineyard.

God sees Naboth.

God sees the person whose voice was removed from the record.

That does not give us permission to pronounce every legal outcome corrupt.

It does tell us that legality and morality are not identical.

The eighth commandment examines not only whether I found a legal mechanism, but whether I honored my neighbor before God.

Now let us make this more personal.

When the Holy Spirit brings a specific act of stealing to mind, what does repentance look like?

It includes confession, but biblical repentance does not stop at feeling sorry.

The laws after Sinai repeatedly require restitution.

The thief must restore what was taken, and in some cases add compensation for the loss created.

God's concern is not merely that the offender suffer.

God's concern is that the injured neighbor be made whole as far as possible.

Restitution is one of the neglected words in Christian discipleship.

We may prefer a private prayer that leaves public damage untouched.

But if I still possess what I stole, the prayer should move my hands.

Return the object. Repay the money. Correct the invoice.

Restore the hours. Name the source. Give the credit.

Tell the truth to the person who bore the cost.

Sometimes restoration is simple.

Sometimes it is complicated.

The original item may be gone.

The person may be difficult to locate.

The harm may involve legal obligations, employment rules or other people's safety.

Do not use complexity as an excuse to do nothing.

Seek wise pastoral counsel and, where needed, competent legal or professional guidance.

Do not create another lie to hide the first one.

Ask what truthful repair requires and take the next faithful step.

Restitution does not purchase forgiveness.

We are not saved by paying enough to balance a spiritual account.

Grace cannot be bought.

Restitution is fruit, not price.

It is what repentance begins to look like when grace reaches the part of life that did the taking.

Zacchaeus shows us this beautifully in Luke 19.

He was a chief publican and he was rich.

Tax collectors could use the power of Rome to collect more than was due and keep the difference.

When Jesus came to Zacchaeus's house, grace did not leave his finances untouched.

Zacchaeus stood and said:

"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

Notice the order.

Jesus came to him before his ledger was repaired.

Grace entered the house.

Then the man who had organized his life around taking began to give and restore.

Jesus said:

"This day is salvation come to this house."

The changed relationship with possessions did not buy salvation.

It revealed that salvation had reached the house.

The eighth commandment therefore asks more than, "Have you stopped taking?"

It asks, "What is grace making you become?"

Paul answers that question in Ephesians 4:28:

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Look at the movement in that verse.

Steal no more. Work honestly. Do what is good. Have something to share.

God does not merely empty the thief's hand.

He retrains the hand.

The hand that took becomes a hand that works.

The hand that grasped becomes a hand that gives.

That is the positive design hidden inside the prohibition.

The opposite of theft is not merely inactivity.

It is productive love.

It is honest labor joined to generosity.

It is a community in which people do not ask only, “What may I keep?” but also, “Whom may I help?”

This keeps the sermon from shrinking into property protection for people who already have plenty.

God protects property, yes.

But He also frees property for mercy.

He does not say that everything I possess belongs to anyone who demands it.

He does say that my possession is not the center of the universe.

The steward receives from God, works before God and gives in love before God.

Generosity is freely offered, while theft takes without rightful consent.

We should not use guilt, public pressure or promises of divine payment to pry money from someone’s hand and call it spiritual maturity.

The God who owns everything does not need manipulation.

He calls for trust, obedience and willing worship.

Perhaps someone is thinking, “I have stolen, and what I did cannot be undone.”

That may be true in part.

Some losses cannot be perfectly restored.

Some years cannot be returned.

Some opportunities cannot be recreated.

Some damage will leave a scar.

The seriousness of the harm should not be minimized.

But neither should the mercy of Christ.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves.

One of them railed against Him.

The other admitted the truth about himself.

He said that they were receiving the due reward of their deeds, but that Jesus had done nothing amiss.

Then he said:

“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

Jesus answered:

“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

That thief had no remaining lifetime in which to rebuild his reputation.

He could not climb down from the cross and make restitution.

He brought no work, no payment and no record of reform.

He brought the truth about his guilt and trust in the King beside him.

Jesus gave him grace.

Do not misunderstand that grace.

The thief's inability to restore was not permission for us to refuse restoration when we can make it.

His story shows that salvation rests in Christ, not in our ability to repair ourselves.

Zacchaeus shows that when time and opportunity remain, grace sends us back toward the people and places our sin has harmed.

The thief on the cross and the tax collector at the table belong in the same Gospel.

One could not repay.

One could begin.

Both needed Jesus.

At the cross, the innocent One was stripped of His garments.

His clothing was divided by lot.

His freedom was taken.

His name was mocked.

His life was treated as disposable.

Yet no one finally took His life from Him against His will.

Jesus said that He laid it down.

The One who owned everything gave Himself for people who had stolen from God and neighbor in a thousand visible and invisible ways.

We have all withheld from God what is His.

We have taken His gifts and denied the Giver.

We have used time, bodies, abilities, money and breath as though they were ours without accountability.

We have crossed our neighbor's boundaries while defending our own.

We have taken credit, attention and advantage.

We have kept what should have been returned and excused what should have been confessed.

Jesus did not come merely to improve our record.

He came to bear our sin.

He died on the cross and was buried. On the third day He rose again.

He offers forgiveness that cannot be earned, life that cannot be purchased and a kingdom that cannot be stolen.

If you have never trusted Christ, the invitation is not to hide until your accounts look respectable.

Come into the light.

Confess your sin.

Trust the One who paid what you could never pay.

Receive the gift of eternal life.

Then let His grace teach you how to walk honestly, repair what can be repaired and become generous.

If that is the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The words do not save you.

Jesus saves.

But you can use these words to express honest faith in Him.

Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner.

I have taken what was not mine and withheld what I owed to You and to others.

I cannot make myself righteous.

I believe You died for my sins, that You were buried and that You rose again.

Forgive me.

Give me eternal life.

Make me Your own.

Teach me to tell the truth, make restitution where I can, work honestly and give freely.

I place my trust in You alone.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

For those who already belong to Christ, I want to offer several questions for the week ahead.

Do not answer them quickly.

Let the Holy Spirit search the places we usually exclude from this commandment.

Is there anything in my possession that belongs to someone else?

Is there money I promised to repay and have quietly stopped treating as a debt?

Have I received labor for which I have not paid fairly or promptly?

Have I claimed time for work I did not do?

Have I taken another person's words, design, image, music or idea without permission or acknowledgment?

Have I used hidden information to make another person carry a cost that belongs to me?

Have I kept silent about an error because the error benefited me?

Have I moved an invisible boundary because I had enough power to do it?

Then ask one more question:

What would restoration look like?

Not vague regret.

Not a promise to be more careful someday.

What name should be credited?

What object should be returned?

What amount should be repaid?

What record should be corrected?

What conversation should begin?

You may not be able to complete the repair in one day.

Begin with truth.

Make a plan.

Invite wise accountability.

Do not delay simply because delay is comfortable.

The worker in Deuteronomy was waiting for his pay before sunset.

Your neighbor may have been waiting for your honesty longer than you know.

Conviction is specific, while condemnation is shapeless and hopeless.

The Holy Spirit points to what must come into the light and leads us toward Christ.

In Christ, “thief” is not your master identity.

Ephesians says, “Let him that stole steal no more.”

The hand can learn a new purpose.

Maybe your application is not restitution but generosity.

You have not knowingly taken from anyone, but your hands are tightly closed.

The commandment has kept you from stealing, but the Gospel now invites you beyond mere restraint.

Work the thing that is good so that you may have to give to the one who needs.

Share a meal.

Meet a practical need.

Pay someone promptly.

Tip honestly.

Give credit publicly.

Return more carefully than you borrowed.

Use your authority to protect someone whose voice carries less weight than yours.

The world formed by the eighth word is not a world where everyone guards a pile and suspects every neighbor.

It is a world where trust becomes possible.

Your field is safe beside mine.

Your labor is safe in my employment.

Your idea is safe in my hearing.

Your weakness is safe in the presence of my power.

Your property is safe when entrusted to my care.

And when you are in need, my honest work becomes a means of love.

That is how former slaves refuse to rebuild Egypt.

That is how a church becomes a truthful economic community.

That is how a short commandment opens into a spacious way of life.

Let us pray.

Father, everything we have comes from You.

Forgive us for the ways we have treated Your gifts and our neighbor's goods as though they existed only for us.

Bring hidden taking into the light.

Give courage to those who need to confess, return, repay or correct.

Give wisdom where restoration is complicated.

Protect workers from exploitation, employers from deception, families from fraud and the vulnerable from people who would use power against them.

Make our work honest, our measurements just, our promises reliable and our hands generous.

Thank You that the blood of Jesus is sufficient even for sins we cannot fully undo.

Form in us the life of Christ, so that we move from taking to working, from grasping to giving and from secrecy to truth.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Before you leave this word behind, choose one concrete act.

Return one thing. Correct one record. Repay one amount.

Credit one person. Or meet one need.

Let obedience have an address, a name and a next step.

If you prayed to trust Christ today, or if you need prayer as you work through restitution, please speak with us.

You do not have to navigate the next step alone.

We will listen, pray and help you seek a truthful path forward.

And please join us in the café.

Bring your questions and your coffee.

Remember, COFFEE means Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Forgiveness does not make honesty unnecessary.

It makes honest change possible.

Next time, we come to the ninth word and a question that requires more care than many of us expect:

Is Every Lie a Violation of the Ninth Commandment?

We will listen to the courtroom language of “false witness,” consider what truthfulness requires and ask how we speak when truth and love seem difficult to hold together.

Until then, remember:

Theft begins whenever I treat what belongs to another as though it were mine to take.

Grace does more than close the thief’s hand.

Grace teaches that hand to work, restore and give.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH
THE TEN WORDS WE THOUGHT WE KNEW
A TEN-PART SERIES | PART EIGHT OF TEN

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Can You Steal Something That Cannot Be Put in Your Pocket?

Hearing Sinai Through Ancient Ears

Exodus 20:15

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Introduction

Most people hear 'Thou shalt not steal' and picture a hand placing merchandise in a pocket. That is theft, but the picture is too small. A pocket may stay empty while payroll, contracts, schedules, measurements, citations, devices and official records quietly transfer loss to a neighbor.

The eighth commandment protects property, yet its Biblical world also protects liberty, wages, inheritance, entrusted goods, honest measurement and truthful exchange. Its moral center is a false claim of ownership: I treat what rightly belongs to another as mine to take, keep or control. Nothing has to enter my pocket for something real to leave my neighbor's life.

This Commentary develops the sermon through Israel's memory of slavery, covenant laws, prophets, Naboth, Zacchaeus, the thief beside Jesus and Ephesians 4:28. It applies the command to work, time, plagiarism, digital permission, borrowing, mistaken transfers, identity, restitution and generosity while preserving evidence, consent and moral precision.

Controlling answer: Yes. Liberty, wages, time, credit, opportunity, identity and truthful interests can be stolen even though none fits in a pocket. Theft begins when I intentionally treat what belongs to another as mine to take, retain or control. The command also requires careful evidence. Not every price, profit, tax, mistake or unfair feeling is theft.

1. Hear the Eighth Word as a Rescued People

A Command After Egypt

Exodus begins the Ten Words with the God who brought Israel out of bondage. Pharaoh seized bodies, labor, children, time and future. Israel knew organized taking before it heard, 'Thou shalt not steal.'

The Rescued Must Not Become New Pharaohs

Freedom cannot endure where the strong consume what belongs to the weak. The command stands against rebuilding Egypt inside the covenant community through private theft, forced labor or institutional control.

2. Ganav Names Taking What Belongs to Another

More Than a Pocket

The Hebrew ganav means to steal or carry away what belongs to another. Its applications include property, but the size and physical form of the object do not define the moral wrong.

The Common Moral Thread

Theft begins when I intentionally treat another person's rightful property, liberty, wage, time, credit or access as mine to take, retain or control. The issue is not whether I can hide the gain. The issue is whose it is.

3. The Kidnapping Discussion Deserves Honesty

Ganav Can Describe Stealing a Person

Exodus 21:16 and Deuteronomy 24:7 use the theft language for kidnapping and treating a person as merchandise. Some interpreters therefore believe person-stealing is the command's narrowest original focus.

Either Reading Protects Person and Property

Other interpreters read a broad prohibition unfolded in the covenant laws. The study need not manufacture certainty. Scripture unmistakably forbids both stealing a neighbor's goods and stealing a human being's liberty.

4. Ancient Property Could Carry a Household Future

An Ox Was More Than Merchandise

An ox pulled the plow. A sheep or goat supplied food, fiber, income and future increase. A cloak could be warmth at night. Loss threatened more than convenience.

A Field Was Inheritance

Land carried provision, identity and a family's place in the covenant community. The eighth Word protects concrete goods because the neighbor whose life depends upon them matters to God.

5. Wages Can Be Stolen Without Touching a Wallet

The Worker May Be Waiting Today

Leviticus 19 joins defrauding, robbing and withholding wages. Deuteronomy 24 commands prompt payment because a poor worker sets his heart upon it. God sees the distance between the person able to delay and the household unable to wait.

The Withheld Wage Cries

James 5 says wages kept back by fraud cry before God. A polished balance sheet does not silence the loss. Honest labor creates an obligation that power must not conceal behind procedure.

6. Honest Work Faces Employer and Employee

Power Must Not Demand Free Labor

An employer can take by removing hours, requiring unpaid preparation or after-hours work or using a worker's fear to obtain what was not freely agreed.

Pay Must Receive Honest Labor

An employee can take by claiming hours not worked, falsifying expenses or deliberately refusing agreed responsibility while others carry the load. Human beings need rest and ordinary flexibility, so the command must not become obsessive surveillance. It requires mutual faithfulness.

7. Theft Can Hide in the Measurement

God Cares About the Scale

Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Proverbs and Micah condemn false weights, scant measures and wicked balances. A small hidden fraction repeated across many transactions becomes profit through another person's loss.

Our Measures Are Often Digital

The same principle reaches a concealed fee, invented mileage, an invoice for work not performed, a knowingly false tax figure or a product described to make another give more or receive less than truth requires.

8. The Landmark May Be Invisible

Moving One Stone Shrinks a Neighbor's Field

Deuteronomy forbids moving a boundary stone. No door needed to be broken. A small secret movement could enlarge one estate and diminish another family's inheritance.

Credit and Opportunity Have Boundaries

A contract term changed after trust, responsibility shifted to someone unable to refuse, another person's idea claimed as our own or an opportunity redirected through concealed information may move real territory even when no stone is visible.

9. Words and Creative Labor Can Be Taken

The Prophets Stole Words

Jeremiah 23 condemns prophets who stole words from one another and attached divine authority to them. They concealed source in order to possess authority that was not theirs.

Learning Is Not Plagiarism

Quoting, adapting and building upon others are part of faithful learning when sources and permissions are honestly handled. Plagiarism hides the source to receive credit. A sermon, paper, photograph, song, design or program visible on a screen is not automatically ownerless.

10. Time Can Be Taken

Schedules and Systems Can Conceal Loss

Off-clock expectations, false time claims, deliberate customer obstruction and manipulation of paid responsibility can all transfer time unfairly. Time cannot be returned to a pocket, but its loss is real.

People Are Not Machines

The command is not permission to count every pause as theft. Healthy work includes grace, rest and ordinary need. The question is whether deception or power intentionally makes another person bear time or labor that was not honestly agreed.

11. With Me Does Not Mean Mine

Borrowing Creates Duties

Exodus 22 distinguishes possession from ownership. A borrowed book, tool, deposit or loan remains another person's concern even after it has become familiar in my house or memory.

An Error Can Become My Choice

Excess change, a duplicate refund or an extra shipment may arrive without wrongdoing by the recipient. Silence and retention can then become a deliberate act. Honesty asks whose it is rather than whether anyone will discover it.

12. Identity Theft Takes More Than Data

A Name Can Be Misused

A stolen name, password, account number or personal record can redirect money and access without thief and victim meeting. The taken information may fit on a screen while the harm fills months.

Restoration Includes Labor and Security

The victim may carry debt, lost access, fear, damaged reputation and the work of rebuilding. Technology changes the method and distance of taking, not the command.

13. Everything We Hold Remains Under God

The Earth Is the LORD's

Psalm 24:1 places every human possession beneath divine ownership. We are real owners and responsible stewards, not absolute sovereigns.

Stewardship Confronts Selfish Control

Money, authority, skill and access are not permission to exploit. Yet stewardship also does not authorize anyone to take another person's goods through guilt or force. Generosity is freely offered. Theft disregards rightful consent.

14. Naboth Shows Theft in Official Clothing

Killed and Also Taken Possession

Jezebel arranged false charges and Naboth's death. Ahab then took the vineyard. Elijah exposed the joined crimes: the king had killed and possessed what covenant inheritance did not make available to him.

Legality and Morality Are Not Identical

Accusation, witnesses, judgment and completed transfer gave the seizure an official appearance. God still saw Naboth and the stolen vineyard. This does not make every legal outcome corrupt, but it prevents procedure from becoming automatic moral innocence.

15. Repentance Moves Toward Restitution

Private Regret Cannot Keep the Benefit

Biblical laws repeatedly require return and compensation. If I still possess what I took, prayer should move my hands. Return the object, repay the money, correct the record, restore the hours, name the source or give the credit.

Repair May Require Wisdom

Some losses cannot be fully reversed, and some actions involve law, employment, safety or third parties. Complexity is not permission to do nothing. Seek competent help and take the next truthful step without creating another wrong.

16. Zacchaeus Shows Grace Reaching the Ledger

Jesus Entered Before the Accounts Were Repaired

Zacchaeus received Christ and then pledged generosity and fourfold restoration where he had taken by false accusation. Grace entered the house before his ledger was repaired.

Restitution Is Fruit, Not Price

The changed use of possessions did not buy salvation. It revealed that salvation had reached his money and his neighbors. When time and opportunity remain, grace sends the repentant person toward concrete repair.

17. Grace Retrains the Hand

Steal No More, Work and Give

Ephesians 4:28 moves from stopping theft to honest work and then to giving to the person in need. God does not merely empty the thief's hand. He gives it a new purpose.

The Opposite of Theft Is Productive Love

A truthful community protects property and also frees possessions for mercy. Honest work becomes a means of care. The question grows from what may I keep to whom may I help.

18. The Thief Beside Jesus Could Not Repay

He Brought Guilt and Trust

The repentant thief admitted the justice of his sentence, confessed Jesus' innocence and asked the King to remember him. He had no remaining life for restitution or reputation. Jesus promised paradise.

One Could Begin and One Could Not

Zacchaeus could restore. The crucified thief could not. Neither purchased salvation. Their stories distinguish inability from refusal and place forgiveness entirely in Christ.

For the Person Ready to Trust Christ

Come into the light and trust the One who paid what you could never pay. You may pray: Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I believe You died for my sins, were buried and rose again. Forgive me and make me Your own. Teach me to tell the truth, make restitution where I can, work honestly and give freely. I place my trust in You alone. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Pastoral Summary

1. Ganav concerns taking what belongs to another and can include stealing a person.
2. Israel heard the command as former slaves who must not become new Pharaohs.
3. Theft can remove property, liberty, labor, wages, inheritance, time, credit, opportunity or identity.
4. The kidnapping-focused interpretation is important but does not erase the wider Biblical prohibition of theft.
5. Ancient animals, clothing, tools and land could carry a household's survival and future.
6. Wages kept back by fraud cry before God.
7. Employer exploitation and employee deception both violate honest exchange.
8. False measurements turn hidden fractions into profit through another person's loss.
9. Landmarks, contracts, credit and opportunity protect real boundaries.
10. Plagiarism conceals source to possess credit or authority that belongs to another.
11. Digital does not mean ownerless, though rights, licenses and permissions differ.
12. Possession and ownership are not identical, and mistaken receipt does not automatically transfer title.
13. Naboth shows that official procedure and legal possession do not guarantee righteousness.
14. Not every price, profit, tax, mistake or unfair feeling should be labeled theft.
15. Restitution is concrete fruit of grace, never the purchase price of grace.
16. Zacchaeus could begin to repair while the crucified thief could not. Both needed Jesus.
17. Ephesians 4:28 moves the hand from stealing to honest work and generosity.
18. Grace does more than close the thief's hand. Grace teaches that hand to work, restore and give.

Ownership, Restitution and Generosity Worksheet

1. Identify anything in your possession that belongs to someone else.
2. Identify money promised for repayment that you have stopped treating as debt.
3. Ask whether you received labor for which another person was not paid fairly or promptly.
4. Ask whether you claimed pay, time, expenses or credit you did not honestly earn.
5. Identify words, images, music, designs, code or ideas used without needed permission or acknowledgment.
6. Ask whether hidden information caused another person to carry a cost that belonged to you.
7. Identify an error, refund, payment, change amount or shipment kept because it benefited you.
8. Name an invisible boundary moved through power, paperwork or control of information.
9. State the evidence and rightful interest before applying the label theft to another person.
10. Identify what object, amount, record, credit or access can be restored now.
11. Identify any legal, employment or safety issue requiring competent guidance.
12. Choose one act of honest work or freely offered generosity.
13. Bring both guilt and inability to Jesus Christ, who saves apart from repayment.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Israel's rescue from slavery shape the eighth commandment?
2. What does ganav contribute to the meaning of stealing?
3. Why do some interpreters connect Exodus 20:15 especially with kidnapping?
4. Why does either reading still protect both liberty and property?
5. How could an ox, cloak or field represent a household's survival?
6. Why does Scripture place withheld wages near robbery and fraud?
7. How can employers and employees each violate honest exchange?
8. What modern practices resemble false weights and scant measures?
9. How can a boundary, credit or opportunity be taken without moving property by hand?
10. What distinguishes learning from plagiarism?
11. Why does digital access not make a work ownerless?
12. How can time be stolen without treating normal rest as misconduct?
13. What duties follow when borrowed or mistakenly received goods remain with us?
14. What does Psalm 24 add to legitimate human ownership?
15. How did law and official process conceal the taking of Naboth's vineyard?
16. Why must accusations of theft require evidence and precision?
17. How does restitution differ from regret and from payment for forgiveness?
18. Why do Zacchaeus and the crucified thief belong in the same Gospel?
19. How does Ephesians 4:28 transform the purpose of the hand?

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, the earth and all its fullness belong to You. Forgive us for treating Your gifts and our neighbor's rights as though they existed only for us. Expose the object, amount, hour, credit, opportunity or advantage we have taken, retained or controlled without right.

Protect workers from exploitation, employers from deception, families from fraud, creators from concealed appropriation and the vulnerable from those who would take liberty or identity. Make our measurements just, our records truthful, our promises reliable and our use of power accountable.

Give courage to return, repay, correct and acknowledge. Give wisdom where repair is complicated or incomplete. Keep us from calling every disagreement theft and from using complexity to avoid what truth requires. Teach us that restitution is fruit of grace and never its purchase price.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, the innocent King who gave Himself for thieves. Thank You that the unable may receive mercy and the able may begin repair. Retrain our hands to work honestly, restore faithfully and give freely. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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5. Psalm 24:1
6. Proverbs 11:1; 22:28
7. Jeremiah 23:30
8. Micah 6:9-12

9. Malachi 3:5
10. Matthew 6:19-34; 19:16-22
11. Luke 19:1-10; 23:32-43
12. John 10:1-18
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