

# Sticky Fingers vs. Open Hand

Exodus 20:15

## Introduction:

**Exodus 20:15** You shall not steal

- **Stealing is taking something that belongs to someone else without their permission**

### 1. Violated by Theft

- One of our daughters friends from So.Cal visited SF and went to the **Nike** store. They put their new shoes in the trunk only to come back to their car robbed.
- I remember when my **car** was broken into and my prescription sunglasses, jacket and Bible was stolen in the parking lot of Kmart in Colma (now Kohls)
- **Pickpockets** in Fisherman's Wharf
- **Scammers** on the phone and internet trying to trick people out of their money
- **Catalytic converters** are popular among thieves

### 2. Employee Theft

- 75% of employees have stolen at least once from their employer. (Source: [CalRest.org](#))
- More than 30 percent of business bankruptcies are due to employee theft. (Source: [Service Management Group](#))
- 90% of all significant theft losses come from employees. (Source: [Willis North America](#))
- Cash theft is the top cause for over 20% of businesses. (Source: [Balance Innovations](#))
- 40% of employees who steal from their work have experienced HR red flags prior. (Source: [SHRM](#))
- 60% of employees would steal if they knew they wouldn't get caught. (Source: [FBI](#)) <https://www.embroker.com/blog/employee-theft-statistics/>

## I. Why We Steal

### A. We Covet Material Things (Joshua 6:19-20; 7:20-21)

**Joshua 6:18-19** <sup>18</sup> But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. <sup>19</sup> But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord."

- God commanded the Israelites not to plunder from Jericho
- Achan did plunder money and a beautiful cloak
- Israel suffered defeat at their next battle at Ai

**Joshua 7:20-21** <sup>20</sup> And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly **I have sinned** against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did: <sup>21</sup> when **I saw** among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar,

and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then **I coveted** them and **took** them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

- Achan forsook God's command to not plunder, but he did because he coveted and failed to trust in God's provision
- We think we can take when no one is looking, but God is
- Claiming deductions that are unlawful
- Taking off the top

## **B. We Treasure Earthly Idols** (Mt 6:19-21,24; Prov 15:16)

**Matthew 6:19-21,24** <sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

- The Ancient Middle East measured wealth through 3 commodities: **Garments, Grain and Gold**
- **Clothing** was often woven with gold and/or colored with expensive dyes
  - Naaman brought Elisha changes of clothes as a reward for healing his leprosy (2 Kings 5)
  - Achan coveted a fine Babylonian outfit - God judged him for it (Josh 7)
  - Joseph possessed a coat of many colors (Gen 37) but it became a symbol of jealousy for his brothers
- **Grain** measured wealth
  - The Rich Young Fool had so much grain, he had to build a new silo (Lk 12)
  - A man had 100 measures of wheat in Lk 16
- **Gold** was valuable
  - Those who had gold would hide it in their floor
  - Thieves would break in and steal the gold
- **Earthly treasures are temporal in:**
  - Duration
  - Value
  - Satisfaction
- "Lay Up" (*thesaurizo*) and "Treasures" (*thesauros*) both come from the same root, which is where we get our English word "Thesaurus" which is a treasury of words
- **There are only 3 things that last forever:**
  - **God** – Invest in the future by getting to know God more intimately
  - **The Bible** – Spend time in His Word - it endures forever

- **Souls** - live forever in heaven or hell - get as many as you can into heaven be sharing the Good News of Christ
- The problem is that we've switched the price tags placing the more expensive price tags on temporal things and put the inexpensive price tags on the most enduring items

**Proverbs 15:16** Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.

### C. We Don't Trust God's Provision (Mt 6:28-32)

**Matthew 6:28-32** <sup>28</sup>So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; <sup>29</sup>and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

- **"Worry" is an anxiety caused by fearing what can not be controlled**
  - "Worry is the anxious care that comes from assuming a responsibility which we are incapable of discharging." (Dwight Pentecost, *Man's Problem, God's Answer*)
  - "Worry is concern about something that one *can do nothing about* and that he *cannot even be sure about.*" (Jay Adams, *What To Do About Worry*)
- **Provident** (Provide) = pro (beforehand), video (to see) – God sees beforehand all that we need
- God wants to provide for us
- Stealing tells God that He's not sufficient
- Stealing tells God that we are our own provider and that His rules don't apply to me
- We ignore the 10 commandments by not honoring others, as well
- Phillip Ryken writes that "every theft is a failure to trust in his provision. Whenever we take something that doesn't belong to us, we deny that God has given us or is able to give us everything we truly need. Therefore, keeping the eighth commandment is a practical exercise of our faith in God's providence." (*Written In Stone*, p. 175)

### D. We Steal What God Provided To Someone Else (1 Chron 29:11-12; James 1:17)

**1 Chronicles 29:11-12** <sup>11</sup>Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. <sup>12</sup>Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above

- The cold-hearted sin of looting takes no consideration that property belongs to someone else
- God recognizes the right to ownership
- Ie/ **Jacob stole Esau's birthright** (Gen 27)
- John Calvin: "For we must consider, that what each individual possesses has not fallen to him by chance, but by the distribution of the sovereign Lord of all, that no one can pervert his means to bad purposes without committing a fraud on a divine dispensation."  
(*Institutes*, p. 408)  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/calvin-institutes-christianity/book2/chapter-8/eighth-commandment.html>
- J.I. Packer: "Temptations to steal property – that is, to deprive another person of what he or she has a right to – arise because fallen man always, instinctively, wants more than he has at present and more than others have." (*Keeping The Ten Commandments*, p. 89)

## E. We Contradict Christ's Humility And Sacrifice (Phil 2:5-8)

**Philippians 2:5-8** "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, **did not consider it robbery to be equal with God**, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

- V. 6 "**equal**" = Gr. *Isos* (ie/ isosceles triangles with 2 equal sides)
  - Stated as an assumption, Christ did not consider it "robbery to be equal with God." He did not grasp firmly to retain His reputation, but He let it go freely.
- "**robbery**" = selfish hanging on to, grasping
  - Christ willing to give up the reputation, glory & splendor of being God to take on form of a man
  - Opposite of Lucifer (Ezek 28) who wanted to be like God & grasped for it
  - Jesus Is God:
    - Col 1:19; 2:9 "All the fullness of the Godhead"
    - 1 Tim 1:11 "blessed God"
    - Tit 2:13 "Our great God & Savior, Jesus Christ"
    - Heb 1:8 – God calls Christ God
  - Commentator Gordon Fee gives us a clear definition of "robbery": "*arpagmos* is a noun formed from a verb that means to 'to seize, steal [hence the KJV's 'robbery'], snatch, take away.' Although its meaning has been much debated, there is a growing consensus that its probable sense leans toward something like either "a matter of grasping or seizing" or "something grasped for one's own personal advantage." In the first option the emphasis lies on the verbal side of the noun, on

the idea of “seizing” as such. Thus Christ did not consider “equality with God” to consist of being “grasping” or “selfish”; rather he rejected this popular view of kingly power by pouring himself out for the sake of others. The alternative, which is probably preferable, is to see the word as a synonym of its cognate *harpagma* (“booty” or “prey”), which in idioms similar to Paul’s denotes something like “a matter to be seized upon” in the sense of “taking advantage of” it.” (*Philippians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, Vol. 11, p. 94*)

- “What is meant is that the heavenly Christ did not selfishly exploit His divine form and mode of being, but by His own decision emptied Himself of it or laid it by, taking the form of a servant by becoming man.” (Kittel, Bromily & Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 661, Logos edition)

## II. How We Steal

### A. Theft (Ex 20:15)

**Exodus 20:15.** You shall not steal

- “*Ganaf*—stealing—covers all conventional types of theft: burglary (breaking into a home or building to commit theft); robbery (taking property directly from another using violence or intimidation); larceny (taking something without permission and not returning it); hijacking (using force to take goods in transit or seizing control of a bus, truck, plane, etc.); shoplifting (taking items from a store during business hours without paying for them); and pickpocketing and purse-snatching.” (Rob Schenck, *The Ten Words That Will Change a Nation: The Ten Commandments*, p. 155)
- The Heidelberg Catechism  
*Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?*  
*A. God forbids not only outright theft and robbery, punishable by law. But in God’s sight theft also includes all scheming and swindling in order to get our neighbor’s goods for ourselves, whether by force or means that appear legitimate, such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God. In addition God forbids all greed<sup>4</sup> and pointless squandering of his gifts.*  
<https://thereformedmind.wordpress.com/2012/04/02/heidelberg-catechism-questions-110-111/>
- Barna reported that 90 percent of evangelical Christians say that they have never broken the eighth commandment. (George Barna, *The Barna Report*, 1992-93, p. 117)

### B. Cheating (Prov 20:7; Dt 25:13-16; Amos 8:5)

**Proverbs 20:17** Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.

**Deuteronomy 25:13-16** <sup>13</sup>“You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. <sup>14</sup>You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. <sup>15</sup>A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be

long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. <sup>16</sup> For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God.

- Cheating on **taxes**
  - **Insurance** fraud
  - **Identity theft**
  - Corporation cheat by **not reporting income**
  - **Claim** your product does more than it can or last longer than it does
  - **Plagiarism**
  - Cheating on an exam steals from those who don't cheat
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- John Calvin said, "It follows, therefore, that not only are those thieves who secretly steal the property of others, but those also who seek gain from the loss of others, accumulate wealth by unlawful practices and are more devoted to their private advantage than to equity."

### C. **Swindling, Bribery, Extortion** (Ex 22:25; Ps 15:5; Prov 28:8)

- Excessive interest

**Exodus 22:25** If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

- Embezzlement, bribery, extortion

**Psalms 15:5** He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

- "put out his money at usury" = lit. "he does not put the bite on them" (BKC)

**Proverbs 28:8** One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion gathers it for him who will pity the poor.

- if you cheat or extort to gain money, it will eventually be taken away and be given to the poor
- this is a verse of justice that God will eventually carry out

### D. **Laziness** (Prov 6:10-11; 18:9)

**Proverbs 6:10-11** <sup>10</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, <sup>11</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

**Proverbs 18:9** He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.

- Working 7 hours but clocking in for 8 hours is stealing
  - The average employee is only productive for [2 hours and 53 minutes per day](#).
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<https://goremotely.net/blog/productivity-statistics/>

- chatty coworkers and office noise were cited as the top distractions for 80% of workers in the same study.
- the average employee is interrupted from their work 56 times a day.  
<https://www.applauz.me/resources/employee-productivity-statistics>

#### **E. Government Corruption** (Prov 11:16)

**Proverbs 11:16** A gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches.

- Capitalism, Socialism and Communism have some merit. Some more than others. But the weak point to all of them is corruption.
- Capitalists steal from their employees and employers
- Socialists and Communists leaders take for themselves and don't really support the working class
- Stealing from the government
- When the government borrows without intending to repay, deficit spending steals from future generations
  
- Skip Ryan: "In capitalism, the money is yours to do with it what you want. In socialism, it belongs to the state, and the state uses it for what the community needs. In Christianity, it's God's, and it must be used as He directs." (cited by Alistair Begg, *Pathway To Freedom*, p. 176)

#### **F. Slavery** (Ex 21:16)

**Exodus 21:16** Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

- Lives were stolen from their home and brought to Europe and the Americas against their will in slavery
- There is modern day slavery today – from sex slaves to brick factories
  
- Kevin DeYoung: "The whole slavery system that existed in the New World worked by forcibly taking people from their homeland (although in some cases, they'd already been taken by people in that homeland, and then sold into slavery). It was a violation of the eighth commandment." (*The Ten Commandments*, Kindle version)

#### **G. Robbing God** (Mic 3:8-10; Dt 15:10)

- Robbing His glory – taking credit for what God did
- Robbing Him from what is His – not giving to the Lord and helping others
- Poor stewardship is like robbery because we're not taking care of what is His

**Micah 3:8-10** <sup>8</sup>Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. <sup>9</sup>You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. <sup>10</sup>Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may

be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need

**Deuteronomy 15:10** You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

### **Conclusion:**

- **Trust the Gospel of Christ which is the ultimate anti-theft antithesis in God's gracious and sacrificial salvation.** (Mt 27:38 – He died between and on behalf of thieves)

**Matthew 27:38** Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

- **Set your treasure in heaven, not earth.** (Mt 6:19-32)
- **Work with integrity.** (Prov 19:1; 20:7)

**Proverbs 19:1** Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

**Proverbs 20:7** The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.

### **Discussion:**

- Have you ever been robbed or cheated? How did feel?
- What does the sin of stealing say about one's relationship with God?
- How do we take from God what belongs to Him? How is poor stewardship akin to theft?
- How can we be better givers than takers?