

Name: _____



Advanced Bible Study Course

Lesson 42: The Law of God – Eighth Commandment

LORD'S DAY 42

Q. 110. WHAT DOETH GOD FORBID IN THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT?

ANSWER: GOD FORBIDS NOT ONLY THOSE THEFTS (A) AND ROBBERIES (B) WHICH ARE PUNISHABLE BY THE MAGISTRATE; BUT HE COMPREHENDS UNDER THE NAME OF THEFT ALL WICKED TRICKS AND DEVICES, WHEREBY WE DESIGN TO APPROPRIATE TO OURSELVES THE GOODS WHICH BELONG TO OUR NEIGHBOUR (C); WHETHER IT BE BY FORCE, OR UNDER THE APPEARANCE OF RIGHT, AS BY UNJUST WEIGHTS, ELLS, MEASURES, FRAUDULENT MERCHANDISE (D), FALSE COINS, USURY (E), OR BY ANY OTHER WAY FORBIDDEN BY GOD; AS ALSO COVETOUSNESS (F), ALL ABUSE AND WASTE OF HIS GIFTS (G).

(A) I COR. 6:10; (B) I COR. 5:10, ISAIAH 33:1; (C) LUKE 3:14, I THESS. 4:6; (D) PROVERBS 11:1, 16:11, EZEKIEL 45:9&10, DEUT. 25:13; (E) PSALM 15:5, LUKE 6:35; (F) I COR. 6:10; (G) PROVERBS 23:20&21, 21:20

All forms of theft forbidden

In the eighth commandment, God forbids all forms of theft. God desires to protect our possessions through His good commandments. First of all, any form of theft and robbery which the authorities also punish is forbidden. Theft is still seen as illegal by most people, but this also includes all efforts by sinful methods to make ourselves richer at the expense of others. This is done sometimes under the appearance of right, for instance, if we, in going against what the law intended, make use of loopholes in the law.

Honesty in business

In addition to theft, the above answer sums up a few dealings in doing business which are forbidden:

- False weights: weights and scales must report the correct weight, and are therefore certified by the government. If they indicate more than the actual weight, the buyer pays more than that which is required.
- Incorrect ells and measures: formerly textiles were measured by ells, and liquid substances by liters, which have a legally prescribed length or capacity.

However, often the ell was shortened, or liquid measures were used with less content, so that the buyer received less than that to which he was entitled.

- Fraudulent merchandise: this is when we sell inferior merchandise to a customer, but tell him that it is a good product, or when we, for instance, do not tell the customer about hidden faults of the product we want to sell him.

- False coins: coins were to have a certain prescribed amount of silver or gold or other metal, which gave the coin its value. But it often happened that coins of less weight were used, or of a different alloy, so that the buyer received less than that to which he was entitled. Paul wrote: *“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such” (I Thessalonians 4:6).*

- Usury: usury is also mentioned as a form of theft. In banking, but also in lending money to others, usury did and does occur, which is to ask more interest than what is reasonable. This happened especially when people had financial problems and had no other option but to borrow money from the usurer. Money may be borrowed, and interest asked for it, because the lender can also use that money to buy goods and make a profit. However, lending money to others may not only serve self-interest; it should also give the other a real chance to solve his financial problems. This can also apply to unusually high rent. In old times, lending money was seen as a form of charity and charging interest was seen as making improper use of the need of others. The rich person who was able to lend money was looked upon as someone who was endowed by God with talents with which he could and had to help his fellow man in time of need. In Old Testament Israel, asking interest from one's own people was forbidden: *“Take thou no usury of him, or increase (interest): but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee” (Leviticus 25:36).* They were only allowed to charge interest to strangers (merchants from other countries, for instance). Lending money was then seen as a business transaction.

- This commandment of charity is also in the New Testament, although asking interest was not forbidden. In the sermon on the Mount, Christ points to His Father's example: *“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35).*

The commandment to help our neighbour

Paul urges the believer to work, *“that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Ephesians 4:28).* The talents, also the talent to work, which we have received from God, we have received to provide for ourselves and our family, but also to help our neighbour with what is left. This includes our neighbour within the congregation but also those outside and afar off. Paul wrote: *“Now He that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness; being enriched in everything to all bountifulness” (II Corinthians 9:10&11).*

Therefore all miserliness and greed are forbidden. We may freely make use of the goods given us, but we are not permitted to let our neighbour, whether close by or far away, who does not have enough to live reasonably, to suffer.

The same applies to misuse and wastefulness of gifts we have been given. If we use the gifts God has given us solely for our own enjoyment, so that we are not able to adequately help others, we are misusing these gifts. James pronounces judgment over such a use of riches: *“Your riches are corrupted”* (James 5:2). Notably the Old Testament gives evidence of God’s care for the poor by all kinds of rules and laws for society, which forbid extortion of the poor and employees, but which also sharply condemns the failure to help a neighbour in need. However, the New Testament also points out what we are required to do for our neighbour. Therefore in the first Christian congregations collections were taken on Sunday for the poor in their own congregation and those outside of the congregation.

No stealing from the government or from employers

In connection with the eighth commandment other forms of stealing must also be mentioned, which are detrimental to the government or our employer, such as an inaccurate report of our income and wealth for tax purposes; declarations of costs which we did not make; laziness in the work we are to do or wasting of working hours by talking and telephone conversations without any concern for our employer; a reporting of hours worked in excess of those we actually worked; the unlawful use of facilities which the employer extended to us; and stealing of the goods of our employer.

Unlawful self-enrichment

Also to be mentioned here as a form of theft is unlawful self-enrichment, which at times involves great risks: pursuing financial gain by participating in pyramid schemes, lotteries, and the like. We are allowed to increase our possessions in a lawful way, but on the other hand we must be content with what we have received. Christ said in the sermon on the Mount: *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). The true treasure is the knowledge and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That treasure we must seek or try to increase.

Q. 111. BUT WHAT DOTTH GOD REQUIRE IN THIS COMMANDMENT?

ANSWER: THAT I PROMOTE THE ADVANTAGE OF MY NEIGHBOUR IN EVERY INSTANCE I CAN OR MAY; AND DEAL WITH HIM AS I DESIRE TO BE DEALT WITH BY OTHERS (A); FURTHER ALSO THAT I FAITHFULLY LABOUR, SO THAT I MAY BE ABLE TO RELIEVE THE NEEDY (B).

(A)MATTHEW 7:12; (B)EPHESIANS 4:28

Care for our neighbour commanded

The eighth commandment not only forbids, but also commands. As much as we are able and the means are lawful, we must try to help our neighbour with the given talents of head and hand. We should not be stingy, but generous.

Here the golden rule of Christ applies: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is (what is written in) the law and the prophets”* (Matthew 7:12). This positive rule goes further than the negative rule which the world implies: What you do not want done to you, do not do to others.

This care for our neighbour can be expressed by giving money to help in his financial need, but also by giving a portion of our time in works of mercy, and in the attention for our neighbour in being in contact with them.

In addition to this, the Christian is called to a faithful fulfillment of his duty to work: *“that he may have to give to him that needeth”* (Ephesians 4:28). Also employers are obliged to give their employees a decent remuneration. They are not permitted to enrich themselves at the cost of their employees.

Questions:

1. What are some examples of theft without money being involved?

2. What does the eighth commandment require of us?

Evaluator: _____

Meditation: Deceitfulness of Sin

Deceit is one of the prime elements of the natural heart. It is more full of deceit than any other object. We sometimes call the sea deceitful. At evening the sea appears perfectly calm, or there is a gentle ripple on the waters, and the wind blows favorably; during the night a storm may come on, and the treacherous waves are like mountain billows, covering the ship. But the heart is deceitful “above all things”; more treacherous than the treacherous sea. The clouds are often very deceitful. Sometimes, in a time of drought, they promise rain; but they turn out to be clouds without rain, and the farmer is disappointed.

Sometimes the clouds appear calm and settled; but before the morning, torrents of rain are falling. But the heart is deceitful “above all things.” Many animals are deceitful. The serpent is more subtle than any beast of the field; sometimes it will appear quite harmless, but suddenly it will put out its deadly sting and give a mortal wound. But the natural heart is more deceitful than a serpent; “above all things.” It is deceitful in two ways; in deceiving others and itself.

Taken from: “Gems of Robert Murray McCheyne”