

Sermon Series: “A Post-Lenten Look at the Decalogue”

Take the Money and Run?

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Sunday, May 17, 2020

It is amazing at some of the things that are glamorized today, and quite unexpected things. Things that have been normally seen as wrong are now often seen in a “tongue-in-cheek”, wink and a smile way. E.g., I recall watching on the Tennis Channel where they did a top 10 hotheads in tennis, and they looked at people like Ilie Nastase, John McEnroe, and Jimmy Connors and the current player Nick Kyrgios, and they were discussed by the commentators as though they would not change a thing— and seemed to put bad behavior as just as acceptable, perhaps more admirable and exciting, as the gentlemen in tennis, like Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. E.g., the movie from 1967 “Bonnie and Clyde” seemed to give a very likable aspect and beauty— played by Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway— to the criminal couple, which I found confusing as a young person watching it. E.g., back in 1976 the Steve Miller Band did a song called, “Take the Money and Run”, which was about two lovers, Billie Joe and Bobbie Sue, who robbed a man’s house, shot him, got away, and the refrain of the song was, “Go on, take the money and run”. The song ends where they move south and are still running today. So, this song seems at best to be a mixed message on stealing. “Go on, take the money and run” and they are still running today. This mixed view on stealing is not only found today, but also in the ancient world.

READ Exodus 20:15 (p. 66)

CONTEXT: Moses has just given us seven commandments: no other God before God, no idols, don't use the Lord's name in vain, honor the Sabbath, honor father and mother, don't murder, and don't commit adultery. Now we come to the eight commandment.

READ v 15. "The eighth commandment is rather simple yet profound: don't steal. This means don't take what belongs to another." This seems simple and true, and it becomes profound when it happens to you and me personally. Have you ever had something stolen? E.g., I recall when I was in my 20's and living at home with my parents I got home from a date with Elena and parked in front of our house on Filmore Ave. when I got home. The next morning I was sweeping off the front porch and looked out t the street in front of the house and it just seemed bare to me— but I didn't know why. Then it hit me— my car was gone! It had been stolen in the dark hours of the night! I recall a few weeks later it was found and it made me feel a bit violated that someone would actually steal my car. Stealing is simple to understand, but it has profound implications.

Moses in Exodus goes as far as to point out that one is not to steal such things as people (21:16), animals (22:1), and things (22:7)." Sometimes we may wonder why it is people steal. Part of the reason, I believe, is that some people think that since someone has a lot of something we are entitled to some of it. We need to teach children this is wrong as well as adults. E.g., I recall when I was younger I hung around for about a year a group of friends who were a bad influence on me, and we rode our bicycles to someone's house who had a citrus tree which had fruit hanging over a fence, and we would ride our bikes over and take some without permission, and once we were caught and the owners of the house scolded us for it— and they were right. And I stopped doing that. Sometimes adults can feel that way also about others who have more than them, that somehow we who have little are entitled to have what those who have more

have. E.g., I recall when I was out of high school I worked for a summer at a gas station and the assistant manager became a friend of mine; his girlfriend did the accounting/bookkeeping work for the gas station, and after I quite the job I came back months later and asked where the assistant manager was, and found out he and his girlfriend were embezzling money from the owner of the gas station.

There is an interesting perspective also on government taxation which I think is important to consider. E.g., Dinesh D’Souza has written that when the government taxes the wealthy excessively this amounts to stealing, and I think he is making a good point. I believe that if we have been blessed extravagantly by God in material things we should be generous in giving to bless others, but this should not be forced.

“Stealing reveals not only a dysfunction in our relationship with others, but also with God.” When we are tempted to steal, to take what is not ours, it reveals a heart that is not thankful before the Lord. We miss out on the fact that God has blessed us a great deal in the U.S. E.g., when I have gone on mission trips to third world countries I recall thinking that those who are considered to be the poor in the U.S. are the middle class in many other countries. E.g. Thanksgiving is a time I ask us to write a list of ten things for which we are thankful. Perhaps it would be good for us to re-visit that today, and thank the Lord for what He has given us.

“What are some big ways— and small ways— could we be tempted to steal? Cf. Luke 16:10.” READ. It is very important that we refrain from stealing in big things, as well as small, perhaps even things we gloss over and don’t think of as stealing. E.g, I was at a Methodist ministers’ conference a few years ago that had its meetings at a Hilton hotel, and in the rooms there were these really nice black metal pens with the word “Hilton” on it, and during the conference I put the pen in my shirt pocket and used it. One day I had to go to the front desk to ask a question, and after interacting with the man behind the desk he said to me in effect, “Is that your pen in your pocket?” I knew what he was getting at, and I

said I was using it during the conference. I made sure to leave it in the room when I left. Since then I have tried to make sure that if I like the pen in the hotel room I call the front desk and ask permission to take it home with me. We need to be sure whether we are at a hotel or at work or at someone's house, we respect what belongs to another, and remind ourselves how blessed we are!