

Class 11j: The purpose of this class is to understand the eighth commandment of the *Decalogue*.

Eighth Commandment: *"Thou shall not steal."* (Exodus 20:15)

- **What is stealing?** “We are forbidden to part after the possessions of others, and consequently are commanded to strive faithfully to help every man to keep his own possessions.”¹ Stealing or theft refers to the intentional, secretive “misappropriation of good of another rather than taking them by force.”² It is a crime where a thief sets out to benefit at the expense of another person’s property. Thomas Watson said, “the thing forbidden is meddling with another man’s property.”³
- **Theft by Neglect:** The penalty for theft by neglect is favorable restitution.
 - **Responsibility for indirect consequences:** If I catch my neighbor’s barn and crops on fire, I owe restitution for property and profit. (Ex 22:6)
 - **Responsibility for neglect:** We must pay restitution if we cause our neighbor to lose property or profit out of a neglect of property maintenance. If my animal kills my neighbor’s animal, I will owe restitution. If I catch my neighbor’s barn and crops on fire, I owe restitution for property and profit. (Ex 21:33-36, 22:6) If a rancher lets his animals graze without supervision and they consume his neighbor’s crops, the owner of the animals must pay restitution. The guilty party must pay from the best of his property. (Ex 22:5)
 - **Principle:** We are responsible for the direct and indirect consequences of our actions. We must guard our actions so that we do not damage our neighbor’s property by our neglect or laziness.
- **Theft with Intention** (Ex 22:1-4): The penalty for intentional theft is double restitution.
 - Stealing of a man and selling him as a slave renders the death (Ex 21:16). Thus, the slave trade is sinful.
 - A thief must pay double restitution for what he steals. (Ex 22:4, 8) A thief risks being lawfully killed if he is caught breaking into your home at night because a man has the right to protect his household. A man may not kill a thief who is caught in the daylight. The thief must pay double restitution. If a thief cannot pay, he can be sold into slavery. A man has the right to defend his household. (Ex 22:1-4) Double restitution pays for the loss of the property and compensates the owner for the crime.
- **Theft by Breach of Trust:** We are often asked to keep our neighbor’s property safe while they are away. When we agree to protect their property, we take on a serious responsibility to our neighbor. Our love for our neighbor should drive us to protect their property diligently, but the situation does not always go well. Exodus 22:7-15 addresses how the eighth commandment applies to our trustworthy care of what we borrow and keep. The principle is that we are responsible to care for our neighbor’s property under our care.
- **Theft in Borrowing or Renting:** If you borrow something and it is damaged from neglect, you owe restitution, but if the owner knows that you have cared for his property, you do not owe restitution. If you rent property and it breaks, the rent covers the restitution. In other words, the owner takes the risk when he rents his property. (Ex 22:14)
- **Bank Theft or Pawnshop Theft:** A bank cannot take advantage of the poor by lending money with usury. the poor are very vulnerable. Sometimes their only option is to depend upon someone else, so the Lord protects them

¹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 407.

² John L. Mackay, *Exodus: A Mentor Commentary*, 382.

³ Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, 164.

from such abuse. We cannot get rich at the expense of the poor. (Ex 22:25-27)

- **Various Types of Thieves⁴**

- “The Highway Thief” robs his neighbor’s property.
- “The Church Thief” takes his wages but never preaches to his congregation (Ezek 24:2ff)
- “The Shop Thief” runs the market which cheats his customers (Hosea 12:7)
- “The Usury Thief” loans money to desperate people at unbearable cost (Lev 25:36-37, Neh 5, Ezek 18). Christ calls us to not refuse one who wants borrows from us. The context is those, who are in desperate need. (Matt 5:42)
- “The Borrower Thief” borrows money or goods but never returns them. (Psalm 37:21, 2 Kings 4:7)

- **New Testament Take on the Eighth Commandment:** The NT applies the fullness of the eighth commandment to the life of the Church. We will look at just four places that address the commandment

- **Work Commanded—Idleness Forbidden:** In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, Paul rebukes the Church for their idleness. Apparently, many members were living off some sort of welfare in the Church. Paul commanded them to live according to his example. The deacons of the church were not to feed those who would not work. Because we are Christians, we must quietly earn our own living. Even in the NT, the creation ordinance of working still applies.
- **Two-fold Purpose of Work:** In Eph 5, Paul teaches the transformation that the Gospel must have in the life of the believer who was a thief. In all areas of life, we are to understand that we, believers, are new creations *in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*. As a result, we must put off the old self. Eph 4:28, Paul reminds us that stealing is part of who we were before Christ. The Christian must stop stealing and start working. Paul expands the command to work beyond a righteous way of attaining our needs. We are to work to give to those who are in need. The Gospel transforms a thief into a generous donor. Work takes on a twofold meaning: 1) Work provides for our households; 2) Work is the means to care for others.
- **When in Want, Pray:** The Lord will inevitably lead us into times of need and even poverty. Christ taught how believers are to deal with our needs. We cannot steal, but we must pray.
 - Everyday, we are in need of the Lord’s provision, so Christ included a petition for temporal needs in the Lord’s prayer. The petition says *give us this day our daily bread*. The heart of the prayer acknowledges a dependence upon God’s grace. The petition seeks what the Lord would give us daily so that we would learn continual dependence upon Him to sustain our lives and contentment with Him.
 - In Matt 7:7-11, Christ also addressed those specific requests that we have. We are to acknowledge that the Lord provides. Rather than stealing from someone else, Christ instructs us to ask the Lord for what we want or need. The thief takes, but the believer seeks the Lord’s provision.
- **Contentment:** We steal because we want more than what God has given to us. The key to mortifying our sin of theft is contentment. Heb 13:5 and 1 Tim 6:6-8 address the virtue of contentment that is part of the new heart that is given to us in the Gospel. When you come to realize that you brought nothing into the world and will take nothing with you, you will look at the inheritance that God has given you in Jesus Christ. We must strive to be content with Christ, our Lord and Savior.

- **Summary:** The eighth commandment calls us to work diligently to earn an honest living. We are to live in dependence upon and thankful acknowledgement of God’s providence. We are to live careful lives, which guard against damaging the property or estate of others. We are to be stewards all that the Lord gives to us.

⁴ Watson, *Ten Commandments*, 165-166.