



DIGGING DEEPER

Exodus 20:15-16 – Theft and testimony

PLEASE READ – Exodus 20:15-16 and Proverbs 30:5-9

GETTING STARTED

How much do these two commandments overlap? “Character assassination”, for example, could be regarded as false testimony *and* theft of reputation. But we’ll still look at them separately, using a common template:

- 1) Dig down deeper: what do these commandments include *and not include*?
- 2) Flip it over: instead of merely condemning the negative, what positive virtues do these commandments point us to cultivate?
- 3) Look up higher: how might these commandments apply to our relationship with God?

Commandment 8: theft

This commandment is very broad ranging, and we need to be careful not to justify things that we do “because everyone does them”. But could some of the other Commandments also be seen as different expressions of theft? So, most important of all, then, must be a consideration of the question, “Will a mere mortal rob God?” (Malachi 3:8)

1) Dig down deeper:

The Marxist / Anarchist slogan “Property is Theft” is probably so memorable because it looks so self-contradictory. But for a while some Christians were troubled by the “communist” lifestyle that seems to have been adopted in the early church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:44 and 4:32). Is anything similar expected of believers nowadays?

What “minor” thefts are we tempted to overlook?
Is theft from organisations (or “The State”) any less theft?
What if “We Was Robbed!!”? What do we do now?

Which of the other Commandments can also be seen as expressions of less literal, but still serious, theft?

What do we “owe”, in less literal senses? (Romans 13:7-8)

If what is due from us is not spelled out clearly ... what are we supposed to do? ... Or does only a legalist ask this question?

2) Flip it over:

Even if theft is a sin (1 Corinthians 6:10), remember that thieves can be saved (1 Corinthians 6:11) and thoroughly changed (Ephesians 4:28).

So how, now, can we cultivate a grace-informed spirit of generosity? (1 Timothy 6:18, Acts 2:46)

3) Look up higher:

“Will a mere mortal rob God?” (Malachi 3:8). Consider ...

Psalm 115:1

Romans 3:23 – “fall short” – read in the context of Romans 1:23 – “default”

Commandment 9: false testimony

The Ninth Commandment: do not lie. Or is that too big an over-simplification? The scenario (the word “testimony” should be a clue!) is a courtroom, where one is called to answer (the usual translation of the word we have here as “bear”) concerning someone else. There are a number of ways that our testimony could be false: as well as providing actual falsehood, we could simply decline to provide truth as regards our “neighbour”.

1) Dig down deeper:

What *doesn't* this ban?

the “lesser evil” (Exodus 1:19-21)

social conventions (Luke 24:28)

acting / game play

stories – parables! (e.g. Luke 16:19ff)

silence – “full disclosure” is not always called for

But even if the literal is quite stringent (Deuteronomy 19:18-21), consider also ...

putting down – belittling (Proverbs 12:18)

putting up – flattery (Proverbs 26:23-28)

speaking up – gossip (Proverbs 26:22, 2 Corinthians 12:20)

shutting up – silence (Leviticus 5:1 - though remember, too, Ecclesiastes 3:7)

2) Flip it over:

Do not bear *truthful* testimony against a neighbour!

Are your words ...

truthful?

necessary?

kind? - as gentle as possible

benevolent? - intended for good (not in anger)

timely? - you can miss the moment

Speak truth graciously (Ephesians 4:15,29)

Remember the example of gracious truth, Jesus himself (Revelation 3:14)

3) Look up higher:

Could we default on bearing true witness (in words or lifestyle) to Jesus?

In which case ... Luke 19:40?