

Series: Ten	Reference: Exodus 20:15, Matthew 5:42	Title: The Eighth	Date: 08.07.2022
Website Writeup: God doesn't want us to steal anything from anyone. Yet instead of viewing this command in the negative, let's see this commandment in the positive as God's desire for his people to work for the good of others.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

I've had two bicycles stolen in my lifetime. Once when I was a kid. I saw it on another kids lawn a week later, and my mother & I drove over to get it. The second time my neighbor watched a guy waltz into my garage, take my bike & walk away. He figured it must be someone from church borrowing it. Later that afternoon my wife watched the same guy riding it down another street thinking, "Wow, that looks like Jasons bike." We finally figured out that was a ring of bike thieves in the area. Both times I felt violated & angry. Something about theft leaves you feeling sort of dirty...someone's invaded your space & taken advantage of you. Not a nice feeling.

The first kid just saw my bike, wanted it & took it. The second guy was doing it to make money. Both motivated by sheer selfishness.

In Hugo's classic, *Jean Valjean* steals silver plates from the bishop, Monseigneur Bienvenu (chap. 12). Valjean is stopped by the police, and when they find him in possession of the silver, they bring him to the bishop's residence. Instead of pressing charges, the bishop demonstrates amazing grace to this thief, offering Valjean the silver candlesticks in addition to the silver plates he stole. The Bishop claimed it was all a gift. The law was in the bishop's favor, yet grace guides the bishop's actions.

At the close of the chapter the bishop explains his actions to Valjean saying, "Don't forget, don't ever forget, that you promised me to use this silver to make an honest man of yourself....Jean Valjean, my brother, you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I am taking it away from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I am giving it to God." The rest of the story beautifully demonstrates how Valjean embodies the grace shown to him by pursuing a life obedient to God in love toward others.¹ An act of grace. A beautiful picture of unmerited favor, of being blessed when it's not deserved.

It also gives us insight into the next commandment in this series, the eighth commandment: "*You shall not steal*" (Exodus 20:15).² God doesn't want us to steal anything from anyone. Yet instead of viewing this command in the negative, let's see it in the positive, God's desire for us to work for the good of others.

¹ Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 63.

² Mike Coper, "Law and Grace in 'Les Mis,'" *The Gospel Coalition*, December 20, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/tgc-podcast/law-and-grace-in-les-mis/>

Theft is a sin taking many forms. From simple everyday theft: taking something which isn't yours. A sin. To plagiarism, theft of thought. This can range from the easy fix of a college research paper, conveniently found online, to the more-attention grabbing headlines of artist, reporters & musicians accused of stealing the work of someone else. Like a certain politician constantly quoting other politicians speeches claiming their words as his own, or musician Ed Sheeran, sued for plagiarism numerous times.³ Theft of any kind is a sin.

There was a man who lived across the street from an abandoned home. Every spring the most beautiful daffodils & tulips would bloom in the overgrown yard, and every spring the man would think about digging them up & planting them in his yard. One year, after watching the flowers every day & considering digging them up, the man resolved to do so. "After all," he thought, "who could it hurt? The home was abandoned."

That night, as dusk settled over the neighborhood, he got a shovel & bucket, and prepared to dig up the flowers, when at the last moment, his eye was drawn to a flower in his own yard. The flower came with the house; he didn't plant it. And then he remembered the joy of discovering what was buried beneath the ground that first spring in his home. He realized, despite all his attempts to justify transplanting flowers from an abandoned home, that he was robbing the next homeowners of the same joy he'd experienced that first spring. The commandment to not steal moves beyond simply taking objects or ideas, and even into the very realm of robbing others of their joy.

But what if God's commandment to not steal meant even more. What if, like the other past few commandments, it was also a commandment to do good? **The Heidelberg Catechism asks this question: "What does God require in this commandment?" Answer: "That I do whatever I can for my neighbor's good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need."**⁴

Instead of thinking of the Ten Commandments in terms of what I'm not allowed to do, try thinking of them in the words of the catechism: What does God require? It isn't that God simply requires we not steal, but that we actively work for our neighbor's good.

This is what Jesus advocates for in the Sermon on the Mount. He gives us this command: "*Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you*" (Matthew 5:42).

Do not refuse the one who would borrow from you! There are no conditions here which might allow us to wiggle out of this command. There are no qualifiers like "unless they've asked you several times before," or "unless they're lazy." The command's very simple: give if you're asked.

³ Suzy Weiss, "Ed Sheeran Announces Hiatus from Music amid Legal Woes," *NY Post*, August 28, 2019 <https://nypost.com/2019/08/28/ed-sheeran-announces-haitus-from-music/>

⁴ Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 111 <https://www.rca.org/resources/heidelberg-catechism-ten-commandments>

What Jesus is describing here, and what God requires in this commandment, is selflessness which really defines this & the past two commandments. At the root of murder, adultery & theft are selfishness. You see something - whether it's a person or an object - and want it. Suddenly you don't care about what's right or wrong. Murder involves a clash of the wills. And your will's right in your eyes. If that means someone else has to die for the sake of your will, then so be it. Love doesn't demand its own way, but murderers demand their own way. Adulterers demand their own way. Thieves demand their own way. Jesus says we're to love our neighbors as ourselves. So, we're seeing a pattern here in Jesus directives.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount in which we find this verse, Jesus teaches the principle that Christian kindness should transcend even straightforward tit-for-tat retribution....in light of prevailing ethical thought Jesus contrasts radically with most others of his day in stressing the need to decisively break the natural chain of evil action & reaction that characterizes human relationships.⁵

The Christian arrests the process of evil & hatred by their thoughts, actions & response to the world around them. They are Salt & light; preservative & guide. The Bishop in *Les Misérables* arrested the process, becoming an agent of change in not holding onto belongings so tightly, rather in loving the one who stole from him.

The teachings of Christ, and the rest of the New Testament fly directly in the face of human self-preservation. Teachings such as 1 Corinthians 6:7... *The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?* The Scriptures dictate a life of walking with Christ which we struggle with, that love trumps our rights; to suffer like Christ. That Christ's name & people more important than my bank account, wallet, car, house, or even my own well-being!

Each of Jesus' commands requires Jesus' followers to act more generously than what the letter of the law demands. "Going the extra mile" has rightly become a proverbial expression & captures the essence of all of His illustrations. Not only must disciples reject all behavior motivated only by a desire for retaliation, but they also must positively work for the good of those with whom they would otherwise be at odds.⁶

Jesus fulfills the Torah by interpreting it rightly & living it completely, and calls His followers to live out covenant loyalty in line with the values expressed in the Torah....the law implies legalism & exists only to provide the counterpoint to God's grace & forgiveness. We would do well to remember, the Old Testament affirms the goodness of the law (e.g., Ps. 119:9-16), and that within the law itself a means of forgiveness is provided in the sacrificial system (e.g., Lev. 4).

⁵ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 113.

⁶ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 113.

“Jesus began this section in v39 characteristically by presenting the traditional Old Testament teaching: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth’ ” (v. 38). That is an exact quotation from three Old Testament passages (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21) and represents the oldest law in the world - the law of retaliation, technically known as *Lex (Law) Talionis* (retaliation).

The earliest reference to *Lex Talionis* comes from the Code of Hammurabi in the second millennium b.c. Far from being savage or harsh legislation, it was intrinsically merciful because it limited vengeance. The typical primitive blood feud knew nothing of equity. A small infraction by one tribe against another - for instance, trespassing - was met with a beating, which was returned by homicide, which was then countered by genocide. *Lex Talionis* did away with this - on paper at least.

Today we recognize *Lex Talionis* as foundational to all justice. The whole system of civil, penal, and international law is based on the idea of reparation & equity which has its roots in *Lex Talionis*.

As it exists in the Bible, *Lex Talionis* was given to the judges of Israel as a basis for adjudication, as Deuteronomy 19:16-21 makes so clear...“*If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, ¹⁷ the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests & the judges who are in office at the time. ¹⁸ The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, ¹⁹ then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you. ²⁰ The rest of the people will hear of this & be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. ²¹ Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*”

Individuals were *not* permitted to use this law to settle disputes with others. Only the courts were permitted to do so. Moreover, it was not literally carried out by the Jewish legal system because they correctly saw that in some cases to do so would result in injustice. For instance, a good tooth might be removed for a bad tooth!

So, they assessed damages just as we do in our courts today. The *Mishna* devotes an entire section entitled *Baba Kamma* to assessing proper damages. So we have the traditional Old Testament teaching regarding one’s response to personal wrong in the principle of exact retribution. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with that, apart from man’s manipulation of it. It brought equity & stability to human relations.⁷

This is why Paul tells us in Romans 12:17-21...*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the sight of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On*

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 131–132.

the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Then urges us in Romans 13:1-7 to submit to earthly authority.

It's important...that we do not offer a false dichotomy of law versus grace. Just as the Old Testament affirms the importance of covenant loyalty as a response to God's redemptive work & grace, so Jesus calls His followers to covenant loyalty in light of the arrival of God's kingdom & through the lens of the ultimate values of the Torah. Jesus as its consummate interpreter demonstrates that the center of the Torah is expressed in love of enemy as well as neighbor. And Matthew provides the theological grounding of Jesus (as God) with his people (1:23; 28:20) to indicate the relational (covenantal) basis for obedience to God.⁸

What that means is that we obey the Law of God in heartfelt love of God & others; that we respond to others as God responded to us with grace & mercy. We don't murder, even in heart & mind. We don't commit adultery, even in heart & mind. And we don't steal, even in our heart & mind, out of the gratitude we have towards a holy God who loves us & gave Himself for us by taking on the penalty of Sin. In all ways internally & externally we emulate Him in all we think & do. Realizing His Law is good, bringing stability to relationships & society. That when we take justice into our own hands outside of set authority in community, we do so at the peril of our own soul, and in risk of doing evil to others.

But does Jesus mean we have to give to every beggar asking for money? I don't think so, but He does call us to extreme generosity. What we give can be different if what's being asked would be detrimental to that person. We are to lead the situation & conversation in light of the Gospel we wish to communicate.

"So what does He mean? He means that the righteous are to give to those who are attempting to hurt them through borrowing. Luke refers to this kind of persecution when he says, *"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back"* (6:35).

We must realize that Jesus' advice is for a specific situation in which a believer's being persecuted. Moreover, Jesus doesn't say how many times one is to loan to a persecutor. Nor does He mention the restraint that love will impose on one's generosity. **As Alexander Maclaren wisely said: If turning the cheek would make the assaulter more angry, or if yielding the cloak would make the legal robber more greedy, or going the second mile would but make the press gang more severe & exacting, resistance becomes a form of love & duty for the sake of the wrongdoer.**

⁸ Jeannine K. Brown, [Matthew](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 62.

Jesus' advice isn't a set of mechanical rules, but principles for meeting the personal wrongs that come to those who follow Him. In the matter of loaning, the Lord wants His followers to reject a tightfisted, penny-pinching attitude which says, "This is mine & I'll never share it!" Consider just how superseding this new teaching of Jesus was & is. Under the Old Testament, the believer thought in terms of *Lex Talionis* & its idea of equity. But then Jesus came & changed everything.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, ministered for eleven years in Sandfields in Wales. His wife Bethan tells the story of the remarkable conversion of a man named Mark McCann. McCann was the meanest man in town; he loved to fight. Although he was sixty years old, he was not known to have ever lost a scuffle. When he would go to a fair, he'd always take two friends with him because when he got into a fight he would go so out of his mind that he would kill the other person if his friends didn't restrain him. One time his wife fixed his dinner, and the dog got into it while McCann was washing his hands. He took a bread knife, took the dog into the kitchen, and cut his head off. Then that man met Jesus. He was barely literate, and as Bethan Lloyd-Jones tells the story, when he first saw the name of Jesus in Welsh in the Bible, he wept & kissed the name. He was completely changed from a vengeful, hateful, "these-are-my-rights," *Lex Talionis*, law-of-the-jungle sort of man to a man who was loving & kind.

Jesus changes lives! We no longer consider it our duty to get even. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" is fine for the court, but not for our relation to others - even our enemies. Thanks to Jesus, we have let go of our legalistic obsession with fairness. We're glad that Jesus wasn't fair with us, since if we'd gotten what was coming to us, it wouldn't have been good. As Jesus' followers we give ourselves to the highest welfare of others, even our enemies. We put up with the sins & insults of others for Christ's sake & theirs. Though hurt many times before, we refuse to withdraw into the shell of self. We don't run from hurt. We appear weak, but we're strong, for only the most powerful can live a life like this. But the power isn't ours, it's Christ in us!

Everything comes from Christ. Jesus' sayings are hard - in fact, impossible! I'm glad the Sermon on the Mount is impossible, because it forces dependence on Jesus. May the Lord Jesus work in us a surpassing righteousness so that we don't hold on to our rights, so we don't always insist on others being fair to us, so we're willing to be hurt, so we're willing to be vulnerable, because then, just as in the ancient world, people will notice & will come to Jesus for the same.⁹

It isn't that God simply says don't steal, but that we actively work for our neighbor's good. May we be obedient to this command out of love for God & others, and if it happens to us, may we react like Jesus & Monseigneur Bienvenu!

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 135-137.