



Is It Still Stealing if I Deserve It?

Exodus 20:15: (NASB) *You shall not steal.*





Have you noticed how blurred the world has become? It has become increasingly more difficult to locate and abide by any life guidelines that represent clear boundaries and a clear direction forward. The eighth Commandment was simple: "You shall not steal." This was a clear directive - do not take what is not yours. Fast forward society several thousand years and we have quotes that call that simple statement into question, like this one: "It's not stealing if you don't get caught." Then there is the more philosophic approach like this one from Mohsin Hamid: "You see, it is my passionately-held belief that the right to possess property is at best a contingent one. When disparities become too great, a superior right, that to life, outweighs the right to property. Ergo, the very poor have the right to steal from the very rich." What exactly is our Christian responsibility regarding stealing? How definitive are the guidelines and are there any grey areas?





How to thrive in relation to spirituality and to who God is

Exodus 20:3-14: (NASB) Selected verses:

 **EPISODE 1147**  *You shall have no other gods before Me*
THE LESSON:
GOD IS SOVEREIGN

 **EPISODE 1147**  *You shall not make for yourself an idol*
THE LESSON:
THE HONOR DUE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS NEVER TO BE SHARED OR DIMINISHED

 **EPISODE 1136**  *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain*
THE LESSON:
WE SHOULD NEVER REPRESENT THE HOLINESS OF GOD'S NAME CARELESSLY, FOOLISHLY OR WITH ANY HINT OF IRREVERENCE

 **EPISODE 1127**  *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*
THE LESSON:
WE MUST REGULARLY SET TIME ASIDE TO REVERE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY



The fifth Commandment is the first step towards establishing how to thrive as a physical nation in relation to one another.


EPISODE 1161



Honor your father and your mother

THE LESSON:

THIS IS THE FIRST STEP IN ESTABLISHING HOW TO THRIVE AS A PHYSICAL NATION IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER

The sixth and seventh Commandments are the first and most fundamental commands regarding our relationships with our entire human family and our most personal relationships within that family:


EPISODE 1168



You shall not murder

THE LESSON:

THIS IS THE FIRST AND MOST FUNDAMENTAL COMMAND REGARDING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR ENTIRE HUMAN FAMILY


EPISODE 1169



You shall not commit adultery

THE LESSON:

THIS IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE HUMAN FAMILY RELATIONSHIP, THE SACRED COVENANT BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE.



Now comes the eighth Commandment, which is foundational in establishing the personal rights of those around us and in our community:

Exodus 20:15: (NASB) *You shall not **steal** <1589>.*

Steal: Strongs #1589 *ganab*; to thief (literally or figuratively); by implication, to deceive

It is interesting that deception is part of the definition which we will explore shortly.

King James Version translates this word as "steal" 30 times, "steal away" 7 times, "carry away" 1 time, "brought" 1 time

The four words in this Commandment represent a VERY broad meaning and are explained in several Scriptures in the first five books of the Old Testament called the *Pentateuch* or *Five Books of Moses*.

Stealing leaks into every other Commandment. If we look at breaking the Commandments, we see that each one encompasses deceiving and taking what which is not ours. It is amazing how the details of the Old Testament Law describe each case of stealing as having a different corresponding penalty.

You shall not steal applies to the lives of our fellow man. Each individual has a right to live according to the Law:

Exodus 21:16: (NASB) *He who **kidnaps** <1589> a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.*

This shows God's concern for the sacredness of life. The word *kidnaps* here is the same Hebrew word as *steals*. Kidnapping is stealing. There is no difference in the penalty for kidnapping. Take someone against their will and the Law says you will die.





Hundreds of years ago there were many “so-called Christians” that said, “Well the Bible supports slavery, so we can do as we choose.” God was very specific that if they were abiding by the Old Testament Law, they should have died.

You shall not steal applies to how we treat one another within the context of the general business of life:

Leviticus 19:11-13: (NASB) ¹¹*You shall not **steal** <1589>, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.* ¹²*You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.* ¹³*You shall not **oppress** <6231> your neighbor, nor **rob** <1497> him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.*

Oppress/Extort: Strong's #6231 *`ashaq*; to press upon, i.e., oppress, defraud, violate

King James Version translates this word as oppress 23, oppressor 4, defraud 3, wrong 2, deceived 1, deceitfully gotten 1, oppression 1, drink up 1, violence 1

Rob: Strong's #1497 *gaza*; a primitive root; to pluck off; specifically to flay, strip or rob

King James Version translates this word as “spoil” 8 times, “take away” 8 times, “rob” 4 times, “pluck” 3 times and once each as “caught,” “consume,” “exercised,” “force,” “pluck off,” “torn,” “violence”

Do not steal, do not deal falsely, do not defraud, do not take from anyone. Even when it came to wages, if you had a day laborer working with you, they were to be paid that day. It was considered defrauding someone to not pay them on the day they worked. Simple honesty should prevail! Most people do not understand the Law of God beyond the 10 Commandments because they do not see the depth contained in these general statements.

You shall not steal applies to the specifics of buying, selling and trading:

Leviticus 19:35-36: (NASB) ³⁵*You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity.* ³⁶*You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah (a measure of grain), and a just hin (a liquid measure); I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt.*

God reminded them that He was the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They had been mistreated and He would not allow them to mistreat others.

In matters of trade, God says to be precise and have integrity.

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To steal is to disrespect.

God is clear that our fellow man, their property and their rights must be respected above our own wants, lack and desires.

Stealing is a basic broad-based activity we should always avoid. Because it is so broad, avoiding its allure is hard.





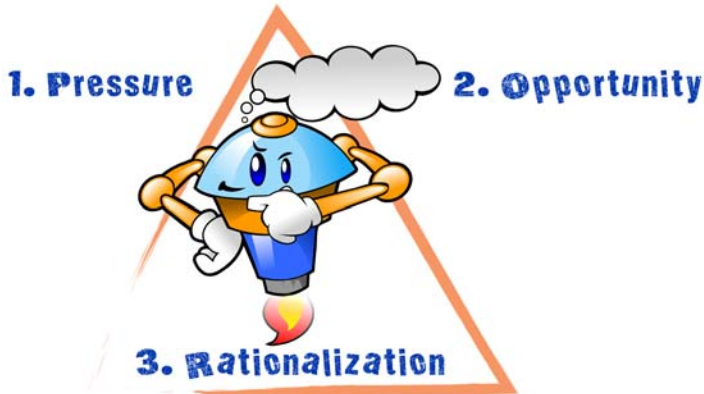
Stealing can happen on many levels. Are there different penalties for stealing different things?

We already saw that the act of kidnapping carried the death penalty. In the Old Testament Law there were several levels of stealing and therefore, several levels of penalty. We will soon see what things were most important to protect and why.

How do people end up stealing? They create an environment to make it acceptable in their own minds.

 **The Fraud Triangle, *How People Rationalize Fraud*, Kelly Richmond Pope, TED Talk**

- The truth is that many people are susceptible not only to the temptation to commit fraud, but to convincing themselves that they've done nothing wrong. So, why does fraud happen? While individual motivations may differ from case to case, the fraud triangle, a model developed by criminologist Donald Cressey, shows three conditions that make fraud likely: pressure, opportunity and rationalization. Pressure is often what motivates someone to engage in fraud to begin with. It could be a personal debt, an addiction, an earnings quota, a sudden job loss or an illness in the family. As for opportunity, many people in both public and private sectors have access to tools that enable them to commit and conceal fraud, corporate credit cards, internal company data, or control over the budget. The combination of pressure and being exposed to such opportunities on a daily basis can create a strong temptation, but even with these two elements most fraud still requires rationalization.*



Pressure always occurs first - opportunity presents itself, and then we rationalize our way into doing something we should not do.

You shall not steal as it applies to many general experiences of taking what is not yours:

Leviticus 6:1-7: (NASB) ¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through **robbery** <1498>, or if he has **extorted** <6231> from his companion, ³or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do.

Robbery: Strong's #1498 *gazel*; robbery, or (concretely) plunder:
robbery, thing taken away by violence



What if we found what was lost but did not turn it in? Should we say, "I found it; it should be mine?"

Here is what the Old Testament Law says should be done:

⁴then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found, ⁵or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering.



Restoration of what was stolen plus (*one-fifth*) 20 percent squares you with your neighbor, but that is not all. It must be made right before God:

⁶Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, ⁷and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt.

This gets very costly. He has to take one of his own expensive rams (*without defect*) and offer it in sacrifice plus 20 percent more because of his mistakes. Robbery or extortion was a sin against God as much as a sin against the neighbor.



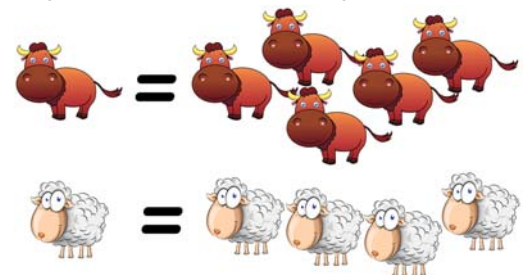
YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

THE ONE GUILTY OF STEALING WAS TO NOT ONLY FULLY REPLACE WHAT WAS TAKEN AND THEN SOME, HE WAS TO GIVE OF HIS OWN FLOCK TO GOD AS A SACRIFICE TO SHOW HIS REPENTANCE.

You shall not steal as it applies to the stealing of those things which give a man the ability to support his family:

Exodus 22:1-4: (NASB) ¹If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. ²If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. ³But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He (*the thief*) shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. ⁴If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.

Explanation: You have your ox and your sheep. I steal your ox and slaughter it or I sell it. I then owe you 5 oxen for that one. If I took your sheep, I owe you four sheep for that one.



If I go during the night to steal something from your barn and you hear a noise and go out to protect your property and kill me in the dark, you are not held responsible. But if it is light and you can see who I am, then you have a responsibility.

What if I took your ox and I slaughtered it or sold it, but I cannot repay you? *I need to be sold* for the cost of the debts. *I need to work* to earn the cost of the debt so I can rightfully pay what I owe you.

If I am caught for stealing your ox and it is still in my possession? I owe you two oxen.

Do not get in the way of someone's livelihood.





YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

TO STEAL THE LIVELIHOOD OF A FAMILY AND PROFIT FROM IT BROUGHT A MUCH HIGHER PENALTY THAN ANYTHING EXCEPT KIDNAPPING. THE LAW OF GOD WAS BUILT TO PROTECT FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

You shall not steal as it applies to negligence in caring for one's own livestock that leads to the loss of another man's possessions:

Exodus 22:5: (NASB) ⁵If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed bare and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.



If I am careless and do not cultivate my fields properly, and my animals have nothing to eat so they go to your house and start grazing from your field, I have to replace that with the best of what I have because of my negligence.



YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

NEGLECTANCE THAT RESULTS IN THE LOSSES OF ANOTHER IS STEALING! NEGLECTANCE IS NO EXCUSE.

You shall not steal as it applies to breaches of trust and their penalty:

Exodus 22:7-9: (NASB) ⁷If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep for him and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he (the man who had been trusted) shall pay double. ⁸If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property. ⁹For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, This is it, (meaning I gave this to my neighbor to take care of for me) the case of both parties (the property owner and the holder) shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.

Example: Jonathan gives Rick \$1,500 to hold for him when he goes away. Jonathan tells Rick, I do not want to keep this in my house; please hold this for me until I return in two weeks. Rick agrees. The money is stolen from Rick's house. Rick had been trusted but did not protect the money. As the owner of the house, he will appear before the judges, and if his negligence allowed it to be stolen, he owes Jonathan double.





Even though he was not the thief, he did not protect Jonathan's property. Rick was negligent. The judge decides the truth of the matter. When we are entrusted with our neighbor's property and lose it (or take it) we do not fulfill that trust. The penalty is appropriately much higher here showing the trust factor is valuable.



YOU SHALL NOT STEAL
A BREACH OF TRUST STEALS YOUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR.
THE PROTECTION OF OUR NEIGHBOR'S GOODS
IS A MATTER OF VERY HIGH VALUE
AND RESPONSIBILITY.

We need to respect our neighbor and all those around us.

The principles that drove the Old Testament teaching regarding stealing is summed up here:

Proverbs 11:1-3: (NASB) ¹A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight. ²When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom. ³The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.



1. Respect those around you.
2. Have integrity be the driving force in your decisions regarding others and their property.

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The Law of Israel made it clear that God expected His people to treat each other as the chosen people of God.

What I want never gives me permission to take what you have.

Disobeying this Commandment carried serious consequences.

God was amazingly specific in teaching Israel the specifics of avoiding theft. This reminds us of how easy it can be.

The Old Testament is clear regarding stealing and its consequences.
What about the New Testament?

As we fast forward to the teachings of Jesus, it is important to remember two things:



1. Jesus upheld the Old Testament moral Law.
2. In the time of Jesus, the penalties given in that moral Law were in many cases unenforceable due to Israel being under Roman rule.

However, the standards are not lower because the penalties are different or more lenient; righteousness is *always* required. The difference in the time period and the fact that society today may be more lenient does not give us the right to act without integrity or outside of our Christian principles.



First, let's establish how Jesus understood the most important aspects of the Law:

Matthew 22:34-40: (NASB) ³⁴*But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together.* ³⁵*One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him,* ³⁶*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?* ³⁷*And he said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* ³⁸*This is the great and foremost commandment.* ³⁹*The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* ⁴⁰*On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*

Because Jesus came to fulfill the Law, his teaching here is vital. He is saying the primary purpose of the Law is to honor God, and secondarily to thoroughly respect those around you. He is picking up on the same moral respect and integrity from the Old Testament without minimizing them. Doing wrong is still wrong, even if the penalties are different from when the Law was given. Therefore, to love your neighbor is honoring God! *You shall not steal.*



Rationalization, How People Rationalize Fraud, Kelly Richmond Pope, TED Talk

- Many fraudsters are first-time offenders. So, in order to commit an act most would regard as wrong, they need to justify it to themselves. Some feel entitled to the money because they are underpaid and overworked. And others believe their fraud is victimless. Perhaps even planning to return the money once their crisis is resolved. Some of the most common types of fraud don't even register as such to the perpetrator. Examples include employees fudging timesheets or expense reports, taxpayers failing to report cash earnings or service providers overbilling insurance companies. Though these may seem small and can sometimes only involve hundreds of dollars, they all contribute to the big picture.*



About eight or nine months ago, there was a tornado that went through our town. It did not damage too many buildings but managed to tear off a big part of the roof of the building my office is in, and my office is on the top floor. That meant it was raining inside. What a mess! Most of my stuff was completely ruined. I put in an insurance claim as I was supposed to. It is so easy to put in a claim and add a little bit or exaggerate a value, and nobody is going to know. The way it works is, you put in the claim, tell them what the value is, take a picture, and no one even comes out to look. They say, "It looks good," and write out a check for the amount. As an example, all my equipment - my fax machine, computer and scanner - was ruined, except for my 20-year-old copier...the one I *wanted* to die! It was sitting right next to my fax machine, it got a few drops of water on it, but it was fine! It would have been so easy to include that with the rest and say it was a clean sweep. But we cannot do that. Even the desktop computer could have been upgraded three or four times with its age. Based on conscience, I called up the computer company and told them to look up the last computer I bought and match it. I thought that was the right thing to do. It would be easy to rationalize this based on the inconvenience, difficulty, displacement from the office space and all of this stuff. But that would not have been the right thing and I can sleep well at night!





Let's look at what Jesus said about stealing. Here he addresses the motivation of several sins:

Matthew 15:15-20: (NASB) ¹⁵Peter said to him, Explain the parable to us. ¹⁶Jesus said, Are you still lacking in understanding also? ¹⁷Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? ¹⁸But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. ²⁰These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.

The Old Testament Law was all about the "WHAT" of right and wrong - do not murder, steal, lie, covet or commit adultery. The teachings of Jesus bring us to the "WHY" of right and wrong: the corruption of our sinful hearts.

Stealing originates
in a sinful
HEART



Stealing originates in a sinful heart! But what if we legitimately have a serious need that cannot be filled? We will deal with this in the next segment.

Stealing takes place because of what we want, what we *perceive* we need or what we actually need.

Here is an example of stealing to satisfy a want:

Matthew 21:12-13: (NASB) ¹²And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. ¹³And he said to them, It is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a robbers' den.

The money changers were price gouging the people coming to the temple to buy animals to sacrifice. The people were traveling long distances, and some had no means to travel with the animals. They took advantage of the average person. They were acting with such a lack of integrity in such a holy place, Jesus would have no part of it.



Check out our CQ Kids video:
DID JESUS EVER GET ANGRY?
christianquestions.com/youtube

(Source: John Gill's Exposition of the Bible) These are the words of Christ, affirming what is complained of in Jeremiah 7:11 and applying it to the present case, on account of the wicked merchandise, unlawful gain, avarice and extortion, of the priests and other officers of the temple, who had a considerable share in these things; and to whom the temple was, and by them used, as a den is to and by thieves and robbers, where they shelter themselves; for these persons robbed both God and man, and the temple was a sanctuary to them...

For those who take because they want to:

1 Corinthians 6:10-11: (NASB) ¹⁰nor **thieves** <2812>, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.



What about those diagnosed with the impulse control disorder called "kleptomania?" It is difficult for them to resist the urge to steal items even though they do not need them.

We strongly recommend they get professional help to control the behavior.



Thieves: Strong's #2812 *kleptes*; an embezzler, pilferer

Greek-English Lexicon: 1) an embezzler, pilferer 1a) the name is transferred to false teachers, who do not care to instruct men, but abuse their confidence for their own gain

The etymology of our English word "kleptomania" is from the Greek word *klepto*, a form of this word *kleptes*.

We are not to take what is not ours. Heaven is closed to thieves. *Such were some of you* - it is one thing to have been a thief, and an entirely different thing to continue being one after knowing Christ. God judges us not on our past but on how we handle what we are given now through Jesus.

Pay close attention to those who exploit followers of Christ - they are stealing from others and from God:

Titus 1:10-11: (NASB) ¹⁰For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.



What about the so-called "Prosperity Gospel" where the leaders steal money from their congregations?

Giving promises of great wealth and abundance "if you only give..." with no results has to make us think something is wrong with the message. Is it a lack of faith in the congregant? No, it is a lack of integrity by the leaders. Thieves take advantage of people, and heaven is closed to thieves.



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Jesus focused us on the heart of the matter when it comes to stealing. When tempted to take what is not ours, let us **deeply consider our "WHY"** before we allow ourselves to engage in a sinful "WHAT."

As usual, Jesus elevated the Commandment of God to make us examine our hearts. The question is, are we listening?

What if we feel a need to steal to supply a need we simply cannot manage? Is stealing justified then?

There is much that can be said to answer this question. Let's put it in the context of our present conversation. We are talking about Christian principles regarding stealing that are built upon the Jewish Law. How should the Law be applied in a Christian way?

Here is a quote that typifies our desire to find the extreme exception to the rule:

In the natural world, stealing is a necessary and frequent strategy for survival. Every animal group includes opportunists that snatch others' fresh kills, pilfer nesting materials or swipe prospective mates from distracted rivals.

— *Mindy Weisberger*



Does this mean we are taking guidance from the natural world regarding matters of morality? Should we act like dogs, steal each other's food, growl and fight amongst each other? Is this not what the quote is implying? Of course, we should not look to the activities of animals for our own actions. While animals sometimes show purity of intention, they are governed by instinct. We are supposed to have integrity in our actions with one another. We are created in the image of God. We need to act like it, operating on a higher level of thinking than the natural world!

What if "I deserve it," should I therefore have it? Someone set the trend with this thought long ago:

Isaiah 14:13-14: (NASB) ¹³*But you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.*



Here it is, Lucifer, the very first thief! This is where the "I deserve it; I should have it" attitude started. Who do we want to associate with? God Almighty, the God of justice, mercy, love and power; or Lucifer, the dark lord of this world, who tried to take what was not his? This mentality belongs to satanic thinking.



Stealing trust, *How People Rationalize Fraud*, Kelly Richmond Pope, TED Talk

- *And it's not just corporate greed. Governments and nonprofits are also susceptible to fraud. During her time as City Comptroller for Dixon, Illinois, Rita Crundwell embezzled over \$53 million. Rita was one of the country's leading quarter horse breeders and winner of 52 world championships, but the cost of maintaining the herd ran to \$200,000 per month. Because her position gave her complete control over city finances, she was easily able to divert money to an account she used for private expenses, and the scheme went unnoticed for 20 years. It is believed that Cromwell felt entitled to a lavish lifestyle based on her position and the notoriety her winnings brought to the city. It's tempting to think of fraud as a victimless crime because corporations and civic institutions aren't people, but fraud harms real people in virtually every case - the citizens of Dixon, whose taxes subsidized horse breeding, the customers of companies which raised their prices to offset losses. Sometimes the effects are obvious and devastating, like when Bernie Madoff caused thousands of people to lose their life savings, but often they're subtle and not easy to untangle. Yet someone, somewhere, is left holding the bill.*



Imagine, this woman embezzled \$53 million over 20 years! She must have had an amazing ability at rationalization to tell herself she was doing this for the good of her community. She was, after all, bringing all this notoriety to her city through the success of her horse breeding and racing. But, in reality, she was stealing the money of others. She was not doing this for the good of



everybody. *You shall not steal* needs to be looked at squarely and honestly. We cannot go down the road where we greatly benefit ourselves, and maybe help others a bit too, and then justify it by telling ourselves that we are just doing it for the good of others.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Beg, borrow or steal"? This saying appeared in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (*The Tale of the Man of Law*, circa 1386). It was also the title of a 1937 movie. It is an idiom for doing whatever is necessary to accomplish a specific task. It means we should do whatever it takes. Does this justify stealing? Of course not. This is the wrong attitude.

What if, instead of defaulting to the most extreme case of what to do when absolutely no option but stealing exists, we default to all the things we can do *before* that extreme and unlikely case occurs? People often go to extreme cases when challenging us to see how far we will stick to our morals. We should look at *when* does this most extreme case occur? *Why* does it occur? Instead of waiting until the question becomes, *Would it be okay to steal if stealing was the only way to stay alive?* We should look at all the things we could have done before we got to this extremity. On the road to that most extreme case, there are lots of exits that most of us will not take. Then we get to the end and turn around, telling ourselves we are now in the extreme and we have no choice. Most likely, with few exceptions, we have had choices along the way of which we failed to take advantage.



What if we change "Beg, borrow or steal" to "Seek, act and rely"?

SEEK - Seek out help.

This requires humility:

Romans 13:8-10: (NASB) ⁸Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹For this, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Most of us have a heart of wanting to be in service to another. Loving our brother means helping those in need. If you are in great need, seek out those of like faith for help. The hardest part of seeking help is needing to be humble enough to ask!

Not asking for help could result in prison, likely an even worse situation than what drove the person to steal. Some might rationalize and say, "But not if I do not get caught!" We should seek help instead.

Both Old and New Testament teaching expect this kind of kindness:

Leviticus 23:22: (NASB) *When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God.*

This beautiful verse shows how God expects us to care and provide for our fellow man. It is straightforward. Do not reap the corners of your field.



Leave them on purpose so that those that are needy have a place to go for food. God built charity for others into His Law. This willingness to be helpful is the kind of template we should use towards one another.

The New Testament requires this attitude as well:

Galatians 2:9-10: (NASB) ⁹*and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.* ¹⁰*They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.*

This is a great example. In the New Testament, we read of what the Apostle Paul did for the poor, especially those he did not know in Jerusalem. He had such a heart for those who did not have. Paul was not a wealthy man. He was on the road preaching, working when needed wherever they went in order to support himself and others.



But he worked for his Christian brothers in need to build them up and keep them going. There were loving brethren who handed Paul funds to give to those in Jerusalem during a particularly hard time. There had been an extensive famine in the Jerusalem area with persistent food shortages. When he wrote to the Corinthians, he mentions that their efforts before were good, but by setting aside a little each week, they could give even more this time! This is an important concept - when we have a great need, we need to ask for help. We should work together to build ourselves up. By meeting the needs of others in times of hardship, we forge a community of believers that care for whoever has the need.

ACT - Act in a manner that is appropriate to righteousness.

This requires discipline:

Ephesians 4:27-28: (NASB) ²⁷*and do not give the devil an opportunity.* ²⁸*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*

The point here is that we should not always be the needy ones. If we have a season of need in our lives and receive the abundance of the brethren, we should then grow through it and supply someone else in *their* need. This is "growing up," gaining Christian maturity.

When we act in a manner that is appropriate to righteousness all along, we are not looking for the "I have no other choice" scenario. We can rationalize to that end, but we have willingly turned our backs on the exits provided if we do so. Do not give the devil an opportunity! *He who steals must steal no longer*, instead, work, or even barter to put your affairs in order. Work out an agreement for exchanging basic services. Borrow legitimately and follow through on this agreement. We need to be men and women of integrity and fulfill the terms of these agreements. Not only should we go to any length to legitimately take care of ourselves, *but our objective should also be to rise to a point where we can help others*. It is a rare occasion when someone gets to the point of having to steal without ways of avoiding this extreme action along the way. When we look at avoiding this problem, we see it takes humility and discipline.



RELY - Rely on God's grace and on those we know who are spiritually-minded to help separate us from our wants and focus us on our true needs. This requires faith, trust and humility to rely on others:

Galatians 6:1-2: (NASB) ¹*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*

Fulfilling the law of Christ is helping each other, holding each other up. It is not a matter of taking the responsibilities from another, but of one helping another bear their own responsibilities. Sometimes we might need to borrow from someone else. Sometimes we might need another's charity. Whatever it is, we need help to grow up in Christ, to avert that difficulty. It is so beautiful to watch when people reach out to those in great need and offer tremendous help. To watch them not only accept the help (maybe feeling a little embarrassed at first), but then growing up to help others. That is what Christian maturity is.



We are prospective members of a "body" for a reason. Instead of considering the extreme example of having to steal to preserve life, look at all the ways to avoid getting into that extreme state! Be serious about having some forethought so that we will not need to rationalize bad actions. We look out for and support one another to the benefit of all.

This verse talked about *the spirit of gentleness*. This spirit helps us to separate from our sinful thoughts and ways. We get lost sometimes and need to be nudged back into a mind of spirituality. We all need help at times to avoid the paths that do not have integrity. We cannot fall into the mindset that allows us to rationalize stealing.

The
STANDARDS
high
of honesty

Stealing is no small matter.

Our bottom line as Christians is to avoid ANY action that could be interpreted as stealing as we seek godliness, righteousness and faithfulness.

You shall not steal. We cannot make excuses to travel some road where we say these actions are justified. There are probably ten or fifteen ways to avoid these actions if we truly apply ourselves to looking for the exits from this road *before* we get to the extreme end.

Proverbs 4:23-27: (New Living Translation) ²³*Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. ²⁴Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech. ²⁵Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. ²⁶Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. ²⁷Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil.*

Read these beautiful admonitions for living a godly life: *Stay on the safe path; mark out the straight path; guard your heart above all else. Do not ever go down a road that has a lack of integrity. By marking out that straight path, we avoid following the evil path.*



We are representatives of God through Christ. Let us act like representatives of God through Christ and never allow ourselves to go down those roads. Stay on the path of righteousness!

*So, is it stealing if I deserve it?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on May 17, 2021
Ep. 1178: Is There a Difference Between
Exaggerating and Lying?

Where there's property, there's theft. — Ursula K LeGuin

It's always easier to take something than work for it. — Alexandra Bracken

Christian Questions Weekly Newsletter

CQ Rewind Show Notes and
Study Questions

Text

CQREWIND

to **22828** to get started.



Study Questions to follow

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1177: Is It Still Stealing if I Deserve It?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1177-stealing/>

See:  CQ Rewind
SHOW NOTES

1. What is the eighth Commandment? What is the relationship of this Commandment to the others?
According to the Jewish Law, what was the punishment for theft or kidnapping? (See Exodus 20:3-15, 21:16)
2. How does the eighth Commandment apply to the way we treat our fellow humans?
What is the "High Standard of Honesty" here? (See Exodus 21:16, Leviticus 19:11-13, 35-36)
3. Why do people end up stealing? What are the three conditions that make fraud likely?
(See *The Fraud Triangle*, TED Talk)
4. How are general robbery, livelihoods, negligence and breaches of trust covered by the eighth Commandment?
What is the "High Standard of Honesty" here? (See Exodus 22:1-9, Leviticus 6:1-7)
5. What are the consequences for committing the sins mentioned above? Why are they so severe?
What are two things should drive our actions to avoid any theft mindset? (See Proverbs 11:1-3)
6. What did Jesus say about the motivation behind theft? What is the difference in the Old Testament Law and the teachings of Jesus? What is the "High Standard of Honesty" here?
(See Matthew 15:15-20, 21:12-13, 22:34-40, 1 Corinthians 6:10-11, Titus 1:10-11)
7. Why should we be careful about taking things we believe we deserve? Who was the first thief? How can people live with themselves while committing fraud? (See Isaiah 14:13-14)
8. To change "beg, borrow or steal" to "seek, act and rely," what is required to "seek" help when we are lacking things we need to survive? What must we do before we end up in extreme need which might set us to think we need to steal out of necessity? (See Leviticus 23:22, Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 2:9-10)
9. What do we need to "act" in a righteous manner? What must happen after a season of need where we received help from others? Ultimately, what should be our objective or goal? (See Ephesians 4:27-28)
10. Why is it so important to "rely" on God's grace and those who are spiritually-minded? How can this help us resist the urge to steal? Why is it important to be part of a spiritual community?
(See Proverbs 4:23-27, Galatians 6:1-2)
11. How are you "marking out a straight path" that you might "stay on the safe path"? Can you think of a time when you allowed yourself to get into an extreme situation when stealing seemed your only option? How could you have used forethought to avoid this outcome?