

TEACHING GOAL

To study the positive requirements of the eighth commandment.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. Which is the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal.

Q. What is required in the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment requires the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.

S.C. 73-74, L.C. 140-141, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 97-98

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Ephesians 4:17-32

Support Passages: Genesis 3:17-19; Leviticus 6:1-7; II Thessa-
lonians 3:6-15; I Timothy 5:8; I John 3:16-18

BIBLE STORY

Genesis 2:10-20; Adam takes care of the beautiful garden.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Ephesians 4:28

28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

APPLICATION

To get something for nothing or to receive a "free lunch" has been the goal in life for many throughout the history of mankind. As popular as it is, the lottery remains a prime example of this sinful attitude. To the contrary God requires of us the sanctity of labor to the end that we glorify and enjoy Him and have the means to help our needy neighbor. This is every one's responsibility and not just that of the wealthy or the relatively few recipients of lottery largess.

SUMMARY

As with all of God's law the underlying principle is the law of love. We are to love YAHWEH our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind and as well, our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore the prohibition of stealing is based on love for our neighbor as is clear from the study text before us in Ephesians chapter 4. We are no longer to steal, as we once did when we were alienated from the life of God, laboring with our own hands to have "something to share with him who has need." It is an act of love to further the outward estate of our neighbor. To deliberately impoverish ourselves or our neighbor is an act of sinful hate.

Furthermore it is completely contrary to the fruit of conversion. Paul's reference to Gentiles in verse 17 is a reference to our manner of life when we were unconverted. These particular Gentiles were typical of all who were deadened in their understanding and excluded from the life of God through ignorance and hardness of heart. In this estate they were callous, given to sensuality and the practice of every sort of impurity with greediness. "But you did not learn Christ in this way", writes Paul. A life of greed and indolence may be typical of many in our modern society but it is not the life style wrought by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit renews our mind-set and our inmost being in the likeness of God Himself "in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Therefore "let him who steals steal no longer." Why? Because the one whom God regenerates is much different than this. Radically different behavior is the true fruit of the Spirit.

"When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against YAHWEH, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery..."¹ restitution must be made in full and one fifth more must be added as a means of satisfaction. How loving and kind is this treatment of both the perpetrator of the crime and the victim. According to the law of the Gentiles the hand of such a person would be cut off or he might be imprisoned. He could not then perform the labor necessary to repay what was stolen and mollify his victim with a token of satisfaction. Robbery, extortion or deceit is a hateful thing in itself but the ungodly remedy of such a crime is equally hateful. God would have us restore what was taken. He would have us labor with our own hands for that which is good so that we would have the means to help our neighbor.

Labor, not indolence, is the mark of a godly man. Adam labored in the garden of Eden being placed there for the express purpose of cultivating and keeping it.² Therefore it follows that the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 is not the curse of labor; it is rather the pain and hardship connected with labor and the frustration mankind experiences as the result of the curse upon the ground.³

¹ Leviticus 6:1-7

² Genesis 2:15

³ John Murray, Principles of Conduct, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957, p. 82

Adam would still eat bread and labor with its appropriate reward were not abrogated. Neither is sweat necessarily bad for our bodies. The great sting of the curse in any event is death not labor. "For you are dust and to dust you will return", is a curse of death.

In fact, if one does not labor to provide for his family, according to I Timothy 5:8, he is worse than an unbeliever. In II Thessalonians 3:10 Paul teaches that anyone who will not do labor should not eat. Indolence, doing no work at all, leads to one's acting like a busybody and Paul commands and exhorts such a one to "work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread." It is John, however, who gives us our final application of this truth. "Whoever has this worlds goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" At the heart of this prohibition against stealing, therefore, is the law of love for our neighbor.