First Century Fellowship Ministry

A Biblical Church of God

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not steal.

(Exodus 20:15 Deuteronomy 5:19)

Seems pretty straight forward. You shall not steal. There is nothing to separate it or qualify it. No "if's", "ands" or "buts", or "under specific or certain circumstances". Just, you shall not steal. Can it be that easy? Not with man and his infinite self-proclaimed wisdom.

We should note right off although it does not say it, it also implies a person has the legitimate right to possess property.

The ways we acquire something happens in only one of three ways. 1. We receive it as a free gift or inheritance from a person or God. 2. We receive it as the result of the fruit of our labor as a wage or purchase it with that wage. 3. We steal it.

In our study of the sixth commandment we realized that over the centuries man has developed more efficient ways to kill one another. Similarly, we will see how well man has learned to steal, cheat and deceive his fellow man.

We have developed hundreds of ways to steal. Stealing directly from someone, taking their possessions. Stealing by deception, false advertising or making false claims about something for personal gain. "You shall do no unrighteousness in judgement, in measures and weights, or in quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin. I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And you shall

observe all My statutes and all My judgements, and do them, I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:35-37).

"Permanent" borrowing, taking by borrowing with no intent to return something. Wage or time theft, failing to pay a fair wage for fair labor or taking pay without being fairly earned. James covers part of this in James 5:4; "Listen! The wages of the workmen who harvested your fields, which have been withheld by you, are crying out; and the cries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts."

We commit larceny, burglary, robbery, embezzlement, steal supplies from work thinking it's okay, shoplifting, cheating on exams to pass a course, cheating at games, cheat on taxes and the list goes on and on. We have even justified a small theft from a larger theft like there are degrees of sin.

We even steal from God. True believers in the word of God realize we own nothing. Everything we have is from God. We may possess things but we never truly own them. God has commanded us to tithe. Originally it was for the benefit of the Levites, the original priests, because they did not receive any other inheritance as the other tribes of Israel did. The tithes of the people were used to support them so they could be concerned about the service to God. A second tithe was used for the commanded Holy Days and a third (the third year tithe) was to support those who were less fortunate, i.e., "…then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied." (Deuteronomy 26:12). People slowed in their tithing obligation or stopped all together, thus stealing from God.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! (Malachi 3-8-9).

False preachers can steal, also. They try to steal people from Jesus. They entice them with pleasant sounding false doctrine and their "charismatic" way. Their true goal is to secure for

themselves wealth, possessions and fame. You will know them by their fruits. God warned us to watch for these false shepherds in the Old and New Testaments. "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture," says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, God of Israel, against the shepherds who feed My people, "You have scattered My flock, and have driven them away, and have not taken care of them. Behold, I will bring upon you the evil of your doings," says the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:1-2; see also Ezekiel 34:1-10 and John 10:1-10).

What's curious though, of all the many ways there are to steal and cheat one another and God, there is only one way to be honest.

As a society, and for the most part a world, we have developed a very lax moral code. We put degrees on everything to lessen the effect of the incident. No matter how you define it, stealing is the ultimate example of greed, lust, covetousness and selfishness. We want something and we go after it with no regard for others. We have a "get" rather than a "give" attitude.

As a society we have a lack of ethical conduct. We have lost our moral compass and many cannot figure the reason for it. Here's a hint, look around. Where do you see God within our society? Is He in the schools like He once was? Do we involve Him in our lives as our parents and grandparents did? He is definitely not in our colleges and universities (with little exception). Too many have developed a secular mind set not being educated sufficiently or fairly to see the other side of things. We do not speak to one another, we argue points instead of debate them or even discuss them in a civil manner. What we have is a failing or in some cases, a false belief in God. We have allowed our spiritual foundation to be eroded before us. We need to rebuild.

So where do we begin? We start off by re-affirming our commitment to God. As Peter responded to those from the house of Israel who were with him just prior to Pentecost, "Then Peter

said to them, "Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). Keep things in a Biblical perspective. "But as for you, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33).

We need to be appreciative of the rights of others in all we do. Develop and have a sense of responsibility and respect for others and their possessions. Does that sound similar to something we have already gone over? "Master, which commandment is the great commandment in the law?" And Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment; And the second one is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40). Add to that with, "And as exactly as you would have men do to you, you do the same to them." (Luke 6:31).

Jesus has set an example for us. Be generous to and serve others before ourselves. Giving to others of our excess is more beneficial to us than to seek and accumulate earthly treasure for ourselves. "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust spoil, and where thieves break through and steal; But store up treasure for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust spoils, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matthew 6: 19-20). He has shown it is far better to give than to receive. "…The one who has two coats, let him give to the one who has none; and the one who has food, let him do the same." (Luke 3:11). "In all things, I have showed you that you are obligated to so labor to support those who are weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35). Our heavenly Father knows our needs and if we diligently obey Him He will take care of us. He wants us to get away from the Satan inspired "get" mentality and move on to the "give" attitude inspired by Jesus. "But this I say: the one who

sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and the one who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Each one as he purposes in his heart, so let him give, but not grudgingly or by compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. For God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that in every way you may always have sufficiency in all things, and may abound into every good work." (2 Corinthians 9: 6-8).

In the New Testament Jesus re-affirms the practice of tithing when He spoke to the Pharisees and chastises them for the way they neglect other parts of the law by their practice. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, but you have abandoned the more important matters of the law-judgement, and mercy and faith. These you were obligated to do and not leave the others undone." (Matthew 23:23; also Luke 11:42).

Jesus said we are to give to our enemies and the ungrateful and follow God's example. "But love your enemies, and go do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the Highest; for He is good to the unthankful and the wicked. Therefore, you also be compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate." (Luke 6: 35-36). We will one day be judged by how we give and serve others. "Give, and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete out, it shall be measured again to you." (Luke 6:38).

We have the instructions on what we are to do. "Let the one who stole, steal no more; rather, let him labor with his hands, working at what is good, so that he may impart something to the one who has need." (Ephesians 4:28). As we also read above, Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38). Then we can work towards changing what seems to be a cultural norm. It sounds like a very large task until you understand we do not have to change the whole world by ourselves. We work to be

an example to our family and those around us by developing a Godly attitude. Talk to them about morals and ethical behavior. Be the example.