

STEAL NOT
Romans 13.8-14

**We want to talk about the commandment, “Thou shall not steal”
But first, I want to ask you a couple of questions this morning.
Has anyone here ever had money stolen from you?**

**Anyone ever have tools stolen from you or tools borrowed and not returned?
Anyone ever have a bicycle stolen? A car stolen?**

Have you ever had your home broken into? Was something taken?

People have said that when their homes are broken into they feel violated and vulnerable, unprotected and paranoid, even angry, some very angry.

One lady was so angry she posted a sign on her property that read, “Beware, property is protected by a pit bull with aids”. She needed to feel safe.

That is understandable isn't it? We lose a sense of security when someone steals something from us.

**Ok, so how many of you have ever taken anything?
Just as I thought, no one here would do that would they?**

OK, so how many of you know someone, who as a child, took candy from the store, or candy from one of our quiet bags for the children, or cookies from the cookie jar, or carrots from the neighbor's garden, or a toy from a friend, or pennies from grandma's dresser, or money from their father's wallet.

**This Sunday School teacher was teaching a lesson on stealing and asked, “What do you call someone who takes something out of your father's wallet?”
A little boy pipes up, “my mom”. I know I shouldn't have told you that.**

**How many of you know a teenager who cheated on a test, downloaded someone else's music, or copied something that had been copyrighted.
Hey, everyone does it anyway-right?**

Maybe you know an adult, who borrowed some office supplies from work, fudged a little, just a little on their tax returns, or someone who didn't give the boss a full day's work for a full day's wage, thinking the boss doesn't need it, besides I've earned it anyway, or someone who was the boss that didn't give their workers their breaks, or worse yet, didn't give them a day's wages for a day worked.

Do you know someone who borrowed money and said they would pay it back next week, and the next week became the next week, and the next week...

Or maybe you know someone who has sold something for more than it was worth. They took advantage of someone to make a few extra bucks...or maybe a lot of extra bucks because they think, "it's worth whatever I can get for it."

It seems a bit frivolous to be talking about "Thou shall not steal", I mean we all know what that means...right? But do we? .

First when we say "thou shall not steal", we're talking about not stealing THINGS from others. That seems pretty easy to understand.

Romans 13.8-9a (MSG), *"Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code-don't sleep with another person's spouse, don't take another person's life, don't take what isn't yours..."*

"Don't take what isn't yours." We all pretty much agree that what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours. There are a few that think what is mine is mine but what is yours is mine too.

Well, maybe more than a few that think that way.

We're told 48% of workers stole from their employers in expense accounts, wasted work time, sick leave, materials and merchandise to the tune of \$40B.

One out of every 52 shoppers steal goods and services.

For every one of those caught 35 get away. If you do the math there are over 140,000,000 incidents of shoplifting in our country that costs over \$120B

You'd think that it is the lower income folks who steal out of need to survive. That is true for only 10% of the shoppers. We know that 70% of shoplifters are in middle income bracket while 20% are from the upper income bracket.

There must be another basic need or two.

Is it that our lives are so out of control that we do things that give us the sense of being in control?

Or is it that we are so bored with ourselves that stealing puts us on the cutting edge of excitement? I really don't know.

The second thing this passage tells us is that, when we steal we steal from ourselves. When we're stealing from ourselves we're obviously not loving ourselves. *"Love other people as well as you do yourself."* Romans 13.9b

Remember in the Bible Jacob stole his birthright. Funny thing, it was already his.

John was a loyal carpenter who was working for a very successful contractor. The contractor put John in charge of the next house the company built. That meant that John would order all the materials and oversee the whole job.

John studied the blueprints. He checked every measurement, every spec. While doing so he had this thought, "Why not cut a few corners, use less expensive materials and pocket the extra money? Once the house is painted who will know the difference anyway?"

So began the project. John ordered second grade lumber but reported buying top grade. He ordered cheap wiring but reported using the top of the line. He order inexpensive concrete for the foundation but report buying the expensive concrete. He cut every corner he could and planned to pocket the extra.

Finally the project is done. The contractor came to sign off on it. He says, "John, this is great, what a magnificent job you have done. Since you've been faithful and loyal all these years, you may have this house as a gift."

God has given this precious gift of life. When we cut corners we only cheapen life, we don't love ourselves as God intended, and we steal from ourselves.

The third thing about “thou shall not steal” is that when we steal we steal the TRUST from and of others.

“You can’t go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love.” Romans 13.10-11.

Friends, when we don’t love others as the “law code” intends we steal their trust, their joy, their peace, their innocence, and many other things as well.

My son Bret had worked hard, saved his money, and bought a new stereo outfit. He got it all set up, called me down to the room, and was excited about showing it to me. I confess I didn’t have the same enthusiasm for the stereo as he did.

My unloving comments were totally inappropriate and robbed him of his joy, and undermined our relationship. Do you think it would made it easier or more difficult for him to trust me again?

Think of the prodigal son’s bitter comments to his father about his brother’s return. Certainly that would have stole some of the father’s joy.

Two weeks ago someone said, “I’m sick and tired of all the politicians and all the scams and scandals, all the neglect of what is right. You can’t trust them. I’ve lost confidence in our system.”

Do you see what I mean? That person expressed a great loss didn’t they? They’ve loss trust in the system. They had certain expectations of our government officials and how things should be done.

We know there are still good people and people of integrity trying to do the right thing in government but the actions of some have caused people to doubt the system, question the integrity of all, and has “stole” the trust of many.

We experience it again and again. We read of CEOs with huge salaries who even embezzle more and steal from their company employees’ pensions. Not only have they stole money but trust as well. Can we trust the corporate world?

It can and has happen in the church. When some use the church for personal gain or when church leaders are involved in sex scandals there can be an erosion of security and trust even in the message we have.

Trust has been loss, in a way “stolen.”

Most people in the church shake their heads in wonder at what goes on but can and do continue to trust in God’s provision and protection.

Those outside the church find it more difficult. They even ask, “why bother with church?” or point their finger and say, “I told you so.”

Pastor F.E. Marsh tells this story. He was preaching and the Holy Spirit convicted a young man named George of stealing.

George confessed to the pastor that he had been stealing some expensive copper nails from his boss to build his own boat but was ashamed to tell to the boss.

George had talked to his boss before about Jesus and the boss laughed at him. So he felt if he confessed to the boss, the boss would think of him as a hypocrite.

George had to make a decision.

Well, the next time Pastor Marsh saw the George he asked what had happened. George told him he confessed to his boss with surprising results.

The boss looked at him and said, “George, I always thought you were a hypocrite, but now I’m not so sure. Maybe there is something to Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a man admit he is a thief...there must be something to it.” Interesting isn’t it?

There are many things in life that can steal not only our money and material things but our trust, our witness, our dignity, our character, our family, our time, our innocence, our joy, our peace, our whatever.

I see the video lottery as something that steals many of these things.

It is set up to bring pleasure to some and it may some but actually brings pain to most.

You ask, “Where is the scriptural mandate to say video lottery is stealing?”

I ask, “Where is the scriptural mandate for saying cocaine is illegal?”

It’s found in the principals presented in the Bible about how we treat each other. The Bible really isn’t just a bunch of rules and regulations, a list of do’s and don’ts.

It might feel like it but God is asking us to be obedient to Spirit of the law, “to love our neighbors, to love one another.”

In lottery, we’ve created an institution that provides more opportunity for depression, alcohol and drug abuse, more spousal and child abuse, more divorces, more stealing, more bad debt, more government spending on social and legal cost than the government cares to admit and that out weights the economic advantages of video lottery.

How is this loving one another? Loving our neighbors?

Do you know a few years ago there was a fast of a few months from video lottery.

The numbers social ills and crime went down.

Yesterday as people were preparing for the wedding a business owner saw the slides for the sermon. She said we should tell people video lottery is a bad thing.

She runs a business in a small town. And last year alone 10 customers went bankrupt on her and she lost \$10,000 due in part to video lottery.

Video Lottery is a sure thing, I’m sure a few enjoy and a few will win and many will lose.

More importantly, I want to close by telling you about another sure thing. I love telling you about this sure thing.

The sure thing is God’s love for you in Jesus Christ. We can cheat on the cross of Christ but God’s love is still there for us. We can steal from God but God’s love is still there for us.

Those of you who have had things stolen from you, those of you who have stolen from others in whatever way, and I could be the first in line...we need to ask forgiveness from God and offer that same forgiveness to others.

We often think God is there, standing hands on hips, pointing the finger, ready to blow the whistle. Or that God enjoys it when we get caught and get our dues.

There was a kid who attempted to siphon gas from a motor home. He got more than he bargained for. When the police arrived they found him doubled up and sick, sitting next to the motor home. He had inhaled from the sewage tank of the motor home instead of the gasoline tank.

The owner didn't press charges. He said, this was the best laugh he'd ever had.

God's not like that. God is not laughing.

God tells us not to steal, but when we do

I see God just shaking his head and weeping

as he sees our pathetic attempts to get ahead and to gain control of our lives.

**But, I also see God hearing a cry, a cry from the cross,
a cry from his beloved son hanging between two thieves,
a cry that prays and pleads for our pardon,
a cry that gasps for breath,
a cry that gasps for breath enough to say over and over,
"Father Forgive them they know not what they do.
Father, forgive them they know not what they do."**

**And I see the Father God pouring out his wrath on his son's unprotected body.
And I see the Son pouring out blood from his body to protect you and I.**

**And I see the Father God, pouring out his mercy on you and I,
because of the body and blood of his son.**

And today the Father tells us once again to steal not and in the next breath with a louder voice, shouts, "COME" COME SHARE with me the gift of my son.

**So friends, COME, let's pray to seek God's vision and experience God's love.
Let's stand and sing the prayer, "Be Thou My Vision." (SANCT)
So friends, come to TAKE, to RECEIVE the body and blood of Christ. (MOC)**

