

Colleyville Presbyterian Church
Ten Commandments: Week 9 - The Eighth Commandment

Class Outline:

1. The text of the eighth commandment
2. The Westminster Larger Catechism questions and answers relating to the eighth commandment
3. Two implicit assumptions of the eighth commandment
4. Tithing
5. Taxation
6. Wealth and poverty

1. The text of the eighth commandment

Exodus 20:15: *15 You shall not steal.*

Deuteronomy 5:19: *19 And you shall not steal.*

John Frame: “If theft includes robbing God of His due, then we can understand how, in a sense, all sin is theft. So the eighth commandment is a broad mandate upholding God’s whole law.” JF

2. Westminster Larger Catechism

WLC Q. 141. What are the duties required in the eighth commandment?

A. The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; rendering to everyone his due; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, and suretyship, or other like engagements; and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.

WLQ. 142. What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, manstealing, and receiving anything that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing landmarks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust enclosures and depredation; engrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness; inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.

John Frame: “We see here how ingenious fallen man becomes at finding ways to take what belongs to others.” JF

3. Two implicit assumptions, or presuppositions, of the eighth commandment

- **Private Property**

John Frame: “Scripture endorses the concept of private property, always with the proviso that God is the ultimate owner of creation and the one who has the ultimate authority over it. The eighth commandment assumes this concept. Stealing would have no meaning, unless there were a clear distinction between what belongs to me and what belongs to someone else.” JF

Matthew 20:1-16

- **Work Ethic**

Ephesians 4:28: *28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

John Frame: “Work is the antithesis of theft... Labor replaces theft as a means of sustenance. And more than that: it turns the thief into a benefactor.” JF

4. Tithing

Malachi 3:8-10: *8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

2 Corinthians 9:6-7: *6 ...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

5. Taxation

Romans 13:1-7

Abraham Kuyper: “Thus reads the word of the apostle of Jesus Christ, a word that still today sanctions and hallows the government’s right to administer finances. A government does what it does, not because you ask it to, nor because it wants to, but because God so ordained it. Its duty is ‘attending to this very thing,’ that is, to defend the good and punish the evildoers, a task that incurs great costs. Thus taxes are a nation’s sacred offering, rendering to God in order that God should rule the nation by means of the authorities He has ordained.” AK

John Frame: “I personally believe that the U.S. government has far overstepped the limits originally established in the Constitution. Thus, it has become far more expensive than it should be. I also believe that lower taxes, on the whole, benefit the economy, while higher taxes discourage economic growth. Since government should be under law, the Bible supports efforts to bring the scope of government back

to its constitutional limits or, alternatively, efforts to amend the Constitution to make it justify current practice. But the Bible does not quantify in general how much income government may require of its citizens.” JF

Inflation: the cruelest tax of all (and one of the most surreptitious forms of theft)

Martin Luther: “...thievery is the most common craft and the largest guild on earth. ...Far from being picklocks and sneak thieves who pilfer the cash box, they sit in their chairs and are known as great lords and honorable, upstanding citizens, while they rob and steal under the cloak of legality.

Proverbs 20:23: *23 Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good.*
[see also **Leviticus 19:35-36, Deuteronomy 25:13-16**]

Who in our society is most adversely impacted by inflation?

6. Wealth and poverty

Questions for thoughtful consideration:

- Who are the poor?
- What are the causes of poverty and what are its remedies?
- Is the early church response to poverty an approbation of socialism?
- In light of the eighth commandment, what ought to be our response to poverty?

Who are the poor?

Abraham Kuyper: “By *the poor* we understand people who cannot provide for themselves because they are widows, minors, the elderly, or the sick. It is an area of life where mercy reaps its laurels and comforts those who need to be comforted.” AK

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12: *10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*

John Frame: “The ‘poor’ in Scripture are not poor because they are lazy, but because of circumstances to some extent beyond their control. Most often, they are poor because they have been oppressed by the rich and powerful. This economic deprivation then leads to hunger, health crises, and even homelessness. The disabled are often poor. The most common examples of poor people in Scripture are orphans and widows. They often have no reliable income and nobody to speak for them against oppressors. ...God sides with the poor when they are *unjustly* poor, that is, oppressed. He sides with them because they have a just case, but are unable to make their arguments through human channels. It is in this sense that we should equate compassion for the poor with justice. It is wrong to say that justice requires an equal distribution of resources as such. It does not. But when the rich oppress the poor, to defend the poor against them is simple justice. Insofar as human courts can improve the situation, they are not, then, to be biased in favor of the poor. Rather, they should be biased neither for the rich nor for the poor” JF

Leviticus 19:15: *15 You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.*

[see also **Exodus 23:2-3**]

What are the causes of poverty and what are its remedies?

John Frame: “The family was [in biblical times], and today remains, the first and most solid defense against poverty. In Israel, it was understood that parents would provide for their children, that children would provide for parents in their old age, and that parents would leave an inheritance for their children. ...In modern society, the breakdown of the family through illegitimacy and divorce is one of the major causes of poverty. Nothing can do more to alleviate the problem than the restoration of a biblical family structure.” JF

Is the early church response to poverty an approbation of socialism?

Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37, Acts 5:1-4

John Frame: “Socialist states have decreased the gap between rich and poor, but more by impoverishing the rich than by enriching the poor. But selfishness abounds in socialist states as much as in capitalist. The main difference is that in socialism the way to accumulate benefits is political rather than entrepreneurial: by supporting the policies of the governing party. There is no reason to suppose that politicians are any less selfish than entrepreneurs.” JF

John Frame: “We don’t have a biblical mandate, in my judgment, to ‘narrow the gap between the rich and poor,’ as an end in itself. We do, however, have a mandate to feed hungry people.” JF

In light of the eighth commandment, what ought to be our response to poverty?

If we are not generous to the poor, are we stealing from them?

Peter Leithart: “Theft is practical idolatry, service to Mammon, one of our world’s most revered idols. ...Ultimately, we break Mammon’s hold when we acknowledge that all we have is a gift from God. Our property is ours, but in the mode of gift. ...Once we reckon with God’s universal ownership, we can see the story of fall and redemption shrouded within the Eighth Word. God created Adam to have dominion, to take ownership of creation. The fruit of the tree of knowledge was the one thing that belonged exclusively to God. Adam stole it, and all children of Adam are thieves, stealing God’s holy things, assaulting God’s image by assaulting the property of others. Above all, we steal *ourselves* from God: We are not our own; we were bought at a price (1 Cor 6:19-20). We bear the Name that marks us as the Lord’s property (Third Word), yet we want to be our own god. Every time we disobey, we steal and commit sacrilege, misusing God’s holy things.” PL

Matthew 25:31-46

JF John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2008)

AK Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto* (Bellingham, Lexham Press, 2015 – first published as *Ons Program* in 1879)

PL Peter Leithart, *The Ten Commandments: A Guide to the Perfect Law of Liberty* (Bellingham, Lexham Press, 2020)