

## SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

### Ninth in series, Ten Commandments Revisited The Eighth Commandment

Preached by Douglas Norris at the First United Methodist Church, Palo Alto, California  
March 24, 1985 Luke 10:29-37

"You shall not steal," is the eighth commandment. In this series of sermons, we have emphasized that we are people of the covenant. God has entered into covenant with the people he has called. God promises to be our God, and our response to salvation--the state of being loved and in relationship with God--is to live in covenant, to live God's lifestyle as an alternative to the world's lifestyle. We are called to model God's way for the world; not in arrogance or superiority, but in humility, in gratitude for all we have received from God. God's lifestyle begins with the Ten Commandments; those are the basics. Jesus expanded, extended the commandments into an ethic for Christians that can revolutionize the world.

Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments into two: love God and love neighbor. The first four commandments are the basis for loving God: God is #1, the highest priority. Let God be God; do not attempt to manipulate or coerce God. Treat God with reverence, with respect. Keep a sabbath, a day for worship, rest, honoring God. The next six commandments are summarized by Jesus as "loving your neighbor." Living in relationship with people, as God's people, means to respect parents and children, to respect the sacredness of life, and to respect the marriage relationship (faithfulness). The eighth commandment teaches us to respect not only people, but things.

The eighth commandment deals with our relationship with things, especially things that do not belong to us. "Something for Nothing" is the principal condemned here. Our culture today revels in getting something for nothing, without work, without the investment of time and energy. The popularity of TV game shows where gigantic prizes are won; the popularity of lotteries where, for the price of a ticket, huge rewards are received; the popularity of slot machines and gambling games all are expressions of a culture that is mad about getting something for nothing--until the tables are turned and we are the ones victimized. An irate employee went to the company paymaster and objected, "My pay is a dollar short! What's the meaning of this?" The paymaster checked the record sheet and replied, "Last week we overpaid you a dollar. You didn't complain about that, did you?" "I can overlook an occasional mistake," shouted the angry worker, "but not two in a row!" We're happy with getting something for nothing, until we are on the short end.

Jesus had much to say about things, about possessions. Perhaps the parable that best illustrates a range of attitudes about things is the story of the Good Samaritan.

The first attitude illustrated in the parable is, What's Yours is Mine, I'll Take It. A traveler was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. We don't know what he had that was attractive. We don't know how much money he had. Perhaps the robbers didn't know either, but whatever he had, they felt it was their right to take it. They believed in getting something for nothing. It was irrelevant how hard the traveler had worked for his possessions. He had something. They wanted it. They took it. What's yours is mine, I'll take it. Young hoodlums in the New York subways, gangs on the Muni buses in San Francisco, purse-snatchers in Palo Alto--What's yours is mine; I'll take it.

Individual stealers are only part of the picture. Groups, even nations, are guilty. European nations built empires on this principle applied to Africa, the Middle East, the Far East: what's yours is mine, I'll take it. Our own country is far from pure. To our nation's shame, there were times when we applied this principle to the minerals and resources of South America. We took what we wanted, exploited the workers, reaped huge profits, and even sent our army to defend corrupt governments who cooperated with our



thievery. We are being judged, I believe. The moral fiber of our nation is weak in part because we have violated the eighth commandment.

The second attitude portrayed vividly in this parable is What's Mine is Mine, I'll Keep It. The traveler was left beaten, stripped of his possessions, half dead along the road. A priest went by, a Levite went by, both respected members of the community, both in the business of religion. They both crossed to the other side to put the wounded person out of sight, out of mind. They did not share. They did not share their time. They did not share their resources. Their philosophy was: what is mine is mine, I'll keep it.

I saw a bumper sticker on a camper that read, "We're spending our children's inheritance." I was amused and smiled to myself; but by the time I saw the bumper sticker a second time and a third time, it ceased to be funny. In fact, it is indicative of a sick attitude in our country. What's mine is mine, I'll keep it. We have a very selfish attitude towards the resources. We exhaust the oil, pollute the air, dirty the water, with little thought for our children or the future. Who owns the natural resources? What did we do to deserve the wealth we enjoy, the good life we enjoy? WE received something for nothing, solely a gift of God's creation, but we act as if we are the owners and have a right to waste and to spoil, with little thought for the future. The true owners are the future. What we have been given is entrusted to us to keep for the future; to use as we need, yes, but to safeguard, preserve, and even enrich for the future. To keep things for ourselves is stealing! Stealing from the future.

People with this attitude also steal from God. The prophet Malachi (3:8) asked, "Will you rob God?" But you say, "How are we robbing God?" "In your tithes and offerings." You and I have not received something for nothing. God has entrusted to us the environment, the rich resources, your personal wealth and health, all for a reason. Not to keep selfishly for yourself, but to do God's work.

This leads us to the third attitude illustrated in the parable. What's Mine is Yours, I'll Share It. To turn the eighth commandment over, to state it positively in Jesus' lifestyle, is "What's mine is yours, I'll share it." The Samaritan had compassion. He cared; and he cared enough to go out of his way; share his time with the wounded person, share his strength--for he helped the wounded to an inn, share his resources--for he applied medicine and paid the bill at the inn. The irony of Jesus' story is that the Samaritan was an outcast. No good Jew would have anything to do with a Samaritan, and here is a Samaritan befriending a Jew.

Sharing with one another is the essence of God's lifestyle. We are put on this earth to help one another; to share freely, ungrudgingly, so that others may live their lives more easily and happily. There have been many articles in the newspapers lately about the Oakland A's pitcher, Mike Norris, and his struggle with drugs. Some of you have enjoyed teasing me with the headlines about Norris, as if it were me. Lowell Cohn, in Friday's San Francisco Chronicle, wrote how the A's baseball team is rallying around Mike Norris. They are demonstrating their concern by accompanying Mike when he goes to his group therapy four nights a week, four hours a session. They accompany him to offer their support. "The A's have made a human contract not to let one of their number fall by the wayside." Mike Norris is touched and overwhelmed by the support. He said, "I got so much backing here, I'd have to be admitted to a nut-house to screw up again." Sharing, helping, doing what you can, is the positive expression of "You shall not steal."

The body of Christ, or the church fellowship, or the people of God, is a group committed to the philosophy, what is mine is yours, I'll share it. Sometimes we care, but don't know how to express it. Recently, I talked to one of our members who hasn't been in worship for several months. In that time, only one person has contacted her and expressed concern. It isn't that we don't care, but often we don't know what to say. When you miss seeing someone here, remember he/she is your brother/sister in

Christ. You don't have to be a counselor. Just pick up the phone and say, "I've been missing you lately at church. Are you okay?" That's all you have to say, and it means so much. During this time since my father's death, I have been touched by the many cards and expressions of sympathy. It really helps to have you say, "I'm sorry about your Dad." Sometimes we don't know what to say to one another at the time of death. You have to say very little. After all, what can one say at death? The words don't matter; it is the thought. Just saying, "I'm sorry" is enough. Many of you have said, "If there is anything I can do, just call on me." That feels good, for that is an expression of Christ's way: What's mine is yours; I'll share it. Let's be quicker to express such concern to our absent brothers and sisters. When people are hurting and miss a few Sundays, if no one calls or makes a contact, they interpret it as rejection. We need one another. That is what Christian fellowship means.

Jesus calls us to an exciting way of life. Following the eighth commandment, in particular, will lead to a deep, full experience of compassion and caring, for "You shall not steal" means "What is mine is yours; I'll share it."

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EIGHTH IN SERIES, TEN COMMANDMENTS REVISITED  
THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

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