

You Shall Not Steal

DARRELL DELANEY

We have all had a moment where we have compared ourselves and what we have to others and their possessions, but what happens when we cross the line and actually steal things? In this episode of *Groundwork*, we are going to look at the eighth commandment and some of the implications of stealing. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney, and we have been, Scott, in a series on the Ten Commandments, and we covered a lot in these episodes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

We are going to look at the eighth commandment today, and here it is in Exodus Chapter 20:15: You shall not steal.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is speaking to God's people, and in the original deliverance of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, God had just rescued the people from Egypt, and the plan was...it ends up being delayed as it turns out...but the plan was that very soon God was going to settle them into a good land—into a promised land—the land of Canaan—a land flowing with milk and honey. So, God is moving them from a time of oppression and slavery when they had nothing to a time when God is going to provide a lot...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why God is doing the talking to say...in a sense he is saying: You shall not steal, and in a sense he is saying because you are not going to have to. I gotcha.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, there is actually a verse that talks about how God had them borrow from the Egyptians, all the gold, all this stuff; and then, that debt that they had from borrowing was supernaturally canceled when they drowned in the Red Sea; and so, they had more than what they needed, which makes stealing absurd in this situation; but I think, Scott, it would be helpful if we came up with a working definition of stealing just to make sure we are all on the same page; and I would define stealing as wanting what someone else has and then taking the action in your own hands to get it for yourself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we are going to talk later in this series...in fact, the tenth commandment will talk about coveting; and when you covet your neighbor's speedboat, you want a boat like that; and maybe you will work to be able to afford to buy one...I don't know, but you covet—you want one like that; but sometimes in envy and in greed...two other deadly sins, right...we cross the line from wanting something like that to wanting that one. I don't want my neighbor to have that; so, in envy we usually say: His having that big boat makes me feel diminished because I only have a rowboat. So, I am going to go steal his boat, or I am going to set his boat on fire so he doesn't have it either; or you say: So, I am just going to take it. I am going to steal it. He won't have it, but I will. That is sort of the heart of theft. It is not just sort of longing that, oh, I wish I had that nice of a car. It is moving beyond that to say: So, I am going to take that one. It is going to become mine by force.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, you just named that stealing has a few different tentacles to it. I was thinking about how these things manifest themselves. Like we have read stories about businesses and corporations that there is an idea, but they didn't create the idea, they stole the idea and then maybe made millions off of it. So, they become a successful empire, and they stole the original idea for that; and there are other situations like it, too. So, there are kids who are in a school project together, and one of the kids is not doing their work, but when they get the A, that is the kid who is the loudest: Look at the work we did; and he gets all the glory for the work that wasn't done, and they didn't put their work in. So, it is interesting how people steal different things for different reasons.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we have heard this term in more recent times, and sometimes it comes up with even whole nations, like the US and China, we hear this term *intellectual property*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To steal an idea can be really, really bad. To steal an idea, to steal the concept for a movie...and there was a lot of back and forth. I remember I read the story, whose idea was Facebook? Was it really Mark Zuckerberg or did other friends give him the idea and he took it? Who came up with Microsoft? Was it really Bill Gates? What about Apple? Was it really just Steve Jobs? So, there is competition for ideas even. So, you can steal, apparently, almost anything. We usually think of stealing a loaf of bread or a car or a piece of jewelry, but even ideas and concepts can be stolen from one person to the other.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even property that is not physical property can be counted in that, because it belongs to someone else, and they have all types of paperwork now to try to track these things; but in the situation with the believers in Israel, they had all they needed and more, and so, it really doesn't make much sense to steal in that situation. Stealing doesn't just hurt the person who is stealing, it hurts the relationship of the person who you steal from; and so, it is really crazy how you see...you just said earlier that stealing is connected to envy or jealousy or these other things. It is kind of like a multi...it sprawls in different directions...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is not just by itself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, you wonder sometimes what motivates somebody to steal. Well, sometimes it is fear. Somebody genuinely fears he isn't going to be able to get enough food for his kids...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, he takes matters into his own hands and steals. That is not a good solution, but you can understand that fear sometimes. Sometimes it is just lazy...oh, I could get a job and work hard to be able to buy that, you know, DVD player or that blue-ray player, but sure, it is a lot easier just to lift it, you know, out of Best Buy and sneak it out of the store. Other times, it is entitlement. Here, the advertising industry always says: You deserve... You deserve...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, you have a right to this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you deserve to drive a Lexus...you deserve to have the best whatever, and some people take that and say: Hmm, yes; I do deserve that, but I cannot afford it, so I will get it through some other way, which is often involving theft. So, I think...you know, fear, laziness, entitlement...I think they all have one common antidote, and that might be nurturing a sense of contentment.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, and now that you have said that, it reminds me of this verses in Philippians 4, where Paul writes about contentment; verses 10-13 says this: ¹⁰I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, Paul was writing this from prison, right? Philippians is one of the prison epistles, Darrell...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, he is in a situation of want. He is in a situation of deprivation; and yet, from that cell, he is able to write these wonderful words about contentment; and as we are going to see, as we talk more about this, Darrell, a lot of that contentment that Paul is talking about there has a whole lot to do with how much we trust God, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is really important for us to understand that because Paul was trusting in God's providential care...and we will talk more about this...he was able to be content; and I believe that contentment can actually kill stealing at the root. So, let's get into that deeper as we go into this episode. Stay tuned for the next part.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is an eight-part series on the Ten Commandments. We can do it in eight because we covered the first three commandments in episode one. So, now we are in the sixth episode, but on the eighth commandment: You must not...thou shalt not steal; and we have said, Darrell, we define stealing as, indeed, seeing something somebody else has, or seeing something that you don't have, even if it is on a store shelf, and deciding you have to have that, but you don't want to go through the hard work to get it the regular way or the usual way. You want that, so you are going to find a way to take it; or your neighbor has a boat; you don't want a boat like it, you want that boat, and so you are going to steal it. But we also said, Darrell, that a lot of this comes because we don't trust God. We are fearful, we are lazy, we are entitled, but one way or the other, we are not content. We would be content if we trusted in God, as Paul wrote in that verse from Philippians that you read just a little while ago.

DARRELL DELANEY

When we take matters into our own hands...you mentioned this, that we usually don't trust God in that situation. We try to make a solution for ourselves; and Jesus actually teaches about what the importance of treasures are and putting them in their rightful place in the Sermon on the Mount, and in Matthew 6:19-21 he says this:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth; where moth and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

I love Jesus' connection between treasure and heart. He is trying to make sure that they don't put their stuff in situations here where they can be stolen; but I mean, ultimately, we know Jesus is the treasure, right? But the problem is that we have sometimes allowed culture and society to tell us what the priorities of treasure should be, and then our hearts become attached to those things, which lead to some stealing at some point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I do kind of like it here that in one sense we read that verse from Matthew 6 to encourage ourselves to be content, and to have our highest treasure in Jesus in heaven so that we are not tempted to steal, but Jesus turns it around to say if your highest treasure is what is in the closet where you are keeping your mother's jewelry, somebody might come in and steal that from you...

DARRELL DELANEY

And then what?

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you know, you shouldn't steal, but you shouldn't value above all else something that somebody else might steal, too. Put your treasure in heaven, where nobody can get at it because it is eternally secure. So, you know, contentment, trust in God. Those are the things that we need to keep in mind, and also to recognize how much God values us, because so much of the time I think when people steal, or when we are tempted to steal, what we want to say is: I will feel better about myself if I have that. I will be somebody. I will be the big guy on the block if I can have that. So, there is some self-worth issues here...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There are some self-esteem issues here; but it never works, right? I mean, you are never going to become a better person by stealing something; quite the opposite; but maybe if we said: You know, I am a child of God. I am a sinner saved by Jesus. I have eternal value already; I don't need a bigger car to have value. Maybe that would help, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, you are touching on something that is really deep, Scott, because I think some of us...and we are probably ashamed to admit this...there have been times in my life when I thought the value and the worth will come externally, and if I could go out there and grab that, or if I could date that person, or if I could do these things...grab these degrees, make this money...that it would bring value and worth to me; but that actually dismisses the point that God has already made us valuable and worth something to him, and because the pressures of society are always prevalent, bombarding us all the time, we have these pressures to think that we need to search outwardly to find that value when God has given it to us freely because he loves us; but I think there is another section about stealing that we haven't talked about, Scott, and it is actually the broken relationship that happens when the person who is stolen from is affected.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Years ago, I think it was after I was in college, but my parents, who at the time lived out in the countryside, came home one night to discover that they had been robbed. A window was broken and some of my mom's jewelry, including stuff she had gotten from her father, who died fairly young, but he had been a jeweler...they stole a bunch of stuff, DVD players, stuff like that. Well, most of it was replaceable, but what couldn't be replaced was, particularly for my mom, her sense of security...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right? She just could never feel quite secure again. They bought an alarm system eventually, but you know, what got stolen from them that night wasn't things, it was their sense of trust, their sense of safety, those are the things that also get violated. One of the things God knows is that the covenant community of Israel...in any community...things get ruptured on all sides when somebody steals. The thief does great harm to his or her own soul, but it also has all these other ripples of affecting those who are stolen from; and not just in the sense that, oh shoot, now I have to buy another VCR; no, it's deeper than that.

DARRELL DELANEY

What you are touching on, Scott, is the fact that...and I have this theory...I believe what this scripture teaches us is that when you sin, something breaks...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, either something is broken in you, or there is something broken in the relationship between you and God, or between you and your neighbor; but there is always something that is broken and desperately needs to be repaired. So, I mean, there are situations where I know people who...and this isn't limited to people who struggle with addictions...but I have seen the situations where there are people who had addictive patterns and they end up stealing from the people whom they love, and now they have to not just return what they stole, but the relationship is now pained, it is strained, it is awkward, it is really hard to work through. The repairing of the relationship takes more time than restoring that item that was taken; and it has really been painful in this situation. When we are believers, we have a relationship with God, who wants us to move away from trying to fulfil that need on our own. We want to trust the way the Lord can protect and provide for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, you know, Darrell, there are so many different kinds of theft. If we looked at the classic Reformed document of the Heidelberg Catechism that we reference pretty often because it has a really good section on the Ten Commandments, it points out that stealing isn't just physical theft, but it is schemes and fraud, things made to look legit, which are really fraud. Back to my parents again. Not long ago, they unfortunately became victims of somebody who called them, convinced them they were somebody else, got them to give out a credit card number. Well, it was a scheme, and immediately they went out and started using that credit card. They didn't physically take anything from my parents, but they stole their information and used it.

We also hear about this thing these days, Darrell, called identity theft...

DARRELL DELANEY

There you go.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I was the victim of that during the pandemic. Somebody got ahold of my social security number and bilked the State of Michigan out of \$6,500 in unemployment benefits under my name, and it took forever to get it cleared up, of course, because it was happening all over the place; but, identity theft, stealing credit card information, calling older people and exploiting their vulnerability by making it sound like you are a legit salesman when you are not, these are all forms of theft, too; and as we have just said, what they do is they disrupt community, they steal peoples' sense of trust, they unsettle peoples' souls. Great damage is done.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that takes a lot of time to undo. I think that we also need to distinguish, too, the difference between needs and wants; and if we could distinguish that I think it would help us to actually discern whether we need to trust in God, or just leave it alone; but in this next segment, we want to talk about what it means to trust God and move away from stealing, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this episode as part of our series on the Ten Commandments, and we are at commandment number eight: Thou shalt not steal; and Darrell, we have been talking about a lot of different angles of this. We have talked about how very often for the thief it is a lack of trust in God to provide...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A lack of trust that God cares and values who you are without your needing to get a bigger car or a better house or something. We have talked about different forms of theft, including, you know, fraud and telemarketers who pretend to be legit and then steal your credit card information, or we just talked about identity theft even; and in all of it, we said it disrupts community. It disrupts for the thief, it disrupts your relationship with God, but it also disrupts your relationship with your community, and it causes damage within the community because, to be stolen from, is highly unsettling. So, we want to keep talking about that, but also to remind ourselves that, indeed, the providential care of God is so important.

DARRELL DELANEY

If we understood that better, then it would actually render stealing unnecessary; and back to the Sermon on the Mount again. Jesus is speaking on this in Matthew Chapter 6: ²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and

the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then Jesus goes on, familiar words: ²⁸"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor and spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."

(Then he goes on to say: Don't worry; you know, don't run around like the pagans and say: What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?) ³³"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

So, don't worry, Jesus says; and I think, you know, in those words, Darrell, we hear an echo of a lot of what we have been talking about is the antidote to stealing, which is trust, contentment...as we saw from Paul earlier...and the belief that we don't have to worry, God's got us; and insofar as various forms of theft come out of great feelings of insecurity, here Jesus is saying you can feel secure because God loves you, God values you more than the birds and the flowers, and he takes care of them, too. So, rest in that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, and so, the beautiful Reformed tradition theology of providential care means that not only has God created, but God is in the process of taking care of and sustaining. If we look at *Adonai yireh*---*Jehovah jireh* as we call it in English—it doesn't mean that he just provided, it means that he actually oversees everything that he has created, and that means he is going to take care of every need. He didn't say he was going to take care of every *want*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But he did say he would take care of every need; and not only do we have what we need naturally, but we have what we need spiritually.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and that is an important distinction. I mean, in that song *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, you know, there is a line: All I have needed thy hand hath provided. You know, secretly sometimes I wish I could sing: All I have *wanted* thy hand hath provided; but that isn't true and it wouldn't be good for me anyway; but as Peter says...you know, the Apostle Peter...in his second letter, 2 Peter 1:3:

[God's] divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

So, spiritually and naturally, God does provide. That doesn't mean we won't now and then encounter a season of some need. I mean, even Paul said: I have been in need...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have been hungry; I have been in distress; but God brings us out of it, and the fact of those things in our lives doesn't mean we have fallen out of God's loving hand.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, and that is actually what makes stealing so bad, Scott, when we forget that God is continually caring for his creation, and we are part of that creation; when we forget that he cares for the sparrow, he cares for the flowers, but we are worth more than they are, it really does show a lack of faith in God to be able to take care

of us; and sometimes we get caught up in what society says is important. I love the quote by Pablo Picasso, where he says: good artists borrow, but great artists steal; and if we believe that in some fundamental way, then we are going to be moving away from what God has for us in our lives, and his plan for us. We are trusting in the fact that he takes care of us, but then, Scott, we need to talk about a little bit what it means to live this out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and one thing is doing something that...I heard a friend of mine say recently that for thirty or more years now, he and his wife have concluded every day by naming ten things that happened that day for which they are thankful...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the old: Count your blessings, count them one by one...the old Sunday school song; but indeed, if you count your blessings one by one, you will see what the Lord has done, and you will recognize the providential care you get every day, even on days that are not real great, my friend said: We can always find ten things. But secondly, we prioritize and recognize what we just talked about. We need to separate our wants from our needs. It is too easy to say that what I want is what I need. Not true; so, let's really see, you know, the difference. We might want a lot of things...and some of them are not bad...but we don't need them...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God will provide what we need.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he is constantly being faithful in that. I think that we also need to look at, if we are thinking about stealing, then we need to think about the consequences first. Being given that immediate gratification might be exciting, but there is always something...there is a payment somewhere that is a consequence, whether you have to pay it back, whether you get locked up in jail, whether you broke a relationship with someone, will you be able to look yourself in the mirror with integrity if you stole something from someone? How do you justify that? You shouldn't have to, because if you are walking in integrity, you won't be stealing; and the next thing that I think is important is that, let's just say you have stolen... We are not going to be naïve to the fact that there are some people who have walked through this. I personally have times in my testimony that I am not proud to admit that I have stolen things or ideas, and we have to ask God for forgiveness in prayer, and say: God, we have sinned against you, we have sinned against one another; and have to go to the other person. Sometimes, if you wrote a bad check, you have to go to the bank and make that right. There is a way to rectify what you have done wrong as well. There is an effective prayer found in Proverbs Chapter 30 that is really cool, that really helps me, and it says:

⁷Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: ⁸Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you, and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. This verse helps me to not ask for too much and not ask for too little, but to be in the situation where I can feel the contentment that Paul was referring to, as I remember Jesus' verse: Give us this day our daily bread, the Lord's Prayer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is faithful, and he is with us, and in that we do rest, thanks be to God.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of the Ten Commandments with a discussion of the ninth commandment: Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

We have a website, groundworkonline.com. Visit it and tell us what *Groundwork* means to you. Make suggestions for future *Groundwork* episodes.

DARRELL DELANEY

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