

***“For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery...”*** Isaiah 61:8

The Eighth Commandment cuts across the thieving spirit of our age.

### **Shocking Statistics**

Recent surveys have found that three out of ten prospective employees admit to having stolen from their previous employer!

22% of workers feel that stealing from their company is *“sometimes justified.”*

33% of employees surveyed confessed to falsely phoning in sick and collecting pay for days they pretended to be sick, but weren't.

One third of college students admitted that they would cheat on an exam if they were sure that they could get away with it. One in seven graduates default on their university loans.

A survey of a number of large organisations revealed that the average employee stole six weeks per year from his employer by consistently coming in late, leaving early, taking extended lunches, spending extra time on coffee breaks and neglecting his duties. All of this amounts to billions lost to the economy each year.

A recent survey of 500 products, chosen at random, revealed that approximately 50% of them contained less items in the packaging than advertised on the label. For example a bottle of 100 headache tablets actually contained 60, etc!

Approximately one third of all business failures each year can be traced to employee theft.

When businesses close down, employees lose their jobs and families suffer.

It is estimated that almost half of all employees are guilty of stealing. Retailers in South Africa report that they lose many billions of rands each year to shoplifting, and even more to “*shrinkage*” - theft by employees.

The South African Police Services reported 395,296 cases of shoplifting and “*commercial crime*” registered for 2007. 14,201 carjackings, 1,245 truck jackings and 77,984 public robberings in the streets were reported in a single year.

### Why Do So Many Steal?

What has caused this pandemic of stealing? Some would like to say that poverty causes theft, however some of the richest people in the world have been guilty of theft and many spoiled children from wealthy homes engage in shoplifting. By way of contrast, there are many millions of poor people who never steal. Even during the Great Depression, when millions of families were destitute, God-fearing people did not steal.

The Bible gives a very straightforward answer to this question in Ecclesiastes 8:11 “***Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.***”

The situation has deteriorated so badly that in South Africa we now have to have special campaigns and TV film series trying to teach basic principles to the general population. *Heartlines* billboards declare rather ambiguously:  
“*We believe in the value of values: Do you?*”

Some shops have felt compelled to place prominent posters declaring: “*Shoplifting is stealing!*” One would have thought that was rather obvious, but all too many people don't seem to see anything wrong with blatant theft.

### Hypocrisy and Deceit

Theft is saturated with pride, deceit and hypocrisy. Thieves, con-artists and perpetrators of fraud are hypocrites. They would not want anything to be stolen from them or from their children. Yet they arrogantly suspend the basic rules of society and exempt themselves from these rules. They would expect their own comforts and possessions to be protected, yet they lie to, steal from and cheat others. There is no worse level of arrogance and selfishness than this.

### **A Callous Crime**

Stealing is a callous crime because the thief does not seem to care about the effects of his crime upon the person who is deprived. The extortioner who charges excessive rent does not seem to care about the hardship that he is causing to his tenant. The person who sells a defective product does not seem to care what trouble his fraud may cause the buyer.

### **Excuses**

There are many imaginative excuses that people come up with to justify their theft:

“I’ve worked hard and I haven’t been fairly rewarded for my efforts.”

“I need it more than they do.”

“I can’t help myself.”

“They don’t appreciate it, I will.”

“It’s easier to steal something than to work for it.”

*“I’m jealous of them and I think I deserve their possessions more than they do!”*

To all of this God responds with four words: **“You shall not steal.”** (Exodus 20:15)

## Dial-a-Porn

When Telkom launched 087 *Dial-a-Porn* a large insurance agency reported that their phone bills went up over five million rand in one month. Now, at that time there were approximately 5,000 employees in that firm. Assuming that approximately half of the employees used the telephones at their place of employment to access 087

*Dial-a-Porn*

, that would mean that the average employee ran up R2,000 of unauthorized phone bills in just one month! These people broke both the Seventh and the Eighth Commandments.

## Theft by Government

Government policy also steals. When the Law of God declares: **“You shall not steal...you shall not covet...”** this entrenches private ownership of property. Socialism is legalised theft and institutionalized envy. Any taxation of ten percent or higher is defined in the Scriptures as oppression (1 Samuel 8:10-18). Any taxation of property, or of inheritance, is strictly forbidden (1 Kings 21:3). Institutions and individuals involved in the fulltime service of the Lord are not allowed to be taxed (Ezra 7:23-24). Those involved in the fulltime service of the Lord are supported by free will offerings by people who have already paid their taxes. To tax money consecrated to the Lord’s service is to steal from God. Any unequal or progressive system of taxation is expressly forbidden in the Scriptures (Exodus 30:14-15; Leviticus 19:15).

## Theft by Inflation

Biblical economics also forbids unjust weights (unbacked currency) and measures (inflation) Leviticus 19:35-36; Proverbs 11:1; 20:10; Amos 8:5-7; Micah 6:11-12). Inflation steals from pensions and savings. It is a hidden tax.

## Legalised Theft

Many people violate the Eighth Commandment by voting for political parties that steal through excessive taxation and socialist policies. Governments that increase taxes without providing equal services are stealing.

## Restitution

In cases of theft, arson or malicious damage to property, the Bible decrees Restitution. Restitution is the restoration of a thing to its proper place or owner. It is reparation for injury or

damage to property. The Bible requires that the Restitution goes entirely to the victim of the crime. Restitution is also required for culpable negligence.

***“...he should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or a donkey or sheep, he shall restore double. If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. If fire breaks out ... so that stacked grain, standing grain, or a field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”*** Exodus 22:3-6

God’s Law is clear: The criminal is held accountable and he is responsible to pay for his crime. He is to work and earn, in money or kind, that which is required for the reparation of what he stole, damaged or destroyed.

### **Have You Been Guilty of Theft?**

**Have you ever stolen?** Have you ever taken something that did not belong to you? Have you borrowed things that you have failed to return, for months or years? Have you used the telephone at work, for personal and private calls without permission? If so, that is theft. It is theft for me to use someone else’s phone without his permission and run up a bill for him. That would be the same as going and taking the money out of their wallet. It is also one of the easiest ways to steal.

### **Zacchaeus**

Zacchaeus is an example in the Scriptures of one who did Restitution. ***“Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today Salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.’”***

Luke 19:8-9

### **Restoration Through Repentance**

Forgiveness of sin is not a substitute for restitution, but rather a foundation of it. Forgiveness of sin is not a redefinition of sin. We are forgiven – free from the guilt and penalty of sin – in order

to do what is right. Forgiveness is not a cloak for sin. It is a solution to sin.

**Forgiveness does not transfer property rights to the thief .** When God commanded: ***“You shall not steal...you shall not covet...”***

He ordained and blessed private ownership of property. Man has no right to abolish what God has ordained in any area – neither in the institution of marriage, nor in the institution of private property. Theft is not only a sin against the victim, theft is a sin against God. God’s Law is violated.

Repentance from sin and Restitution are inseparable. If a sin involved damage to, or theft of, the property of another, then Restitution is necessary before forgiveness can be enjoyed. Grace makes true Repentance possible; it does not eliminate the need for Restitution. Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, loves righteousness. Theft is unrighteousness.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not die on the Cross in order to allow us to steal other peoples property and get away with it. Do not rest until you have returned what you have borrowed. Pay back what you have damaged, or broken, and pay for those telephone calls that you had no permission to make. That is what the Bible requires in Restitution.

### **Diamonds**

Many of you may know the testimony of George Oesche. He had worked in the diamond mines and over the years had succeeded in stealing a large number of those valuable gems. He had a very nice house and comfortable lifestyle. But then when he was converted and learned about the importance of Restitution he went and confessed his crimes to the authorities. Although he had not been caught, and no longer worked for the mines, he began the painful process of repaying everything he had stolen. This involved a lot of sacrifice. And the Lord has mightily blessed him as a result.

***“Fools mock at making amends for sin, but among the upright there is favour.”*** Proverbs 14:9

### **Repaying the Bank**

I also know of another brother, Lawrence Temfwe, who is the head of Prison Fellowship in Zambia. As a clerk in Standard Bank he stole a lot of money. When he was caught, he was thrown in prison. In prison he came to Christ. After he had served his prison term, he worked to repay what he had stolen from Standard Bank. Now, he was not legally required to do so. He had done the crime and he had done the time. However, as a Christian, he understood that he had to do Restitution. Can you imagine the shock when he returned to the bank that he had defrauded and made full Restitution to them? What a tremendous testimony to the power of the Gospel.

***“If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live.”*** Ezekiel 33:15-16

### **Theft at Work**

There are many people who steal from their employers by agreeing to work for so many hours, for so much pay, but they don't work the agreed hours. They come late, they leave early and they only work when the supervisor is watching. They don't put the 40 hours, or whatever amount of work is required, into the given week. However, at the end of each month, they would be very unhappy if they received less than the agreed on salary. Is that not theft? Are you taking 100% of the pay for only 40% of the work? Laziness is a form of theft. We steal from people when we do less than what we agreed on.

Imagine what a testimony it would be if when an employer handed over the salary at the end of the month, an employee responded: *“Actually I've only earned 40% of this, you must take the other 60% back!”*

### **Littering and Laziness**

Littering is also a breach of the Eighth Commandment. We are stealing from the time of other people who must take the effort to go and clean up what we have dropped. We are damaging other people's property by our carelessness. If we had to do unto others, as we want to be done unto, then we must not be litterbugs. The Eighth Commandment requires us to respect other people's property.

### **The Many Faces of Theft**

Stealing includes government corruption, inflation, excessive taxation, defaulting on loans, failing to pay bills, cheating on tests, loafing at work, cheating on income taxes, taking sick leave when we are not sick, illegally downloading or copying software, violating copyrights, and failing to tithe to God.

### Stealing From God

The prophet Malachi wrote that when people don't bring their full tithes and offerings to God they are stealing directly from God.

***“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. ”*** Malachi 3:8-10

### Stealing is Short Sighted

Theft can only benefit a thief for a very short time. Our Creator and Eternal Judge sees everything we do. So no one can possibly get away with stealing. The punishment God hands out to unrepentant thieves will last for all eternity.

### The Repentant Thief

By God's grace, one of the first fruits of our Lord's Redemption was enjoyed by the thief crucified alongside our Lord. When he, in repentance, turned to the Lord and asked: ***“Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.”***

Our Lord Jesus replied:

***“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”***<sup>1</sup>

Luke 23:42-43

The Word of the Lord comes to each one of us this day: ***“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give Him who has need.”***<sup>1</sup>

Ephesians 4:28



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# THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT - YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

Saturday, 26 May 2012 14:23 - Last Updated Thursday, 24 May 2012 12:24

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