

Sermon File # 675

Scripture Text and Reading: Exodus 20:15; Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Title: *The Good Samaritan and the 8th Commandment*

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At International Baptist Church of Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday morning 18 September 2011

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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The Good Samaritan and the 8th Commandment

Introduction:

Today we return to our series on the Ten Commandments, which we have noted are a description of the life that pleases God. Open your Bibles to Exodus 20 and also to Luke's Gospel, Chapter 10, as we continue to look at the Decalogue through the eyes of Jesus, who gives us the full implication of the Moral Law. As we've seen, Jesus demands a righteousness that is above simply refraining from the overt acts of murder, adultery and so forth, but also says that we must obey the inward, spiritual implications, such as angry words and lustful thoughts. Seen in this light, we all are condemned as guilty of breaking God's law, and our only hope is through our faith in Christ, who mercifully forgives us our sins and enables us to fulfill these commands by the power of his Spirit living in us.

Today we come to the 8th Commandment, which says in **Exodus 20:15**, "You shall not steal." Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 10:25-37, which is Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, which he told in response to an expert in the religious law of

the Jews, who had, sincerely or not, asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. The man answered Jesus correctly with the Great Commandment to love God entirely and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Thinking he could obtain Jesus' endorsement of his righteousness, and feeling smugly that he had kept this commandment, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" This self-righteous man thought he always behaved benevolently toward his fellow Jew, but Jesus told a parable that showed his failure to obey the Great Commandment, and also Jesus showed his failure to obey the 8th Commandment against stealing. Follow as I read Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37**.

We've already noted that many of us feel that we've safely avoided violating most of the Ten Commandments, especially those having to do with our actions toward others. We felt smugly complacent about having not disobeyed the sixth commandment against murder until confronted with the application of Jesus, who says that unrighteous anger and hateful words are included (Matthew 5:21ff). We also thought we were safe regarding the seventh commandment against adultery simply because we have refrained from the physical sexual act with someone other than our spouse. Yet Jesus tells us that lust is as serious in God's sight, and we realize our need for purity of mind and heart as well as of body (Matthew 5:27-30).

I assume most of us will think we've escaped condemnation from the eighth commandment against stealing since we haven't been charged with grand theft, burglary, shoplifting or even cheating with our tax reports. But once again as followers of Christ we have to look at this commandment from his perspective and with his much broader and more demanding application.

A poll indicates that 90% of evangelical Christians say they are innocent of violating this 8th commandment (Ryken, 644). Apparently they are thinking of the narrow, legalistic and minimalist interpretation. In other words, they haven't been arrested for stealing. Their record is clean.

Jesus told a story in response to a question from a very religious man who had asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. This man in fact was an expert in the religious laws of the Jews, the Old Testament, including of course the Ten Commandments, and thought that by observing the law as he understood it he would gain eternal life. Jesus asked him what he thought he needed to do and he answered correctly, according to Jesus. By keeping the Great Commandment of loving God with all his being and loving his neighbor as himself he would satisfy the demands of God and inherit eternal life. The problem was, this man hadn't begun to keep this Great Commandment, and Jesus knew it. He smugly thought he had kept the commandments by loving his neighbor as he defined his neighbor—his fellow Jew. So, he was sure Jesus would confirm his righteousness by agreeing that his neighbor was a fellow religious Jew, an upright person just like himself!

But Jesus knew that this man was guilty of breaking the Great Commandment, and also was guilty of breaking this 8th Commandment. Jesus then told the parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the best known stories in the Bible. The intent of Jesus was to show this self-righteous man the meaning and way of true righteousness. And in conclusion Jesus said that the life that has eternal life is one that acts like the Good Samaritan.

In this story, we see three attitudes, that of the robbers, the religious and the truly righteous, which is the only one that obeys this eighth commandment. Let's note the first attitude, that of...

The robbers, who say "What's yours is mine!"

Jesus' story is one that was very true to life, describing a man who had been beaten and robbed and left lying as if dead along the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This 20-mile stretch of road through the rugged desert from Jerusalem to Jericho was a favorite haunt of roadside bandits and thieves, who could easily lie in wait behind the rocky crags. It would be the risk equivalent of walking alone at nighttime through the most dangerous, crime-infested city streets in the US. These robbers simply expressed the attitude, "What's yours is mine."

Let's think about...

The mind and motives of a thief

I suppose there have always been the real and legendary Robin Hood figures, who rob from the unjustly rich in order to give to the innocent poor, but most thieves have a mindset that says they have a right to whatever they can extract from others, which is a self-centered attitude that has no respect for the rights and property of others. Stealing is a way of saying, "I have an absolute right to my own way, whether I have earned it or not" (Oswalt, *NLT*, 159).

This attitude that expects something from nothing is also essentially lazy. Paul had to rebuke some of the members of the church in Thessalonica, who had become dependent on the charity of others (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). These cryptic thieves disrespect the rights and property of others and think the world and even the church owes them a "free pass." Obviously these bandits that attacked and robbed the victim on the Jericho Road thought they had a right to steal at the expense and even the life of the victim.

Mind and motive give rise to...

The methods of a thief

Only a small percentage of the population will be career thieves and bandits, but that doesn't mean that many if not most of us are influenced by the same mindset and

motivation. In fact, when we conduct a search of even Christian society and our own sinful nature, we'll have to agree with Martin Luther that "If we look at mankind in all its conditions, it is nothing but a vast, wide stable full of great thieves." He speculated that if all the guilty were brought to justice and hanged there wouldn't be rope enough. "We must make all our belts and straps into halters," said Luther (quoted in Ryken, 645).

Like all of the other-directed commandments (5-10), these prohibitions are essential for the stability of society. Theft affects all of us. Consider these examples:

- A hotel in the US during one year of business had to replace 38,000 spoons, 18,000 tiles, 355 coffee pots, and 100 Bibles (There's some hope with this last stolen item!).
- Employee theft (making personal phone calls with company phones, taking office supplies, padding expense reports and wasting company time with computer games, etc.) costs businesses over 200 billion dollars per year.
- Businesses charge an extra one third of product costs as a "theft surcharge" necessitated by shoplifting.
- Cheating on tax reports costs the government and hence the entire population.
- People use credit cards with no ability or intention of repaying, and credit card debt has over recent decades risen from 5 billion US dollars to over 500 billion.
- False insurance claims contribute to rising insurance costs.
- Americans each year spend more on gambling, which is a recreational form of theft, than on either food or clothing. (Ryken, 642-645):

Stealing involves not just theft of material items and money, but also of intellectual property, someone else's school work which is taking by cheating on an exam or copying/plagiarizing someone else's material. Students are not the only ones guilty of cheating and plagiarizing. I know of preachers who have admitted to plagiarizing someone else's sermons.

Before the days of the Internet, which has increased the temptation to plagiarize, pastors were tempted to use almost word for word someone else's sermon in a sermon book. I knew a fellow seminary student who bragged that he preached the best sermons that money could buy! The Internet is a great help in finding resources for sermon preparation, but sermons that are posted are often preached nearly word for word by those who didn't write them.

I heard of a well-known preacher who happened to anonymously visit a worship service and soon recognized that the sermon that was being preached nearly verbatim by the young pastor was actually one that he, the older visiting preacher, had published in one of his sermon books. After the sermon, the visiting preacher introduced himself, much to the embarrassment of the plagiarizing preacher. This

older preacher said, “Good job with that sermon, young man. I couldn’t have done better myself. In fact, I *didn’t* do better preaching *my* sermon!”

Even in the negative sense of this 8th Commandment, most of us can think of ways we taken what belongs to others. We’ve all contributed to the social ills that result from theft, even though we may not guilty of kidnapping, theft of someone’s material property or animals, which are the applications of this commandment in Exodus 21 & 22.

Being just “mildly guilty,” we may feel somewhat smug and self-confident when we compare ourselves to the robbers who had stripped, robbed, beaten and left the victim half dead. But Jesus brings this commandment closer to home when he portrays in the parable the attitude of...

The religious, who say “What’s mine is mine!”

It’s not the robbers who are the real villains in Jesus’ story but rather it’s the two men who are...

Religious without love

In telling this story about the Good Samaritan, Jesus is confronting the self-righteousness and selfishness of the religion scholar who was seeking to justify himself on the basis of his understanding of the Great Commandment. He had a religiously respectable but very limited understanding of who qualified as his neighbor. Jesus knew something about this scholar that no one else did. In fact, this story of Jesus was not just a parable but possibly an actual event. Had it been a parable, Jesus probably would not have used the role of priest and Levite, and would have mentioned their offices only if this story was real history or a current event (Plummer, 285f).

I think Jesus knew that this religion scholar/priest was guilty of failing to aid someone in desperate need. Perhaps he was either the priest or Levite that Jesus portrays as avoiding helping a man they had seen lying as if dead along the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Foolishly, a man had traveled alone on this dangerous stretch of road, and not surprisingly, had been robbed, stripped of his clothing, beaten and left dying along the roadside. The priest walked by and decided to not help, perhaps justifying his inaction because of ritual taboos against being defiled by touching a dead body (Marshall, 445). Another religious leader, maybe a worship minister, following the bad example of his superior priest, also ignores and fails to help the dying man.

Jesus thus illustrates how that religion can get in the way of eternal life and that the religious do not necessarily have eternal life. Again, even in our evangelical tradition, it’s not uncommon for church life and requirements and activities to keep us

from living for the kingdom. The priest may have been fearful that had the man been dead and he had ritually defined himself he would have to miss out on his next turn to serve in the temple. How often does our church service actually get in the way of our spending ourselves in serving and giving to others? I can't help but think that Jesus knew this religion scholar had failed to help a man dying alongside the road. His religion justified him, but God did not nor did his troubled conscience. He was religious but without love, the God-like love that gives freely to those in need.

This man was like the rich young man who came to Jesus, also inquiring about inheriting eternal life (Mark 10:17ff). He also was a legalistic, minimalist Moral Law observer, but Jesus knew his heart also. Jesus knew he loved his riches more than he loved God, and thus also was guilty of breaking the 8th Commandment by keeping instead of giving. Thus he was unwilling to part from his loyalty to his riches in order to follow Jesus. His great possessions had possession of him. He was...

Religious without God

Material wealth has such potential for taking ownership of our hearts, regardless of the amount of our wealth or the size of our bank accounts. That's why Jesus said more about money than all else except the Kingdom itself, and used the Aramaic term *mammon* to refer to wealth, "giving it a personal and spiritual character" of a "rival god" (Foster, 25). Jesus warned us about the captivating power of riches (Mark 10:23) and this rival god of money (Matthew 6:24). Too subtly and easily we can find ourselves no longer free to receive what we need and give to others in need. Paul says it's the love of money which is the root of all kinds of evil, leading to all sorts of temptations and ruin (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

This 8th Commandment challenges me to take inventory of my attitude toward my possessions, and whether I am free to stop along the roadside and help the needy or if I, like the priest and Levite, find reasons, even religious and churchy ones, to keep my possessions for myself. I struggle with a sense of responsibility toward my family to provide for their needs, which Paul says I'm obligated to do or I'm worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). But also I'm challenged to respond to the overwhelming needs of a world population, most of whom live below the poverty line.

When I read the promises of Scripture that God will supply the needs of his people, I realize these seem to imply that God's people will be the means by which many of these needs are met, just as was true in the earliest church, which "gave to anyone as he (or she) had need" (Acts 2:45). How else will God meet the needs of those believers in lands of dire poverty and overt persecution except through the generosity of those of us in the worldwide Body of Christ who've been entrusted with so much? I too easily dismiss the story of the rich young man by saying that Jesus would never ask me to sell all I have and give it to the poor and follow him. I'm challenged to examine myself to be certain that my religious interpretation of Scripture doesn't justify godless materialism and disobedience.

I agree with David Platt that “materialism is a blind spot in American Christianity” which keeps us from a radical compassion for the poor (Platt, 111). Unless we are willing to be set free from the grip of selfish materialism, we have serious reason to examine the quality and even the veracity and authenticity of our faith.

The Prophet Malachi condemned the Israelites for their unfaithfulness and materialism, failing to bring their tithes to the temple, God’s storehouse. They were guilty of actually robbing God of the tithes that belonged to him. If they would repent of their theft and bring the tithe (10%) of their produce and material goods, God promised to pour out blessings as evidence of his covenant faithfulness (Malachi 3:6-10).

Although we are not bound by Old Covenant legalism, we are nevertheless to give to God our offerings as an acknowledgment of his ownership and faithfulness to us, and “the most common form of stealing is by default—withholding God’s due” (Francisco, 10). We steal from God when we selfishly withhold an amount that shows his ownership and that fails to believe in his Law of the Harvest, that says when we give in faith to Kingdom causes, God abundantly supplies our needs so that we will have an even greater abundance to share with others (Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 10f). We who are under the New Covenant of grace are not bound by the legalism of the tithe, but for us 10% of our income can be a good place to begin with our giving. For us who are blessed with grace and material abundance, the 10% should simply be the place to begin, and our giving should grow as our faith and God’s blessings to us increase (Taylor, 106ff).

In light of our abundance and the needs of a lost, hungry and dying world, it’s inconceivable that we should give to Kingdom causes less than a tithe (10%) of our income. If we have “running water, shelter over our heads, clothes to wear, food to eat, and some means of transportation (even if it’s public transportation), then we are in the top 15 percent of the world’s people for wealth” (Platt, 115).

But the danger of our regular, “religious” tithing is our becoming legalistic with God, thinking we have made our payment to him and no longer are indebted to him. We can easily become proud and self-righteous with our tithing and neglect “the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have,” Jesus warned, “practiced the latter, without neglecting the former (the tithes)” (Matthew 23:23).

Could it be that we are like the legalistic, self-justifying expert in the law who was religious but without a relationship with the living God? Are we like the ones in Jesus’ parable who ignored the needs of the dying man?

In contrast to the robbers and the religious, Jesus portrayed another attitude, that of...

The righteous, who say “What’s mine is yours!”

In the parable, the one who proved to be righteous, the only one who obeyed the 8th Commandment in the full sense and intention, was a Samaritan, who was the least likely to do so. Jesus adds an element of total surprise. The people who heard this story would have thought the next character, the one who actually stopped to aid the dying man, would be a good layman, in contrast to the “professional clergy.” But Jesus speaks the unthinkable and shocking. The hero of the story, the one who practiced neighbor love, who obeyed the 8th and also the Great Commandment was a Samaritan.

Samaritans were the most despised subculture in the eyes of the Jews, the half-breed offspring of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who intermarried with foreigners during the time of the Assyrian captivity (8th Century BC). Alienated from Judea and banned from the temple in Jerusalem, they had built their own temple on Mt Gerazim and developed their own separate religious traditions, which the southern Jews deemed illegitimate (Stein, page 318). Certainly, the typical Jew, seeing a Samaritan lying half dead beside the road, would have done nothing to help and might have even delighted to “finish him off,” thinking it his religious duty as a good Jew.

But this Samaritan, perhaps a traveling businessman, reacted to the dying Jew with compassion. Sociologically and politically it would be the equivalent of a Palestinian member of Hamas having compassion for an Orthodox Jew (Blomberg, 64-68). When Jesus told this, the people were no doubt shocked. The Good Samaritan demonstrated agape love, caring in practical and sacrificial ways for the undeserving. He gave him what he had, treating and bandaging his wounds, and took him to an inn and funded his health care and rehab expenses.

This attitude of unconditional love saying, “What’s mine is yours” is an indication of...

Knowing the Owner of all things

Jesus told this parable to portray a life that pleases God, that gives evidence of the transforming grace of God. The Samaritan was truly a *good* Samaritan, one who had been made righteous beyond what comes naturally to us sinful mortals. This man knew that God is the owner of all things and understood himself to be only a manager of what God had entrusted to him. His actions reflected the grace/giving of our Lord Jesus Christ, who although he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that through his poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Conversion is far more than a decision to choose heaven over hell. It’s a transformation of character that conforms more to Christ when we repent of sin and selfishness and begin to trust, follow and obey Jesus as Lord, living in the power and radical newness of the Holy Spirit. Those who are being truly converted have not only believed in the Christ of the cross, but are living in the pattern of the cross,

sharing in his life of self-denial and self-giving, which reflects his glory into the world around us.

The truly God-righteous cf. the self-righteous, live in the pattern of Christ who entrusted himself to the care of the heavenly Father and was free to pour out his life as a gift offering for others (Ephesians 5:1-2). Just like Jesus, this Good Samaritan gave his time, energy and money to care for a needy, undeserving man whom God had placed in his pathway. This is fundamental to a life that pleases God, that can act like God in Christ, fulfilling the full intention and implications of the law and will of God. Our God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10), and he will provide all we need in order for us to live fully for him.

It's the truly righteous person who can say, "What's mine is yours," an attitude of one who is...

Managing, giving and investing in eternal riches

A life that pleases God by obeying the full intention of the 8th Commandment is one that knows complete freedom from selfish greed and is free to give freely at every opportunity. We are managers of God's wealth and abundant resources, and we need to be careful that we listen to his voice when he tells us to give and also how much to give.

Every time we give we are expressing the freedom we have in Christ over the controlling power of greed and selfishness. We're showing that money doesn't control us—the love of God controls us (Ryken, 647). The only free person in Jesus' story was the Good Samaritan. The robbers were controlled by desperate and violent greed. The religious were controlled by selfishness and legalism that closed them to the needs of the helpless and dying man. Only the Good Samaritan knew the freedom to lovingly give of himself to this man. He was giving evidence of eternal life by the way he was walking with the compassionate God. He doubtless knew the joy of the Lord, which Paul says characterizes the generous giver that God loves (2 Corinthians 9:7).

This commandment and Jesus' parable also challenge our materialistic Christian individualism. When I read the promises of the Lord Jesus to take care of our every need (e.g. Matthew 6:25-34) and those of the Apostle Paul (Philippians 4:19), these promises must assume that God will meet the needs of his people through his people, just as he did in the earliest church (Acts 4:34). When we pray for our fellow believers in lands of persecution, famine and other natural disasters that have taken away their jobs and possessions, we need to consider how we can share our wealth with them.

The Good Samaritan, in giving away what God entrusted to him, was actually investing in eternity. Jesus told another parable about a shrewd manager who, when his boss was about to fire him for mismanagement, adjusted downwardly the

amounts that debtors owed his master. By doing so, he made friends with these people, who likely helped take care of him in his joblessness. Jesus then said that we in the Kingdom need to be just as “shrewd” and wise (Luke 16:1-15). We need to use our worldly possessions to give to Kingdom causes, to reach the lost with the Gospel and to help the needy, who will bless us in eternity. Our worldly wealth, which is so transient and uncertain, can become a sure and everlasting investment, when we give as Jesus directs us to give, in ways that are part of his Kingdom work on earth. When we give to the needy, in fact, we are actually giving to Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46).

Conclusion:

Maybe you’re still in the 90% of evangelicals who say you’ve never violated this 8th Commandment; maybe not, in the legalistic, minimalist sense.

But when I see what Jesus is showing me in the story of the Prodigal Son, I fear that at times I have been a robber of what belongs to others, saying in subtle, respectable but still sinful ways, “What’s yours is mine.”

I know also I have been and in some ways still am like the religious guys who said, “What’s mine is mine,” and I have no time or possessions to give you. I’ve paid my tithe “religiously,” and given God what’s his due and no more. I’ve calculated carefully what I can afford to give and made sure I don’t overextend myself with radical, sacrificial giving.

I need, and maybe you along with me, to continually be converted to the true righteousness of Christ. I must trust in him and receive his gracious gift of surpassing righteousness that makes me acceptable before holy God (Matthew 5:20). We need then the transforming power of the Spirit, who changes us from cautious or even begrudging, minimalist givers to generous sacrificial givers.

Paul describes the process of being converted from robbers to righteous givers:

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28).

Zacchaeus was a robber in a legal way. As a Jewish tax collector working for the hated Roman government, he had betrayed his fellow countrymen and was not only excising taxes for Rome; he was extorting from his fellow Jews an excessive amount to add to his own personal wealth. But when he met Jesus and invited him to his house he became a new man—one of gratitude for God’s grace and forgiveness and a desire to be reconciled and make amends with all he had defrauded. He immediately gave half of his possessions to the poor and repaid to his victims four

times the amount he had cheated from them. In essence Jesus then said, "This man is really saved! This man was lost, but now is really found! (Luke 19:1-10).

I pray that you and I will obey this Eighth Commandment in the way Jesus intends and in a way that pleases God. May he make us truly righteous givers, saying, "What's mine is yours!"

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What are some more socially acceptable ways you and I might have disobeyed this 8th Commandment?
2. What are some of the ways society suffers from petty theft and dishonesty?
3. What was at the core of the failure of the priest and the Levite to come to the aid of the dying man in Luke 10:31f?
4. What do you think is the Christian's and the church's responsibility to help the poor, needy and suffering?
5. Why do you think that Jesus told this parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to the religious lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" Why is the Good Samaritan an example of one who has eternal life?
6. In what ways is our giving an eternal investment?
7. Spend some time reflecting on your financial stewardship and ask yourself how your giving is an expression of faithful management of what God has entrusted to you.

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