

LORD'S DAY 42

110. Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?
- A. God forbids not only outright theft and robbery¹ but also such wicked schemes and devices as false weights and measures, deceptive merchandising, counterfeit money, and usury,² we must not defraud our neighbour in any way, whether by force or by show of right.³ In addition God forbids all greed⁴ and all abuse or squandering of His gifts.⁵

1. **Exodus 22:1** If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

1 Corinthians 5:9-10 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.
 2. **Deuteronomy 25:13-16** You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. ¹⁴ You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵ You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God.

Psalms 15:5 He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

Proverbs 11:1 Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Ezekiel 45:9-12 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Enough, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plundering, execute justice and righteousness, and stop dispossessing My people," says the Lord GOD. ¹⁰ "You shall have honest scales, an honest ephah, and an honest bath. ¹¹ The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure, so that the bath contains one-tenth of a homer, and the ephah one-tenth of a homer; their measure shall
- be according to the homer. ¹² The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels shall be your mina."
 - Luke 6:35** But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.
 3. **Micah 6:9-11** The Lord's voice cries to the city; wisdom shall see your name: "Hear the Rod! Who has appointed it? ¹⁰ Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the short measure that is an abomination? ¹¹ Shall I count pure those with the wicked scales, and with the bag of deceitful weights?"

Luke 3:14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

James 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! ² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. ⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.
 4. **Luke 12:15** And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."
 - Ephesians 5:5** For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
 5. **Proverbs 21:20** There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it.

Proverbs 23:20-21 Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; ²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.

Luke 16:10-13 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous

mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

111. Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?

A. I must promote my neighbour's good wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would like others to deal with me, and work faithfully so that I may be able to give to those in need. ¹

1. **Isaiah 58:5-10** Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? ⁶ Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you take away the

yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.

Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Ephesians 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.



When we deal with the eighth commandment we are dealing with the sphere of labour and our material possessions. These two matters are very closely related, for material possessions provide us with the means to work, and they also become the "talents" with which we must work (cf. Matthew 25:14-30).

As with the other commandments, the LORD lets the most serious sin in this sphere, which is stealing, stand for all the other related matters. Included under the eighth commandment are matters such as

**8th Commandment
Labour and Possessions**

Laziness Squandering Materialism Usury	Stealing	Merchandising Tax evasion Communism Greed
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stewardship, merchandising, communism, materialism, greed, payment of taxes, etc.

Let's first deal with the matter of labour and then go on to the matter of our stewardship over our material possessions.

Why work? - Society's view

Perhaps one of the most basic questions that we can ask when we wish to discuss work is the question, "*Why work?*" Society in general believes that we work in order to supply our needs. If you don't work, then how will you eat, or clothe yourself, or put a roof over your head?

There may be another incentive. It is quite evident that in our society men and women do much more work than is necessary to provide themselves with the bare essentials for life. They also work for the "*extras.*" They are not content with one set of clothing and they want more than just a basic tin shed or mud brick home. They want more than just the bare necessities. They want to enjoy some of the "*finer things of life.*"

One thing is clear: society does not view labour as an end in itself. They do not view labour as a goal, but only as a means to reach a goal. It is a necessary evil - necessary in order to acquire things that one needs or wants. This view, however, is not in harmony with Scripture, which we will consider.

Why work? - The view of Scripture

The answer that Scripture gives to the question, "*Why work?*" is quite different from the answer of society. One of the key passages concerning labour is 2 Thessalonians 3:10 where Paul says, "*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*" These words do not only incite us to be faithful in our work, they also tell us something about the purpose of our labour.

First let me explain what Paul does not say. Often Paul is understood as though he said, "*If anyone wants to eat, let him work.*" But that is not what Paul said. In fact, that is just the opposite of what he says. If we

want to put Paul's words in a positive form, then we would read, "*If anyone is willing to work, let him eat.*" Food is intended only for those who are willing to work. The word order, that Paul used, shows that work is the goal or aim, and eating is the means to enable a person to fulfil that goal or reach that aim.

We do not work to eat,

but we eat to work.

This is not a trivial matter, nor are we just quibbling about words. We are dealing with the basic purpose of labour, and I dare say, with one of the primary purposes of our life. According to Paul, our labour is **not** just a means to supply material needs and wants. Labor is itself the end, the goal. The material possessions that we reap from our labour are intended to make continued work possible.

This is also evident from the creation mandate concerning labour. In Genesis 1:28-30 we read the following: "*Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'* And God said, '*See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food....*'"

Note the order of events. First God gave man a task of filling the earth, subduing it and having dominion over it. Then God spoke about the food that He had given to man. Food was given to man in order to make it possible for him to fulfil the task he was given.

Notice also that man did not have to work in order to eat. God gave man food before he even began to work. Again it is clear that man does not work to eat, but that man eats to work.

If there remains any doubt about this matter, then think of another passage of Scripture, the well known text of Matthew 6:25-33. There Christ says, *“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ... For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Again we are shown that God has given us the mandate to work for the promotion of His kingdom. If we work to further God's kingdom, God will supply us with the things that we need. Let it be clear in our minds then: We do not work to eat, but we eat to work. Labour is not a means to an end; labour is an end in itself.

As Christians, we believe that God created us to work in His creation and for His kingdom. Fulfilling our creation mandate and promoting God's kingdom are goals for us. Therefore we do not try to do the least amount of work that we can do, but we do our utmost in the field of labour. We work diligently, and we put in a hard days work, seeking to fulfil one of God's purposes for our life.

Our Stewardship Over Material Possessions

In Matthew 25 we learn why God has given us material goods. Our earthly possessions are the material with which we work. They are the *“talents”* which God entrusts into our care as His stewards. With these we must work.

Notice that these material possessions are not ours. They belong to the Lord. We must never think that of all we receive the first (let us say) 10% belongs to God and the remaining 90% belongs to us. No, all of what we possess remains the possession of the Lord. The Lord demands that we give the first fruits to the Lord via the church. The remaining portion is what we are

called to work with and over which we are to exercise stewardship.

In Leviticus 25:23 we read that the inheritance which a man received could not be sold permanently. It always remained the possession, not of the man who sold it, but of the Lord who entrusted it into his care.

When the people of Israel dedicated their gifts for the building of the temple, David said: *“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and **of Your own** we have given You”* (1 Chronicles 29:14). David acknowledged that the people were only giving back to God what belongs to Him.

Sometimes the whole 90% of our earnings is needed to provide us with the necessities of life. If this is the case, we should not be ashamed. But often we receive more than we need. What are we to do with the extra? There are two extremes which we should avoid.

On the one hand, we need not be misers who spend our money only on what is absolutely necessary. God was not stingy when He created the world. Just the opposite, the garden was filled with an abundance of good things. If the Lord gives us abundance we may enjoy it, giving thanks to God.

On the other hand, we must not squander the extra that we earn on all sorts of frivolous things. While we may enjoy the abundance which God gives us, we must not find our joy or satisfaction, much less put our trust in these material things. Furthermore, we should remember that this earth is passing away with all the things on it. But the kingdom of God is eternal. Those who invest in the kingdom of God will reap a rich dividend in the life to come. They who contribute generously to the church and to kingdom causes will store up for themselves treasures in heaven. Think of these words of Christ: *“Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not*

fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys" (Luke 12:33).

Equality of wealth

It is clear that not everyone receives equal when it comes to material possessions. This inequality is opposed by the political philosophies of *communism* and of *socialism*. Both of these political philosophies hold the idea that there should be equality in material possessions.

Even a superficial reading of Matthew 25 makes it clear that Scripture does not teach equality. To the one servant the master entrusted five talents; to another two talents and to yet another one talent.

Often reference is made to Acts 4-5 as a argument for equality in material possessions, but wrongly so. That no-one said "*that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common*" (Acts 4:32) means that men did not selfishly cling to their possessions, but sold them for the benefit of all concerned. We should not lose sight of the fact that at the time there were exceptional needs in the congregation. In order to meet these needs, some who had invested their wealth in fields sold them and gave the proceeds to the apostles, who distributed the proceeds among the needy. This is not communism, but Christian charity in an extreme situation. Scripture does not demand equality in possessions in normal times, but it demands very generous charity when there are very great needs.

The fact that others have more than us should not bother us. We should not adopt the attitude of "*keeping up with the Jones.*" We should not look with envy or greed at what the neighbour has received from the Lord, but be content with what we have received from the Lord God who gives to each one of His servants in perfect measure. In the end all those who work faithfully with what they are given, whether five talents or one, receive the same reward from the Lord. To both the Lord will say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord*" (Matthew 25:23).

Wrongful acquisition of material possessions

There are many ways in which man tries to acquire material possessions but which are condemned by God. The first and foremost of these is stealing.

What prompts a man to steal? There are a number of reasons.

1. A man might steal because he is too lazy to work. He wants to acquire possessions, but he doesn't want to work. But we have seen that if a man will not work, let him not eat (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:10).
2. Often those who steal are possessed by greed. They are not content with what they receive through their normal labours. They wish to become rich, and try to take "shortcuts." God condemns this greed and what it leads to. Even if we receive only the basics, we should learn to say with Paul, "*And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content*" (1 Timothy 6:8).
3. While many steal out of greed, it is also possible that someone steals out of need. Because of poverty a man might not be able to purchase what he needs for himself and his family. He steals in order to supply these needs.

In the eyes of man, stealing because of need does not seem as wrong as stealing because of laziness or greed, but it is because by it we display a lack of trust in our Father's providential care over us. In times of great need we ought to pray and trust that the Father will provide, even when we cannot imagine how.

When Israel wandered in the wilderness God gave them water out of the flinty rock, and He gave them bread from heaven. To steal out of need is to distrust God's willingness or His ability to provide us with our needs. To steal out of need is to take matters into one's own hands because of a lack of trust in God.

Although such things as *lotteries* and other forms of *gambling* are not stealing as such, they are also contrary to what

God has laid down in the commandment concerning labour and material possessions. God has commanded us to work, and has promised that He will provide us with the material possessions to make work possible. But those who gamble (or participate in lotteries) seek to obtain material possessions apart from labour. Those who participate in lotteries, and those who gamble, share the same motives as thieves. Either they are too lazy to work (and many who win lotteries immediately quit their jobs!), or they are ill-content with what God has given, and seek more in a way that God has not ordained.

Beside outright theft, the Catechism mentions "**wicked schemes and devices.**" There are ways in which you can "*pull the wool over someone's eyes*" and make them believe they are getting their money's worth, when really you have cheated them in some way. The Catechism mentions **false weights and measures.** In many businesses, transactions involve weights and measures. We purchase meat in weight (kilograms) and we purchase petrol in measure (litres). It would not be hard for a butcher to write a false weight on a tray of meat. Who would be the wiser? How many people have accurate weighing scales at home? And how many of those who do would take the time to weigh the meat? We conduct business with a measure of trust, and that trust is easily abused, and often is abused. Such abuse is another form of stealing.

Still another form of stealing is **deceptive merchandising.** This happens when merchants purposely mislead people by false advertising. They make people believe that they are getting something which they are not. For example, a store could advertise that a certain item was on sale, reduced by 30%. They say that the item was regularly \$100.00, but now has been reduced to \$70.00. But they have deceived the customer, for the regular price was only \$75.00. They have artificially inflated the regular price, and then reduced it to make it appear that the customer is saving much more than he really is. This is another form of stealing.

The Catechism also mentions **counterfeit** money, that is *fake* money. It looks very real, but it isn't. It has no value. Those who use counterfeit money to purchase items actually steal what they pretend to purchase.

Reference is also made to **usury.** Usury is the lending of money at an extremely high or even unlawful rate of interest. There are always some people who are in desperate situations, and who fall into the hands of the vultures who "*eat up people like they eat bread*" (Psalm 14:4).

Trusting in Mammon

There is a prevailing attitude in society which regards material wealth as a form of security. One who has sufficient wealth needs never fear hunger or poverty. He will never be without clothing or a home. This makes money a "god" in whom men place their trust and confidence. Christ called this god *Mammon* (Matthew 6:24). *Mammon* comes from the same Hebrew word as *Amen* which means "*It is true and certain*" (cf. LD 52). But *mammon* is not *amen*. That is, *mammon* does not give security or certainty. Think of the story Christ told in Luke 12:16-21 about the rich fool. Though he had acquired much *security* in the material wealth he had accumulated, his life was still taken from him. Our security for the future lies in God the Almighty, the King of Creation and the Lord of Providence.

The Redeeming Work of Christ

In Christ we find the perfect man who fulfilled this commandment perfectly. As far as labour was concerned, was there ever a man who was so devoted to doing His Father's work as Christ was? He preached and healed hour after hour, day after day. How often don't we read that Christ was exhausted by His labour? These words of Christ echo His zeal for labour: "*I must work the works of Him who sent Me*" (John 9:4). And at the end of His life He said, "*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*" (John 17:4).

As far as material possessions were concerned, Christ possessed little. Though He might have laid claim to greater possessions had He sought them from His followers, He did not. He hated the stealing which He saw happening amongst His own people, and even drove out the merchants and money-changers who had turned the house of God into a den of thieves.

As a punishment for sin, He was numbered with thieves, for as Mark tells us Christ was crucified between two robbers. *“With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And*

He was numbered with the transgressors’” (Mark 15:27,28).

Thus Christ fulfilled this commandment, and now offers to impute His righteousness to all of us who call upon Him in true faith. He also suffered the wrath of God, taking our sins against this commandment upon Himself.

Christ also sends His Spirit to renew us. He gives us a new outlook towards labour and material possessions. He works in us a new obedience so that we begin to keep also this commandment.

Questions:

1. With what sphere do we deal with in the eighth commandment? Which is the most serious sin in this sphere? What other matters are included?
2. According to society's view, why do we work? What is an additional incentive?
3. Does society view labour as an end in itself? If not, how does it view labour?
4. What does Paul say in 2 Thessalonians. 3:10? What can we conclude about work from these words? Which is true? *We work to eat, or: We eat to work.*
5. What two things become evident from Genesis 1:28-30 concerning food and labour? What other text teaches us the same?
6. How does the knowledge that we were created to work affect our ambition to work?
7. What do we learn from Matthew 25 regarding the purpose for which God gives us material possessions?
8. How much of what we possess belongs to us, and how much belongs to the Lord? Cite three texts which emphasise this clearly. (Relate the contents, and not just the chapter and verse!)
9. Do we have to give all we possess to the church? What must we do with the remaining portion?
10. What two extremes should we avoid if we are blessed with more material wealth than is absolutely necessary?
11. Should all people possess equal wealth and material goods? Which political philosophies says that they should? What does Scripture say? Which text makes this very clear?
12. Does Acts 4:32 (no one said *“that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common”*) support the political philosophy of communism? If not, explain this text.
13. Should we be bothered with the fact that some receive more material wealth or possessions than us? Why not?
14. Name three things which prompt men to steal. Which one seems less wrong than the others? Is it less wrong. Why?
15. What is wrong with participating in a lottery or with gambling?
16. Explain how one can steal by means of
 - a. false weights and measures
 - b. deceptive merchandising
 - c. counterfeit money
 - d. usury
17. How does society regard material wealth? What does this attitude make of material possessions? What name is given to it? Is material wealth what society thinks it is?
18. What was Christ's attitude to work? How does this become evident in Scripture?
19. What was Christ's attitude to stealing? How does this become evident in Scripture?
20. How does it become evident from Scripture that Christ was punished for our sins against this commandment?
21. Besides atoning for our sins against this commandment, what does Christ do?