

Qua Vadis?

EVANGELISASIEBLAD VAN DIE GEREFORMEERDE KERKE IN SUID-AFRIKA

NR. 155, Nov. 1980

Geregistreer by die poskantoor as nuusblad

You are not your own

The Eighth Commandment:

"You shall not steal. "

(Exodus 20:15)

Uitgegee deur die Deputate vir Evangelisasie van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, Posbus 20008, Noordbrug 2522, Potchefstroom en gedruk deur die Potchefstroom Herald (Edms.) Bpk., Posbus 156, Potchefstroom 2520. Tel. 23831.

A modern writer has stated, "The wish to be free of God is the deepest yearning of man." One can readily understand man's resentment towards God for it would seem that, at every turn, he is confronted with God's claims upon his life. Of course, after every brush with the unalterable laws of God, man, most indignantly, reasserts his independence of these, to his mind, petty rules. "I am," he proudly claims, in the poets words, "the master of my fate and the captain of my salvation."

It is to this same creature, man, who is so confident in his own ability to take care of himself, and in his right to do *as he pleases when he pleases*, that God's Word comes, again in confrontation, in the eighth commandment. God say to man in this commandment, "You are not your own and neither is the world regarded as your property."

GOD IS SOLE-PROPRIETOR

Nothing we have, and nothing our neighbour has, is really ours. All that we have is a gift - a trust from God. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." declares the Bible. Ownership, in the first place, belongs solely to God. David, the king of Israel, recognized this in his prayer, "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours" (I Chronicles 29: 11).

If all we possess and we, ourselves, belong to God, then to set up a U.D.I, (unilateral declaration of independence) is a breach of the eighth commandment, for man has robbed God of His glory and honour thereby. This was God's complaint against His people of old, "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know. My people do not understand" (Isaiah 1: 2).

In a very real way Israel was doubly God's possession. The people were His by virtue of creation, that is, He created "the world, and ail who live in it." But Israel was God's possession in a very special way. He had delivered the nation from the misery and degradation of Egyptian slavery, and, so the people had become His peculiar, His particular possession by right of purchase. "I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honoured in My sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you and people in exchange for your life" (Isaiah 3: 4).

The fuller revelation in the New Testament of God's grace, that is, wholly undeserved by man in his rebellion, purpose to ransom, redeem or purchase, for Himself a people without number tells us, most decidedly, that Christ, the Son of God was the ransom price. "I came," the Saviour said of Himself, "to give My life as a ransom for many".

Peter realized the full meaning of Christ's words only after his Lord was crucified. He wrote to his fellow-believers, urging them to holy living. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (I Peter 1: 18).

"You are mine, I have redeemed you" — "You are not your own. You were bought at a price," whether by Isaiah or Paul, God, in unmistakeable terms, establishes sole-ownership over believers. To them, He grants the comfort of knowing that they are not their own but belong to their faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood, has fully satisfied for all their sins, and delivered them from all the power of the devil.

Whether you are a believer in Jesus Christ or not you still belong to Him and are the property of the almighty God, to do with as He pleases. By acknowledging and renouncing your rebellion against the proprietorship or ownership of God and embracing His Son as your Redeemer and Lord, you can become an heir of God to whom all things belong. By continuing in your rebellion you will also become an heir — heir to eternal flames!

MAN IS GOD'S STEWARD

Now, if as was said earlier, that ownership, in the first place belongs to God, it does not mean that we cannot speak of man's ownership. We certainly can speak of man's ownership but, then, remembering that we are trustees of His goods. God made man in the beginning a steward of all His goods. "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28).

God holds all of us responsible for the things He has entrusted to our care — time, talents, money, clothes, everything (Matthew 25:14-30).

But what do we find? Instead of contentment, we find man filled with covetousness and greed. Man is certainly running true to form. Adam, with all God placed under his care, was not satisfied with being God's prime minister or vice-regent. When Satan proposed a scheme whereby Adam might become like God, Adam couldn't refuse the offer. He was quite prepared to rob God of His throne and seat himself upon it.

"You shall not steal," creates a pang of conscience in the heart of every human being. We look upon the world as a huge grab-bag from which we must get as much as we can, taking as little time as we can, putting out of the running as many people as we can because that will mean more for us.

The fever — or is it cancer? — of greed has mankind in a grip and it prevents us from loving our neighbours as ourselves and from doing, therefore, unto others as we would be done by. As a result we pay starvation wages, fail to give an honest day's work for a day's wages, and seek, anxiously, without letting up, to get something for nothing.

The great Physician, Jesus Christ, has come into this world to heal us of this disease of dissatisfaction and greed. By His example He has revealed the nature of true stewardship. Of Him Paul declares, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... He humbled Himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross" (Philippians 2: 6—8). Jesus Christ, the second Adam, did more than to give mankind an example of good stewardship in "completing the work You (His Father) gave Me to do" (John 17: 4), for He obeyed His Father in all things, both in His life and in His death as the Substitute for all who put their trust in Him. In other words, His obedience and faithfulness are credited to the account of every sinner, who has been given to see his own bankruptcy and need of a Saviour.

HOW TO REGARD POSSESSIONS

"What is yours is mine, and I'll take it," says the robber. "What is mine is mine and I'll keep it," says the miser. "What is yours is ours, so let's share it," says the socialist. "What is mine is God's, so I'll share it," says the Christian.

Here we have four very different attitudes toward possessions, whether our own or another's.

The robber, who regards the possessions of others as 'ripe for the taking' is not necessarily the professional thief. Many are the itchy-fingered people who would be

filled with righteous indignation when you do call them a thief, but yet cannot keep their hands off possessions not their own. From junior typists to managing directors, from the new apprentice to the city engineer, from the poorest of the poor to the most affluent, there is the desire to make our dreams come true, no matter what. Therefore tax-evasion, embezzlement of company funds, working short hours, paying low wages, pilfering from the office stationery store or from the store-yard is rife. And what of the covetous eyes we cast upon other people's husbands and wives. Are we not robbing our fellow man of the affection and love of his or her mate, and, should things get out of hand, would we not be guilty of robbing some woman of her security and her children of a father and happiness¹

God condemns stealing, however we may justify our light-fingered ways. But He would not only have man cease robbing, God would have us become benefactors! Paul, the apostle, in his letter to the Ephesian believers, said, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God". He goes on to say that though they had once been such, they were, now, children of light, that is, they had been saved through faith in Christ and were to live transformed lives through the grace and strength of God. "He who has been stealing must steal no more, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."

In Christ, then, we see the robber become a benefactor. A man, united to Christ, becomes an honest man, who does not regard the possessions of others as his to take, as well as a hard-working man, who will, naturally, prosper and acquire possessions of his own. Thankful to God for all His gifts and blessings the Christian will seek to give to those in need in proportion to his God-given prosperity.

It is only when man acknowledges that God is the rightful owner and proprietor of each and everything, he will begin to adopt a right attitude to possessions.

DECEPTION

God brands as theft every trick and device, which men use to appropriate the belongings of their fellow-men. Every Israelite was warned not to carry false weights and to avoid using false measures. The prophets named these deceitful practices amongst the people of God as the cause of impending judgment at the hand of the Almighty.

How shall our generation escape the anger of God, when our society is shot through with this evil? Marketing and advertising techniques are used appeal to the greed of the consumer. Fantastic claims, which are protected from being labelled as downright lies in some ingenious way, are made for product after product, and the gullible, greedy public rushes out to purchase them.

Money-making schemes abound wherein a good return on one's money in the shortest possible time is promised. Some are honest attempts but many have been launched with the sole purpose of lining the pockets of some crook at the expense of many an investor.

"The love of money is the root of all evil," wrote the apostle Paul. How true this statement has proved in the history of mankind. Not even religion has escaped

untouched by greed and trickery. From the religious twisters, who ensure large followings and full purses by stooping to every known trick even to trick photography which makes halos appear over their heads or to painting a mixture on the forehead, which, during the service or meeting, shows up as a red cross when contact is made with a salty perspiration.

Deceivers and the deceived are, not always, but very often of the same bent of mind — they're greedy! How different is or ought to be the attitude of the child of God. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that" (I Timothy 6-10).

LOTTERIES AND GAMBLING

How plausible the arguments, in favour of these extremely popular pastimes, sound. "No one is really harmed by having a little flutter when 'the July' comes around each year." And, "Just look at Rhodesia — what tremendous good has been done through the lotteries. Hospitals and institutions are built all over the place."

Well, we don't have to look very far nowadays. We have our own 'defence bonds' and everyone will tell you how much we need the money for protecting our borders.

But, really, however we try to justify these things, we cannot escape the underlying fact that gambling and lotteries pander (and don't the organizers know it!) to our greed. We want 'something for nothing'. We are inveterate 'scroungers'. And somehow we have brought an air of respectability to what is just plain common greed!

It is simply amazing how people suddenly become full of concern for every social effort and endeavour, and dig down deep into their pockets when faced with a collection list. You see everyone has cottoned on to the secret formula — school P.T.A.'s, welfare organizations, hospitals, etc., etc. And the secret is that you have to appeal to people's greed by having a 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize for the holders of the winning tickets. That's why men and women are buying defence bonds with such abandon. Scout halls are, suddenly, most worthy of our support. RIO 000 or a red Mazda 323 or even a lowly T.V. set are not to be 'sniffed at'.

God is not pleased with our grabbing greediness, our 'get rich quick' scrambling after money or wealth. Such shall not inherit the kingdom of God, the Bible clearly states. Paul calls it idolatry. Money has become the god of our lives. The living God, Who created heaven and earth is rated a very poor second-best, if rated at all, to money.

How different the man, who called himself a servant of Jesus Christ, the man Paul of Tarsus. "I know," he writes, "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. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12 ff.).

Paul, the former Pharisee, who had set great store by his status, his family tree, his bright future as a scholar and a leader amongst the Jews had come to see that these things were so much rubbish. "I consider them rubbish so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him". "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

ID. Wylie.