***Lights in the World - PH51-02  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 2:14-15***

This is the 26th segment of our study of how a believer can be a light in a world of darkness. We've been studying this via Exodus 20, the code of morality known as the Ten Commandments. The moral principle that we are currently studying is that of stealing. This is one that most people very readily understand, and one that they very readily can relate to. The attraction of stealing for our old sin nature is something that each of us knows very well. We never get over the fact of being attracted by an opportunity to rip someone off in some way. Also, the injury of the experience of being a victim of stealing is well-known to all of us.

So we know why God has forbidden stealing. However, the problem is that what constitutes stealing is not always so clear to us, and I hope today that we'll touch on some things that may be our common practices, that we have not put into the category of stealing, which, therefore, will help us to reorient our thinking and line ourselves up better with this principle.

The basic issue in stealing is violating the biblical principle of private property. The Bible insists that it is God's order for humanity to practice private property ownership. That's why we have this moral principle. Stealing is a violation of private property ownership. Any unauthorized appropriation of another person's private property constitutes stealing, whether that unauthorized appropriation is done by individuals or by government–whether it is done legally or illegally. This appropriation is a denial of not only your possessions, but, thereby, of your freedom.

The Jewish law regarding theft is very serious. If you have read the Old Testament, you are aware of the fact that there was a very strict penalty applied for stealing. The penalty was basically giving back what you took–restoring–restitution was the penalty, and there was always an added amount to be restored for the thing that you had stolen.

**Shoplifting**

Today's merchandising system is such that we have great opportunities for shoplifting. You can walk into a store, and things are not behind counters where you must ask for a salesmen to show you a thing. He may watch you, but it's right out there in open display. You can do that with a certain lower level of items that don't cost a great deal. You perhaps have noticed that you never walk into a high class jewelry store that deals in expensive gems, and they have it all out on the counters for you to look at. They don't put $5,000 diamond rings for you to walk around trying on at the counters, but many other kinds of merchandise, they do that. The reason for it is that each item is such a small amount that the owner simply adds a substantial amount to everything you buy to cover the shoplifters. But for things of great value, they could not cover what you are going to buy which shoplifters would pick up. So our whole merchandising system calls for a stringent application of this moral principle of stealing because it's the easiest thing in the world to do. Scrupulous honesty is a refreshing quality, but it is quite out of style today.

Indebtedness is encouraged, and it's made easy as part of our economic system. That's considered economic progress, to make it easy for people to get into debt. People just learn to indulge their desires even though they cannot pay for something at the moment. They simply resort to the credit card. Great stress is laid on the fact that in our society through advertising you have a right to have certain things. If something is available to people in general, the implication of advertising is that you have a right to have that thing. Whether you have the means to purchase it or not is beside the point. You have a right to have it.

People who follow that to the extreme are those who have no problem about stealing, and they will justify what they steal on simply the fact that I have a right to have this thing. I'm a human being, and I should have a right to this just as much as John Rockefeller has a right to this thing. Just because he has money and I don't, doesn't mean that I should be denied having this thing, if he has it. That principle is subtly conveyed in advertising. It is your right to have things. And if you can't pay for them, then get them on credit. So the debtor becomes, in a way, a thief because he will go to the point where he defaults on his payments. He has indebted himself beyond the point of what he can pay.

**Kidnapping**

So stealing takes various forms, and I want to look at some of those specific forms with you today. First of all, the Bible talks about stealing of person. You have this, for example, in Exodus 21:16. We call it kidnapping. In Exodus 21:16, we read, "And he that steals a man and sells him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death." The same principle is stated in Deuteronomy 24:7. Stealing includes, therefore, not only the property of other people, but also the person of other people. It is God's purpose for mankind to rule over creation, and that requires personal freedom to be able to rule over God's creation. Kidnapping is stealing a person's freedom. You will notice here that under the Mosaic Law, it was punishable by death.

In our day, we should take a clue from this that the legal process should also automatically establish the death penalty for kidnapping. Kidnapping should be one of those crimes that our legal system just simply says, "If you ever kidnap a person, when you are caught, you will automatically be executed." Period. Over and out. So if you want to go and steal another person's freedom by kidnapping his person, just go ahead and try it, and run the hazard. The kidnapper is actually viewed as a thief because he takes a person's freedom away from him.

In scriptural times, the way they did it was to snag a person, and then sell him to slave traders who were traveling through who were going to take this person to a distant country where there was no way to expose the kidnappers. You will remember that this is exactly what happened to Joseph. His brothers decided to kidnap him instead of killing him. So they sold him to a group of slave traders who were on their way to Egypt. This was the practice. So Exodus 21:16 calls the kidnapper a thief. He is actually stealing a man. The Bible indicates that this should be treated with death.

**Fraud**

Another way of stealing is that of stealing by fraud. One of the ways that you may defraud a person and steal by defrauding him is to delay in paying in the agreed time for products and services which you've received. You buy something and you say, "I'll pay for it at this time," and then you fail to do so. So the man calls you on the phone. He says, "This bill is due. What are you going to do about it?" And you give him some excuse, and you continue to delay him.

Here's what has happened. The businessman who has provided the services or the products has indebted himself to his suppliers in order to do this. Now, he, in turn, has provided you a service for which you do not pay him. His suppliers start calling him up and saying, "How about paying your bills for the supplies that we have given you to do your business?" In order to keep his credit clear and his supplies coming, he then has to go out and make a bank loan and pay interest on that loan because you have not paid what you owe for the services delivered. That is stealing by fraud.

You get yourself into that position by buying things that you can't pay for–by buying things that are beyond the limits of your income to pay for. Yet this is commonly done. That's why many businesses, because they know that this is the practice of people, send statements, and on the statements they have at the bottom, "over 30 days;" "over 60 days;" or, "over 90 days." They will actually tell you how much of your bill is that much over and beyond, trying to stress how far you have defrauded that particular business in the process of retaining the money that they should have been paid.

This forbids more than what is specifically declared as illegal. This doesn't mean that you can sell a person something, and you take the attitude of "Let the buyer beware." That's a certain principle of business. You may legally sell a person something, but you know that that thing is not suitable to his need or you know that it's an inferior product. That's fraud to sell a person that item. That also is included under the subject of fraud.

The poor are not to be taken advantage by fraudulent means just because they are in need. Proverbs 22:22: "Rob not the poor, because he is poor. Neither oppress the afflicted in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and spoil the soul of those who spoil them. Poor people are the easiest people in the world to defraud economically. They're so hard-pressed that they have very limited financial resources. There are very limited things that they can do. If a person is poor, that's the one person that you don't want to pass something off to that's a shoddy product, or something he doesn't need or something that won't meet the reason he's buying this thing. Yet, it is common practice to try to spot the so-called sucker, and to defraud him.

**False Advertising**

Advertising falsely is also a fraud. You've seen this girl who comes in. She has this beautiful new sweater. She says, "Do you think this will knock Jim's eye out? I just paid $57 dollars for this." Her friend says, "Put your money where your mouth is." She holds up a tube of toothpaste. She says, "Do you think this will get him?" She says, "It worked for me," and she flashes her mouthful of teeth at her. There are some people who are dumb enough to think that if they use that toothpaste, they're going to have sex appeal, but that's a fraudulent practice. I want to tell you that you're going to be deceived. If you have a mouthful of teeth that looks like a Halloween pumpkin, I don't care how much toothpaste you use or what kind. You're still going to look like a mouthful of teeth on a Halloween pumpkin. But that's fraud to try to suggest that something other could be the case. If you make any kind of untrue claims for your product, you're selling.

One national chain has just been brought under government restriction. They advertised a big special on something. They would sell something fantastically cheap, and everybody would read this in the paper, and they'd rushed down to this chain. But the chain was only supplying very little amount. After the first 10 people walked in, they were out of it. But the point was, you were already in their store. So you said, "Well, I might as well shop here." Now, that's fraud. And the government rightly put a stop to that. If you're going to put on the advertising of a sale, then the store is obliged to either provide it or to give you a rain check on it to come back later. This kind of stealing is considered good business practice, but the Word of God says it's outright thievery.

**Wages**

Another way of stealing is the theft of wages. Leviticus 19:13 lays down a principle that was related to the ancient way of paying people. In ancient times, people were paid daily for the services that they performed. Leviticus 19:13 therefore says, "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor. Neither rob him. The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with you all night until the morning." In the ancient world, when a man worked, he was to be paid at the end of the day, and some employers were deliberately holding the money back until the next morning so that they could use that person's wages in effect for further gain in their own behalf. The Bible says that's stealing when a person has performed for you, and there comes a time when he is to be given the paycheck, and you withhold his pay. You are now stealing from him. The laborer was dependent in ancient times, as he is today, upon his wages for the support of himself and his family. So the principle is that the wages are to be paid promptly at the stated time rather than to be used further by the employer.

Also, in connection with wages, the labor is not to be taken advantage of. Deuteronomy 24-14: "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he be of your brethren, or of the sojourners who are in your land within your gates." Here is a man who is so desperate; he needs the work; and, he needs the job. So you say, "Well, I can really squeeze something out of him. I can take advantage of him because he can't afford to quit. He can't afford not to take this job. He can't afford not to take what I'm willing to give him. So I'll take advantage of him."

Verse 15: "At his day, you shall give him his hire. Neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor and sets his heart upon it, lest he cry against you unto the Lord, and it be sin unto you." Here again, whether it was an Israelite or a foreigner, he was not to be taken advantage of relative to what you paid him for the work that he did for you. Neither were you, again, to retain his wages overnight.

Also, the Bible stresses in many places that the labor which is performed is to receive honest payment. For example, Matthew 10:10: "The workman is worthy of his food," and thus he is worthy of the payment that is coming to him. You have the same thing stated in Luke 10:7: "For the laborer is worthy of his hire." This is repeated in Deuteronomy 25:4. The point of all this is that the employer, who is in a position of economic power, is not to use that power to shortchange the wages of the people who work for him. Anybody who gets rich through this kind of stealing of the labors of other people is under the judgment of God. You can consult Jeremiah 22:13, Malachi 3:5, and James 5:4.

James 5:4 makes a very stringent declaration of this. James 5:4: "Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped in your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cries, and the cries of them who have reaped are entered into the years of the Lord of Sabaoth." God is not unaware of those who are being defrauded by their employers. So the laborer was to receive his honest wages. The employer was not to steal from the employee by taking advantage of him. God's judgment is upon those who do.

Honest treatment of the laborer is not a favor. It is an obligation, as Romans 4:4 tells us. When a person works for you and he has performed, then you're not doing him a favor by paying his wages. Romans 4:4 says, "Now to him that works is the reward, not reckoned of grace, but of debt." This is a debt on a part of the employer to his employee.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 happens to reference the wages of the pastor-teacher: "Let the elders (the pastor-teachers) that rule well be counted worthy of double honor." In this particular context, this deals with the matter of wages (payment) to people under various circumstances. Now, that's part of the honor–the matter of wages itself. It says especially, "Let the elders (the pastor-teachers) that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and in doctrine." Those who genuinely perform the task of researching the Word, and then of explaining the doctrine and teaching–those who do that job, along with administration, are to be considered worthy of double honor. This means extraordinary pay commensurate with the performance.

I've heard some ignorant church officers on occasion say, "Well, it is true that this particular pastor does this job; then we have this agency and he does this job; then we have this agency and he also performs in that; and, he might be doing a triple duty or a quadruple duty job. Yet, he only has so many hours of a day. Therefore, he only works so long at the job. It doesn't matter that he is doing different things. That's all the hours he can work."

The point of the Scripture is that remuneration should be commensurate with the quality and the nature of what is being done. We do not pay the man who comes to dig a ditch the same amount of money that we pay the physician who performs an intricate operation. The Bible says you pay commensurate with the value of the performance–not the number of hours. The physician may perform his lifesaving task in an hour's time, where it may take the ditch digger 24 hours to get his job done. Yet he will not be paid the same because of the quality of what he is doing (the nature of what he's doing) over against the nature of the skill and the knowledge of the physician.

So the point here is that the nature of what is being done is to be taken into account when you pay people. Here it is particularly applied in this situation to a pastor-teacher, but the same principle holds in all areas of our dealings with people. This is theft by improper payment of wages.

You may also compare 1 Corinthians 9:7-14 where Paul, in dealing with a very carnal church, the church at Corinth, had to teach them something about the matter of dealing with wages toward those who ministered to them. He said, "Who goes to war at any time at his own charges? Who plants the vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who feeds the flock and doesn't eat of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a man, or doesn't the law say the same also? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the grain.' Does God take care of oxen, or did He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he that plows should plow in hope, and he that threshes in hope should be the partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your carnal things (your money–your wages)? If others be partakers of this right over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless, we have not used this right, but bear all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ."

In the case of the church at Corinth, their carnality was such that the apostle Paul said, "I'm not even going to take your honorarium, let alone your wages." But Paul says, "I want to make it clear to you that I do have a right for you to pay me for the spiritual services which I deliver to you. But because of your carnal attitude, and because of your dullness of mind in spiritual things, and your negative volition, I don't want your money. Keep it. The Lord will supply it in some other way."

That was a shocker, because there were plenty of other people in this very wealthy church at Corinth who were on the payroll of this church, and who had an extensive ministry. And the apostle Paul, the prince of the apostles, came along and said, "I'm not interested in getting any remuneration from you." He, of all people, not only had the right to, but deserved it. So the nature of the service determines its fair value–not just the time on the job.

Also, a person has a right to spend his money that he has earned as he pleases. This is an important principle in employee and employer relationships. Matthew 20:1-15 is the story of the man who went into the marketplace to get laborers to come to work in his vineyard. He did this all day long at different times of the day. He came along in the early morning to this man and he said, "Do you want to come and work in my vineyard for the day?" The man said, "Yes." He said, "I'll pay you so much." The man said, "Agreed," and he came to work. A few hours later, he went back to the marketplace and he saw someone else, and he said, "Do you want to come and work in my vineyard?" This man said, "Yes," but he doesn't stipulate the amount. Later in the day, he came again. He found someone else in the marketplace, and he said, "Do you want to come and work in my vineyard today?" This man said, "Yes." Again, there was no stipulation on salary.

At the end of the day, they lined up for their day's wages that were paid at the end of the day. The people who started in the morning were given their pay. Then as they stood around and watched the others who had come, some of them who had only worked a couple hours maybe, they noticed that the employer paid them exactly the same amount for two hour's wages as they had for their eight-hour day. They complained about it. They said, "Wait, a minute. We worked for eight hours, and you're paying this guy who worked for just two hours the same amount as you paid us." In this story, the Lord points out that the employer very rightly said to these people, "Friend, I do you no wrong. Didn't you agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I will give unto this last even as unto you. Isn't it lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last." For many are called, and few are chosen.

The Lord was using this to illustrate something else–a spiritual truth, but in the process of which He pointed out that this employer had the perfect right to pay a man a whole day's wage for two hours of work if he chose to do so. We have a lot of labor / management problems where labor gets pushy and tries to tell management how much it can pay people with the money that belongs to management. Sometimes it is curious to observe how labor assumes that it has the right to tell the employer how to spend his money. The Bible says, "That's stealing." Just because you are hired by a person does not mean that you then have the right to tell that person how he spends his moneys beyond that which is your own personal deal with him. If you don't like your deal with him, then renegotiate a different deal. But you have no right, as an employee, to tell your employer, "I don't like what you're paying this person over against what you're paying me." The control of the employer's money does not pass into the hands of the worker.

You may strike, as a worker, for higher pay, but you don't have the right to keep the employer from saying, "Well, alright, if you want to strike, I'll hire Mr. So-and-so because he will work at this rate." He has the right to hire other people to take your job if you go on strike. This again is humanism interjected into human relationships which the Word of God condemns. You do not have a right to restrict an employer in his employing tactics.

Nor does the government have the right to come along (on the basis of this Scripture alone) and say, "Listen, there are some minority people here, and we want you to see that you have a certain percentage of them in your employ, or we're going to get on you." The government has consistently stepped out of line, as you well know, to dictate to employers (contrary to scriptural principles), because government leaders have darkness upon their minds and, therefore, they are not enlightened people. They seek to impose upon an employer just whom he may hire and whom he may not hire. If the Equal Rights Amendment passes, one of the things I think I can say almost with a certainty is going to happen is that homosexuals will be able to teach in public schools and no one will be able to say, "No, I don't want you in that classroom all day long subtly influencing your attitudes upon the minds of my children." That is because the government will step in and say to the school system, "You cannot restrict your hiring practices."

So the employer has the right to hire the kind of people he prefers. If he wants to hire people who wear mustaches, then that's what he gets. He gets a bunch of people with mustaches as his employees. If he wants to hire people who shave their heads, well and good. He gets a bunch of bald people in there, and that's what he likes. That makes him comfortable. He hasn't had hair for 50 years. So he wants people around like that that he feels comfortable with. That's his business and his privilege. No one has a right to come in and say, "You have to hire people who have this characteristic; who have this quality; or, who belong to this group or that group.

**Stealing From God**

There's another form of stealing. This is a form of stealing from God. It is a form of stealing from God via offerings. In the Old Testament, this was spelled out very specifically. You may read about this in Malachi 3:8-12. Here it is declared to be stealing in terms of the Old Testament religious income tax (the tithe). Now, this tax is not upon us today. Therefore, this passage, contrary to what a lot of preachers like to do in waxing eloquent on this passage, does not apply to believers today in the church age. But it does lay down, again, a principle of divine righteousness from which we may learn. Malachi 3:8-12 say, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings." Then he goes on to express what God would have done, and what the result was because they did not pay the tithe.

In the Old Testament, the tithe had to be paid. But I do want you to notice that it was not only the tithe in which they were robbing God. They were not paying the 10%, but they were also robbing Him in offerings which were free. It was up to them to give or not to give. Yet what this passage implies is that there were times when God was telling them, "I want you to give this sum of money to my work for this cause," and they refused to do it. They didn't understand, and a lot of people today don't understand that when God lays upon your mind to give a sum of money for a specific cause, it is because He has given you that money in the first place to be used in that respect. He didn't give you the money for you to use it as per your own choice. He gave it to you because He was going to ask you now to pass it on to some segment of the Lord's work. Therefore, if you keep it, which is not yours to keep, you have defrauded God; you have robbed God; you have been guilty of stealing, of all things, from God himself.

Now, grace giving doesn't change this. We too can have money which is given to us by the Lord. All that we have is supplied by Him. It is His purpose to direct us through God the Holy Spirit, under the principle of grace giving, to use part of that money for His work. And we do not do it. Why not? Well, you say, "I'm terribly poor." There never was a poor person who was not expected to give offerings. If that bothers you, well and good, because you're in a lot of trouble with the Lord. I don't care how poor you are. If God has provided you with anything, He has provided part of that for you to sustain His work with.

I don't care how old you are. Some of you may say, "Well, I'm only 24 years old. I've only been working for three years. It took me three years to get to where I'm making $20,000 a year. I'm not ready to start giving." You think I'm kidding.

If you who have grown up at Berean Memorial Church, every one of you is under that temptation. You've always had things provided for you. You've always had the greatest in church ministry. You've always had sharp people ministering and dealing with you in every aspect of your program here. Somehow, the problems economically have always been solved. So what you are going to do is grow up and think that somehow they're going to keep being solved–not realizing that they're solved because people are being faithful who are your elders indeed, but who have been faithful to take the money that God has given them for the Lord's work, and they have put it in the Lord's work. The time comes very quickly. It should start when you earn anything. I don't care whether you are junior, an intermediate, or a senior. When you start cranking in money on your own, then the very first thing you should do is the practice of giving to the Lord's work, or else you will be robbing Him.

The reason for this is that God never calls upon a local church ministry to obligate itself financially for something that He does not intend for it to pay for. When a church comes to the point where it finds it has bills and no money to pay for it, and if the bill was legitimate–if it was something, indeed that was the purpose and plan of God for you to go into that debt, then I can guarantee you without any question of a doubt that it is because somebody in the congregation has been stealing from God. That's the reason. It's because God has provided people with money, and they have kept it at home. It doesn't matter if the operation is just as slim and trim and down to the bone, with no fat money being spent–just what is necessary is being spent. If the money isn't there, it is because there are people in the congregation who are passing by the offering box, and they never give it a second look–like the Pharisee passing by the wounded man on the road.

This is a thing that comes very close to home to each of us. Each of us is going to be faced with this. I've heard all the excuses. I came up with them before you did: "I'm too poor. I'm too pressed. I've indebted myself so much that now I can't give anything." God says, "Under grace, I'll lead you to give what you can give. I don't ask for a percentage. I direct you in that giving. As I find you to be trustworthy with what I have given you, then I give you more. I will trust you with more. If you start cheating on Me; if you start holding back; and, if you start raising your standard of living excessively without raising My standard of living in God's work, then My hand of blessing is going to be taken away from you." There is no reason that the Lord's work has to be done in a shoddy way. It is still the principle of Berean Memorial Church that, since it is the Lord's work, we don't do anything around here for $5 if we can do it for $10. That's why this is not a cheap operation. If you want that, you can find it on any corner in town.

So grace giving is responsible giving. Grace giving means that spiritually mature Christians will give systematically. The spiritually immature Christian gives erratically. Church boards are always looking at the erratic giver. This is fantastic. We don't do that here, but I know of church board meetings where they sit and say, "Now, how are we going to get people to give?" And they'll come up with things: "Well, let's put a little neon sign over the offering box that flashes as they go out. Then here's another good idea. Every time they drop something in the offering box, let's have a little audio recording under there that plays Pennies from Heaven, or some suitable piece of music. Or, maybe a John Sousa march every time they put an offering in there." That's the kind of stuff that you have to work with spiritual dummies in.

However, the people who have grown up spiritually don't have to be pushed, and they don't have to be harangued. They know that God's blessing rests upon them in respect to how they handle their money. So I'm sorry I can't make you feel at ease if you tell me you're poor and you can't give, because that is not a scriptural position. That's your position. You live with it, and that's your business. Nobody is going to talk to you about it. It's between you and the Lord. But just be careful because you're going to have a long eternity to think it over. Because we have these erratic givers, the local church operation becomes a feast and famine operation, which it should not be.

**Borrowing**

There's another way of stealing, and that is by borrowing–thievery by borrowing. Did you ever borrow a book from someone? How many books do you have at home with somebody else's name in them that you never intended to keep, but you borrowed them and forgot? Every time I go to camp, I have a stack of books on my table which I foolishly think I'm going to be able to read up there. But I notice that books begin to disappear on me. These books have to come back to the people you borrow from, or what you're doing is stealing.

**Mooching**

This is also done in small sums. You walk up to the coke machine. How many times have I done this? I say, "Do you have a quarter?" Then I have to write it down: "Borrowed a quarter from so-and-so," or it slips your mind, and you forget it. This is a form of mooching. Mooching is a form of stealing. It's borrowing. That's what you may call it. But it's getting around people who don't want to stand up to you. You can write a deliberate bad check. It's a bad check, and you know it. This is borrowing in a way. It is stealing.

If you borrowed something and you damage it, what do you do? Fix it up with Elmer's glue and return it. So the poor guy uses it, and it breaks on him. He says, "Oh, I have a broken lawnmower." If you borrow his lawnmower and you break it, then you are obliged to repair it. He, on the other hand, is obliged to say, "Well, I've been running this thing for 200 hours. It would have broken on me the next time I used it, so you won't pay for it. Or if he thinks it's because he was negligent in it, then he might let him pay something on it. But you can steal from people on either side–the lender and the borrower.

**Gambling**

Another theft is gambling. Possessions, the Bible makes it clear, are to be gained in two ways. You either work for them or you receive them as a gift. Gambling is in essence stealing. You neither earn it nor is it brought to you as a gift. Gambling, of course, leads to many other sins and many other evils in order to maintain the practice of gambling. All you have to do is visit Las Vegas and just walk around the casinos. Look at the faces of the people who run the place. Look at the people who go there. There's a hardness. There's a callousness. There's a jadedness. I sat at a blackjack table not so long ago in Las Vegas watching a man who had put all the stools up. He wanted the whole table to himself. It was a fascinating thing to watch him play–and the dealer. There was absolutely no emotion between them. It was just the flicking of the cards and the collecting of the money. There was a hardness and a harshness.

You could tell that the love of money was so supreme that it was the guiding factor in everything that was being done there. Any amount of evil would be performed in order to protect the gains and to protect the opportunity to secure the gains. Gambling violates the principle of Ephesians 4:28. Whatever you may want to say, whatever excuses you may want to give for it, you can't get around Ephesians 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more. But rather let him labor, working with his hands, a thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs it." The principle is either by earning or by a gift. That's how you get the things that you have.

You may say, "Well, I like to do it. I just do it for fun. I only gamble what I can afford to lose because I find it entertaining." Well, that in itself does not justify something which is securing gain on a wrong basis. It may be fun, and you may be able to afford to lose the money, but it's a social evil that laps over into people who have opportunity to gamble who cannot afford to lose the money; who have no restraints on what they are doing; and, who are addicted to this. It just violates the principle of Ephesians 4:28. You cannot secure anything through gambling and say that you have earned it.

That is the most outstanding example of ripping somebody off that there is–to secure something as the result of a wager. We could multiply this with many, many more examples. All of this is speaking to you as believers. The unbeliever, as well as the Christian who is not sensitive to doctrine, will be resistant to viewing these things that we have mentioned today as ways of stealing. We can all justify the evil that we want to do. Any one of these things that we have listed here will be justified by people who simply want to do them and want to excuse them. But we have to go back to the Word of God and say, "What does the Bible indicate is God's way of doing things? What is not in keeping with that way is out of line.

In order to understand that, it all begins with the subject of eternal life. In Romans 3:23, we read, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." That puts us all right off the bat to begin with in the position of being sinners. Romans 3:9-10 reinforces that when it says, "For we have before proved, both Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin." That is, both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. "As it is written, there is no one righteous–no, not one." You may be the finest moral person in the world, but in the sight of God, the point is that nobody is righteous. Nobody is fit to go to heaven.

Therefore, a principle like stealing simply is ignored by the unbeliever. But for the Christian, this principle becomes significant. But I wouldn't want you to think that if you quit stealing, and if you obey all these other moral principles, that now all will be well between you and God. That is because you could have all these moral qualities that we've talked about so far, and still head for hell. You are still unrighteous. It takes something more. The Bible tells us, "Wherefore as by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." All of us sin. We were all guilty with Adam in the sin that he was guilty of. We have received a sin nature. We have, therefore, died spiritually. For this reason, the Bible says that we are all equally guilty

In Romans 6:23, we have the solution. God says, "For the wages of sin is death (spiritual and physical), but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Romans 5:8 says, "But God commended his love toward us, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Then the Scriptures finally add the fact that, "He who knew no sin, Jesus Christ, became sin for us, that we, the sinners, hopeless in sin and helpless in sin, might become the righteousness of God in Him, that we might have His perfect righteousness attributed to our account."

So today, I don't want you to get the wrong idea that if you start obeying the no stealing principle of Scripture, that somehow this is what it is to be born again. It is not, because these principles of morality in the Word of God are for unbelievers as well as believers. It is for the protection of society in the era of the angelic conflict between Satan and his demons, and God and the elect angels. So what I'm telling you today is that you may enter the family of God. By simply accepting what the grace of God has provided for you in the death of Christ upon the cross, you may cross the line over, and swap your sin for the absolute righteousness of God. How do you do that? By simply accepting the gift which God is extending to you. You believe in Him.

So, as Paul said centuries ago to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Believe means to trust Him for your eternal life. We who are sinners have no hope except in the fact that Christ died for us spiritually and physically upon that cross. Because He did that, we can live forever. If you have never received Him as your Savior, we commend him to you today, and in the quietness of your own mind, simply say to God the Father, "Thank you for your son. I'm a sinner, and I'm happy to receive Christ as my Savior." Someday, when you do pass through physical death, you will find yourself in the presence of Almighty God in heaven. The alternative is the lake of fire. You must choose.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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