

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity, October 23, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 442, 287:8, 521:1-4, 438, 430:4.

Lessons: 1 Kings 21:1-25, 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, Luke 16:1-13.

Sermon Text: Exodus 20:15.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“You shall not steal.” So simply does God speak of property. Not just “our” property, or “my” property, but he simply says do not steal. Do not take away from others.

All of our property, all of the things that we have are a gift and a trust from God. One of our hymns says

“We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.”
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 441:1)

Today we look at

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

- 1. Do not take or even lust for possessions which are not yours.**
- 2. Instead, help others to improve and protect their possessions.**

In this Commandment God is protecting our and our neighbor's property and business. This is necessary, because by nature man is selfish and does not hesitate to take for himself what belongs to someone else. By nature even children take what they like, and the difference between "mine" and "yours" is one of the first big lessons they must learn in life. Without the protection of this commandment and laws of men which come from this commandment, industrious and thrifty people would be at the mercy of the wicked and lazy, who do not want to work and save, but would live on what belongs to other people.

We receive our property from God. He remains the owner, and we are only his stewards or caretakers. He tells us: **“The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;”** Psalm 24:1 (NIV) and **“Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.”** Proverbs 22:2 (NIV)

God has a right to give this Commandment, because he is the Creator and Owner of all things. He gives them to whom he wills. He tells us through Jeremiah **“With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.”** Jeremiah 27:5 (NIV) Some he makes rich, others poor. **“The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.”** 1 Samuel 2:7 (NIV) But God wants man to work for what he gives him and when God has given it, not waste it.

We are most happy when we are neither rich nor poor, but have sufficient for our needs. Much of man's poverty is due to his laziness, thriftlessness, or extravagance. On the other hand, great wealth is often acquired and used in a sinful way, and for that reason is called **“mammon of unrighteousness”**. Luke 16:9 (KJV)

How is it that we receive all our possessions? They come from God and his grace. God blesses us with the ability to work so that we can purchase possessions or trade for them. God also provides things by gift and inheritance, and especially by labor and earning. Whatever we acquire thus is our lawful property over against our neighbor. God wants us to recognize that **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”** James 1:17 (NIV) God

especially blesses believers not only with spiritual blessings but also earthly blessings. ***“Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.”*** Psalm 128:1-2 (NIV) Everyone should approach God with the attitude of Jacob upon returning to his homeland years after deceiving his brother Esau: ***“I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.”*** Gen. 32:10 (NIV)

Before God we are only stewards of the earthly goods he has entrusted to us, and we must give an account as to how we acquired and how we used them. A steward is a caretaker, a manager. God plainly says ***“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”*** 1 Corinthians 4:2 (NIV) We should use our possessions for our and our dependents' support and to help those who are in need, to support the work of the Church and to pay our responsibilities – our taxes – to the government. In the eyes of our fellow men, we are the owners of what is lawfully ours

We may take someone else's goods when he sells, gives, or bequeaths them to us.

What particular sins does God forbid in the Seventh Commandment? ***“We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get it by dishonest dealing.”***

To steal means to take someone's money or goods without their knowledge and permission. Dishonest dealing, or as you may have memorized this commandment ***“false ware or dealing”*** refers to goods, sold or bartered, that are not as they are represented to be, inferior in quality or short in quantity. Dishonest dealing includes any dishonest business trick, whereby we take advantage of our neighbor to beat him at a bargain.

Men may not always see the sins against this Commandment, but God knows them, and he will finally catch up with all thieves.

God forbids every kind of robbery, theft, and fraud, as well as sinful longing for anything that belongs to our neighbor. ***That*** is coveting. He also forbids us to waste or misuse the possessions he gives us.

Robbery is taking other people's possessions by force. Theft is taking our neighbor's money or goods secretly, slyly, as shoplifters, embezzlers, pickpockets and forgers do. Dishonest dealing and fraud is any dishonest business deal, cheating, as when we give short weight or measure, adulterate goods, overcharge our neighbor; when we do not pay honest wages or do not give honest service such as a whole honest hour's work for an hour's pay. It includes slipshod or careless work, loafing on the job, idleness, begging, betting and gambling, when we withhold wages against the laborer's will, do not pay our debts promptly or not at all. It includes evading taxes, not returning borrowed goods; when we damage property and make no amends, conceal stolen goods or keep them for ourselves.

The transgression of this commandment begins in the heart, with discontent, covetousness and greedy thoughts. Jesus is clear that all dishonesty proceeds comes from the heart. ***“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”*** Matthew 15:19 (NIV) Even the thought of stealing is a sin. In the heart there is envy, begrudging our neighbor the things he has. There is love of money, greed, sinful longing for what belongs to another. To avoid gross transgressions of this commandment, we must fight against these sins when they arise in our hearts. We must be honest also in small things and avoid whatever might tempt us to dishonesty, such as evil companions, idleness, or living beyond our means. ***“Godliness with contentment is great gain. 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. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”*** 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NIV)

What use are we to make of our property and earnings? What does God want us to do?

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)

God reminds us that we are responsible to him for how faithfully we use our possessions. As his stewards, we are to provide for ourselves and our dependents, to help those who are in need, to meet our obligations to the government, and to support the work of the church. We read in First John: ***“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”*** 1 John 3:17 (NIV)

We should help our neighbor to improve and protect his property and business.

But we must not limit our obedience to this commandment to deeds. What attitude of mind and heart toward our neighbor does God require of us? Not to seek our own selfish interests, but that our heart be filled with love and charity toward our neighbor. This includes giving good advice and cheerful giving and lending. We are to help our employer with his money and property by faithful work.

We must be as concerned about helping others with their money and property as we are about our own. We must protect our neighbor's property against loss and damage, take care of his things as well as we do of our own. This includes all property – our own and that of others.

Luther states this so simply: We are to “help [our neighbor] to improve and protect his property and means of income.” This can be done by giving him good advice or lending a helping hand. Each one should look after his neighbor's things as much as he looks after his own; not “everybody for himself”, but each one also for his neighbor, as we read in Philippians: ***“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** Philippians 2:4 (NIV) How can we do this? We should help our neighbor to find profitable employment, to improve his work, and to be successful in his business. We are not to squeeze and freeze him out of his job or business. Much of the business world today is selfish and cruel. Children should learn early on to take care not only of their own property, but also of that of others.

We should help our fellow men in every need and we should rejoice when we see them prosper.

We should not support those who will not work and live on begging, and letting others provide what they need; but we must not withhold help and support from those who are in need. ***“If any would not work, neither should he eat.”*** 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (KJV) We should not merely say that we pity the poor, but we must do something about it. Not merely sympathetic words, but helpful actions are needed. Giving to the poor is lending to the Lord. We read in Proverbs: ***“He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.”*** Proverbs 19:17 (NIV) Such help may be an outright gift, or it may be a loan to help him over his difficulties. It may be good advice, or lending a helping hand in his home or with his business. If our brother is in need, we should be willing to share with him what we have. Never must the need of our neighbor be made an occasion for personal gain to ourselves by helping him only to force valuable concessions from him. In helping our neighbor we should not seek our own honor and profit, but only his good, and we should rejoice as much in his prosperity as we do in our own.

When we examine our hearts we must realize that we have broken this commandment, too, just like all the others. This commandment, too, serves as a mirror and shows us our sins because we have not always been content with our possessions or used them as God wants us to.

Is there any hope? Yes. Because God loved mankind he sent his only-begotten Son to first – obey every commandment in our place and then – sacrifice that Son to pay the price for our sins.

That means there is hope. And because of the grace of God, everyone who believes in this plan of God's salvation has eternal life.

So what follows? The believer, the child of God wants to serve God and his fellow men also in obedience to this commandment, to help our neighbor to improve and protect his property and business and to make wise, God-pleasing use of our possessions. May we always thank him for his goodness by using his gift of possessions in ways which are pleasing to him. God grant this!

“And we believe Thy Word,
Though dim our faith may be:
Whate'er for Thine we do, O Lord,
We do it unto Thee.” Amen (The Lutheran Hymnal, 441:6)