

The forgotten commandment

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's nice to be with you. I've been here, I preached quite a bit here in the early days I was in Cape Town. I think then we got new lectures and they used them. I don't know, it's lovely to be back with you and it's looking quite a full church even in the holidays.

Today I'm going to preach on what I've called the forgotten commandment. We preach much about marriage and family and rightly so.

We occasionally preach about the dignity of human beings, about human rights and the value of life and abortion and those things. We speak occasionally about the importance of truth and ministering the word and hate speech and things like that.

But there's one commandment that I think we have largely forgotten and surprisingly so, at least in the circles that I move in. I can't speak for you. I can only recall once, I've been a Christian now since 1970, the middle of 1970.

I can recall only one sermon and that was recently one of our lectures preached a single sermon on this topic. I'm sure you've heard more than that, but that's what I've heard.

[1 : 15] And it's a topic, as I said, it's surprising. The whole Western world revolves around it, this command. It consumes most of our working lives.

It drives the modern world. It is at the heart of the concern for environment and climate change. It's central to the big issues of today, which besides the environment, of poverty and inequality.

It is foundational to the mandate that God has given us as human beings. And it was the first commandment that was broken. Yet we seldom preach about it.

It's just two words in the Hebrew and three or four in the English, depending on the translation. It has an importance and a significance that is hard to underestimate.

It is at the root of many of our troubles here in South Africa and, for that matter, the world we live in. And the breaking of this commandment is doing a lot to make us a failed state in this country.

[2 : 28] And, of course, if you've worked it out, I'm speaking about the eighth commandment. Thou shalt not steal or do not steal at all. I don't know if you've seen the connection between all those things I said.

It may seem very far away, but I'm going to try and explain it to you. And I think if you don't see the connections and I don't expect you to, it's because we haven't taught about it.

The failure is ours as preachers and not yours. It's a commandment that, you know, there's a group in America who study trends, particularly church trends and Christian trends, called Barna.

And Barna asked the American evangelical Christians, do you ever break the eighth commandment? You know, 90% said they never broke the eighth commandment.

You know, that means 90% of them are liars, so they broke it in the ninth commandment. It just shows that, you know, they don't go to Anglican churches. They don't go and confess their sins every Sunday at all.

[3 : 36] Because we all break the eighth commandment. I mean, Luther said that humankind is a vast stable of thieves, he said.

Okay, so today I want to introduce you to the eighth commandment. I'm going to try and give you a broad overview, like the big picture we always talk about at college. Okay, now for you to understand this commandment and why it is a bit bigger than I said just now, you need to understand two principles that will help you to understand this commandment and the other ones as well.

They're not the only principles of interpretation, but they will help you get the meaning here. Okay, the first principle is that in each command, the part represents the whole.

Okay, it's what Calvin called a synecdoche, and you may remember that from English. I always remember it because I learned it in the Latin. It was pars pro toto, the part for the whole, and you might have heard it that way as well.

Okay, but a synecdoche is a figure of speech where the part represents the whole, and the whole represents the part. It can go both ways. So when we speak about the White House, that's the part. [4 : 54] It stands for the whole American presidency. We talk about the crown. You may have watched the crown on Netflix. Okay, it stands for the monarchy in that series, the British monarchy and Queen Elizabeth II there.

And we use this often, these sort of metaphors. Well, it's not a metaphor, it's a synecdoche. Okay, so when God says, do not commit adultery, he's focusing on the central sin that one commits in marriage, in a family, that can break up a family, that can break up a marriage.

Okay, so he says, do not commit adultery. But it doesn't mean that's the only thing it's talking about. It doesn't mean it's even the only sexual sin. Because if you say it's the only sexual sin, then what about premarital sex or homosexuality or sex with beasts and, you know, pedophilia and all those things.

I mean, do not commit adultery covers all sexual sins. It's speaking about marriage. It's speaking about family. And in fact, it's speaking about human relationships.

And even Ezekiel, God's, Israel is unfaithful to God. And he exiles her. And Ezekiel, through Ezekiel, God says, you're committing adultery.

[6 : 10] Not meaning with other women or other men, but with him, being unfaithful to him. So this commandment is broad. It's the same, and I'll unpack it on the Eighth Commandment side.

And then the second principle here is that the negative implies the positive. That's not always the case, but in the commandments, that is the case.

And if you remember the reading, Paul says, theists must no longer steal, but they must work with their hands and do honest work and give to those in need and break the cycle of poverty.

So the positive is very important. And that's why we say, you know, don't commit adultery. You're also saying, well, be faithful in your marriage and in your relationship with God.

Be faithful to him. So those will help us to understand this and other commandments. Okay. So I want to, in order to unpack this commandment, I want to ask a few questions.

[7 : 14] I think I've got four questions here. So let's start with the beginning. What is the basic meaning of this commandment? Okay. I've told you, do not commit, do not steal.

And this simply means you must not take something that belongs to someone else. What is yours is yours and what is somebody else. You don't take what is somebody else.

That's basically what it is. So you don't take your neighbor's wife or you don't take your neighbor's dog or whatever, apples or whatever it might be. You don't take something from the church or from the state that doesn't belong to you.

Whatever belongs to someone else. Now steal, the word steal is a general word. There are all sorts of words for stealing. Okay. We steal property.

We can steal things. We steal ideas, both the material and the mental objects and ideas, what we make and what we manufacture.

[8 : 14] And we can also steal time, time that belongs to your employee or time that belongs to God. Okay. So stealing covers many different types of stealing.

Burglary, for instance, when you break into someone's house or building and take something. Robbery, shoplifting, pickpocketing, hijacking, kidnapping, fraud, extortion, embezzlement, racketeering, bribery, corruption.

I mean, that's the big thing in this country. We are corrupt. And we're going downhill. There are many different examples of stealing. I'm not going to preach and try and make you squirm or anything here.

But we do many of these things. For instance, plagiarism. We catch some people at college plagiarizing. I'm sure there's a lot more we don't catch there.

And sometimes we don't do referencing properly and we plagiarize ourselves. Gambling, for instance. Wasting your money trying to get something without earning it or laboring for it.

[9 : 18] False insurance claims. Cheating on your taxes. I think that's pretty common. Copying music. It's very common with the young people. Don't pay.

And many churches who use music that is copyright and they don't pay the body that's concerned. I forget, C-I or something. Okay.

And, yeah, it's important to put those things up and do it right there. All right. Cheating your... At work by taking... Spending a lot of time on Facebook.

Or phoning your friends and things like that. Employees are paying you time. And, of course, employees are, you know, over exact time from you without paying you.

So it goes both ways here. You know, they say in the U.S. that people wasting time at work or not working cost the economy \$200 billion.

[10:13] That's a lot of money. So stealing is rife in all sorts of ways. Not paying your debts. Also not giving generously to the church or to the work of God.

Not helping out those who are in great need. So there are many, many areas of stealing. I don't need to point them all out. We know we are thieves.

That we steal at times. And maybe this is a good time. We've got to pray for somebody. Then we remind all through the sermon you've got to pray for this other person and not listen to the preacher. So I'll give you a chance so you can listen to me. So let's pray for that person. That person will stop stealing in some way. I mean, that's real. We are thieves. You know, we may think, oh, I'm not a thief.

I'm not in prison. But we do steal in all sorts of ways. Small and big. So let's just pray for that person now. The question now is why is stealing wrong?

[11:12] Well, I'll give you a few quick answers and elaborate a little bit. Well, it's wrong because God says it's wrong. Do not steal. I mean, that's the bottom line. Is we follow a divine command ethics where God says what is right and wrong.

Okay. But it's also wrong because the law says it. Every religion in the world, as far as I know, thinks stealing is wrong.

Every society, it's wrong. And then, of course, our conscience tells us that it's wrong. And another thing is we don't, Jesus says do unto others what you'd have them do to you.

You know, if you've got a nice cell phone and all your addresses are on there and you do all your banking and all and someone steals it, you're pretty cheesed off. You know, you wouldn't like someone, you wouldn't do it to someone else and you don't like them doing it to you because it's a huge inconvenience.

But why does God say it is wrong? Well, the first reason it's wrong is because you're defrauding your neighbour.

[12:21] You're meant to love your neighbour and you're taking something that belongs to him or her and inconveniences them. It doesn't show love to them at all. And it harms your relationship with your neighbour.

But the second thing, it's also sins against God. Now, God is a God who provides for his children. He's like a father and he gives us things.

So if you steal, you're saying to God, you haven't provided for me properly. You haven't trusted. It's a lack of trust in God and his provision.

A lack of contentment with what he's given you. A lack of satisfaction with what he has given you. And a second reason why it's a sin against God, you're taking away what God has provided for someone else.

Somebody, another of his child or another of his creature. And that's serious. But we must go on and ask another question.

[13:25] What key principle underlies the prohibition of stealing? This is really an extension of why stealing is wrong. Now, stealing is wrong because it violates the principle of ownership.

Ownership is key here. If there was no ownership, there would be no stealing. There's got to be possession to have dispossession. And God is the creator and God owns all.

It says in Psalm 50 verse 10, For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. And that states the general principle. He owns everything. He's the ultimate owner.

But as the ultimate owner, God has given us ownership too. Proximate ownership, temporal ownership of things. And one of the principles of ownership is, if you own things, you can do what you like with them, basically.

So God can do what he's like with the earth. He can dispossess the Canaanites because they were unjust and wicked and for all good reasons. You can't do it arbitrarily and destroy justice.

[14 : 36] And so we are owners. Because God has made us owners. He's created a world and he's put the world under us.

We are kings in this world. We are to rule the world and to manage it and develop the world. To use its land to produce crops and to farm sheep or cattle or pigs or whatever it might be so that we can eat and we can provide for others.

To mine for gold. To use the resources of the earth. To build houses. To develop roads. To have hospitals. And, you know, all those sort of things.

And so we are owners. And stealing basically assumes yours and mine. I mean, that is the reality of this world that we live in.

This God-given world. And it's mine. And I'm talking here about legitimate ownership. You know, what I've bought or what I've inherited or what I've been given. Or what I've earned in some way.

[15 : 44] And so we can see then that the whole science of economics is built on ownership. And that is increasingly seen by economists.

I mean, it always was Adam Smith. It was built on scarcity. Now, scarcity is important in economics. But economics is also about flourishing.

About productivity. It's not only the dismal science at all. And ownership is key. It needs to be protected by law and laws.

The constitution. And so on. Because without the protection of, without ownership being protected, what happens then is we lose security and freedom.

If we are slaves, it means we don't own ourselves. We are owned by someone else at their disposal. And you can, I mean, you can see enough films and read enough stories about American slavery and how, you know, a guy sells the slave to someone else and keeps the wife.

[16 : 50] Or the wife is sold and, you know, she's separated from her children or from her husband. These things really happen. And by so-called Christian slave owners too.

It's wicked. But you can see the economic effects of that. Now, there's lots of talk about, oh, you know, we must, the state must own the mines.

We must, what is it called now? State, sorry? Nationalization. Yeah. You have this sort of, I mean, it's absolute madness. But who's going to invest in mines and develop the mines if there's no security of owning that mine?

I mean, to develop a mine costs billions and billions of rand. And, of course, that country is losing. I don't want to go on and develop a theme. But you can see the importance of ownership and the protection of ownership and how it affects a country and how it affects you personally.

If someone comes, you know, if people burn your house down. I mean, in Kalini, was it Kalini? Yeah. Up in the northwest province there. There was dissatisfaction about service delivery.

[17 : 59] And so they come and they burn people, burn the houses down of people who had nothing to do with the poor service delivery. Just taking their anger, smashing shops in their, you know, when they protest sometimes in the city.

And they steal and destroy the hawkers. I mean, these poor people who've got nothing and they're hawking and they come and trash their goods or they break windows and things like that.

Destruction. That is all wrong. Okay. But countries that protect ownership and punish stealing and have good laws and things like that, those are the countries that develop.

They become productive. And you own a business. You know you've got the security of the business. You can work at it. But if you've got no security, you're not going to do much work at all. Or you're going to run from the country and sell it or give your business away at all. And so ownership is very important. Okay. And you look after things when you own things.

[19 : 01] But if you, say, work for the government and you're using other people's money, it's much, you're much less careful. And that's why we have a lot of corruption in our country.

It's not my money. I'm not paying the taxes or it's not just my taxes. It's easy to steal and to be corrupt if you do not have ownership at all.

So ownership is a very important concept in the eighth command there. All right. So my next question is, you said every command has a negative don't and every command has a positive do. So what are some of the positives implied by this command? I'm just going to focus on two. I don't know when I started preaching. I don't want to overdo my time at all here.

So we've just spoken about ownership, and that's key to the positive. Ownership implies the legitimacy and the ability to use what we own if we own something.

[20 : 07] Of course, that ownership, you can't do anything with what you've got. It's got to be within the law. So you own a knife. It doesn't mean you can go and stab something.

If you own a knife, you can cut bread or you can cut your grapefruit in half or something like that. You can cut the meat for Sunday lunch. But it's not there to kill.

The purpose of the knife is honest good use. So we can't do what we like with what we have at all. And we've got to use what we have in line with its intended end.

For the thief, it may be intended end to kill someone or steal somebody. But it's always responsible use, productive use, using to serve and to love others.

And so we have a home. Not everyone has a home. But if we're fortunate enough to have a home, whether we're renting or buy it, we use that home to secure our family.

[21 : 11] A place of protection from the wind and the rain and the snow or whatever it might be. A place where our children can grow up in safety. A place where they can study and sleep and so on and invite their friends and play.

We use our home. And of course, if you have a home too, it's something God has given you or given you the ability to buy.

And we use our home not only for ourselves but for others because we've got to love our neighbors. So we can accommodate people. We can use it for hospitality. Invite them around.

Give them a meal. If a missionary is in the area and needs accommodation, we volunteer. I've got a spare room. Let's have the missionary there. Things like that.

There are many things you can do with your home. There's many things you can do with your car. You can give lifts to other people. Going to school. If you're in the city and you're not taking the train, you can form a lift club.

[22 : 09] You know, use the resources wisely. Don't waste things. We can share some things. We can share lawn mowers and things like that and give the extra money either to surviving or to those in need or to the church or something like that.

So what God gives us, we use to sustain our families. We don't indulge in unnecessary luxury or we don't have to have Merc or Mag wheels or whatever it might be like that.

We're to be good stewards of what God has given us. Because waste is also breaking. It may not be stealing but it's wasting God-given resources. And we're to be very careful with resources.

They're scarce. So the Eighth Commandment is always about stewardship. It's about managing the assets that God has given us.

Looking after them. Maintaining them. Repairing them. Renewing them in various ways here. If we have a garden, it means watering the garden.

[23 : 13] Mowing the lawn. Putting in nice flowers. Putting in endemic species and things like that into our lawns. Into our gardens and things like that. We look after things.

Ownership is ultimately about the stewardship of creation. We are made in God's image. We are to rule the world and develop a world.

To study the world. To make the world a productive place. To look after the animals. We look after the plants. And all these things.

The stewardship of the environment. That's part of our duty. That's implied by this commandment. And also one can say to appreciate. Besides stewardship of the creation, we should also be appreciating the creation.

So whereas the seventh commandment focuses on our relationship with our husband, wife, our children, and with other human beings. The eighth commandment focuses on our relationship with this creation.

[24 : 13] With this world. This physical world. And also a mental world as well. And so we look after this world. It's our present home. It's not our final home.

But it's our present home. And we're going to live here for a long time. We may live here for many thousands of years to come. We don't know. There's no indication that we're at the end of time or anything like that.

The gospel's got to go throughout the whole world. It's taken 2,000 years to get here. And there's still a lot of places. The Islamic world is to be Christianized. The Buddhist world. The Hindu world. Taoist world. All those. So at the beginning stages. For much of the world. The last two centuries. They've only had the gospel. Okay. Europe basically has had the gospel for nearly 2,000 years.

But the rest of the world is not long. And so it's a long way to go. But we don't know when the end is coming. So I'm not going to preach on that. But the thing is. Whether it's short or long.

[25 : 13] We have. Our stewardship of the creation. Is also a stewardship. For the future. Future generations are coming. Some of them are in the Sunday school over there.

And they will probably grow up and have children. And it will go on and on. And St. Marks may be here for 300 years time. We don't know. But we've got to think of the future. And that is why it's so horrific.

That America is pulled out of the Paris Climate Accord. And saying, well, me first. America first. Don't worry about the rest of the world.

We cannot think like that. It's unchristian. It's ungodly. It's wicked. To think that way. We're part of a human family. Part of a whole world. We're not isolated. At all.

I mean. I'm taking that example. But it's not just them who can do it. We do things too. In this country. We did it in the past. In this country. Focusing on the whites.

[26 : 10] Or something like that. We've got to. You know. Racism and things. South Africa is for all. For all who live here. Whatever your color. Whatever your creed. It doesn't matter.

It's our country. And we to look after. And to look after the immigrants. And others who come here. Flee from other countries. At all. So we've got to preserve for the future.

So the positive of the Eighth Commandment. Is responsible use. For the glory of God first. Always for him. Because it's his. In the end. And for the benefits.

Of others. It's all about stewardship. Then a second positive. Of the Eighth Commandment. Is to ask. What is the opposite. Of stealing. Because remember this.

And the opposite of stealing is what? Anyone? Giving. Yeah. That's right. And let's look at our passage here. Let the thief no longer steal.

[27 : 08] But rather let him labor. Doing honest work. With his own hands. So that he may have something to share. Or to give. With anyone in need.

So stealing is replaced by working. And honest work. Whatever it might be. A teacher. A secretary. A preacher. Whatever it might be. Or maybe just a mother at home.

And not just a mother. I mean it's a huge thing. Responsibility. And so Paul says. The thief must stop stealing. And he.

Or she. Must labor. Okay. There are big problems sometimes. In. Of unemployment. And things. Whereas. Understood.

That's understood. But. Seek to labor. And give to those in need. And that's very important. Because there are many people in need. And God has blessed many of us.

[28 : 06] With many resources. So we must always be aware. Of the needs of others. And particularly when. You've got like unemployment here. Of 45%. Official unemployment.

Of about 28%. There are many people in need. And the government helps. By various laws. To get grants and help. But there's always need. In the.

In this country. And in every country. And one of the big things. In the early church. Was they looked after one another. You know today. We say.

And it's true. The Jews look after each other. Okay. They need. And I think it's. At least in traditional African society. Ubuntu. The society cares for one another.

They don't care for the other tribes. But they care. For one another. And that's an important principle. In the West. Our individualism. We lost that. But the early church kept. Looked after their.

[29 : 02] Needy. I mean you had it right there. In Acts 6. Some of the. The Greek speaking. Widows. And women. Were overlooked. In the daily distribution of food.

And so they. Appointed. Seven. Men were chosen. Were full of the. Holy Spirit. And they. They were what. Most of us think. Were the foundation of the deacons.

In the early church. There were two. Groups of official ministers. The one was the elders. And next elder. I'm an elder. Past. Presbyter. They call us. You know. Using the Greek.

But. And also deacons. Which we don't have in our church. We have people called deacons. But they actually. Apprentice ministers. Or. Like that.

But the order of deacons. The Presbyterians have got this right. When they do it. Is that. They were official group of men. Who looked after the poor.

[29 : 57] And. I mean. That is expanded. To look after buildings. And administration. And things like that. Finances in the church. But at the center of that. In the early church. Were the deacons.

And they looked after the poor. Because there were many needy. They were often persecuted. And economic boycotts. And things like that. And. And widows particularly.

And now a woman. Go out and work. But in those days. If your husband died. You were often penniless. You had nothing. You had to go back to your father. Or someone else. But the early church. They were widows. And the widows.

You know. Paul said. The younger women. The widows. Must try and find a husband. But the older women. Who have served in the church. They must be looked after. And so it's very important. So the. The church has always.

Through history. Looked after the poor. And the needy. It's central. To our. To our being Christians. And that's also. A major implication.

[30 : 52] Of the eighth commandment. And if we aren't doing. What we can. In a society like that. We are stealing. As churches. And that's. That's wrong. Okay. Okay.

So I think I've said enough. Give you a general idea. So what is the eighth commandment. All about. It's about respecting. Property and possessions. It's about the wise. And responsible. Stewardship of our property. And the property. Of companies. That we work for. Property of the church. Or the state. Or whatever it might be. The property of a. Country. City. Province. We are to be stewards. Of God's creation. Bearing in mind. Future. Generations. It's about the protection.

Of ownership. And not destroying. The property of others. Often. Lifetimes work. We just go up. And smoke. Not burning. The trains. Here. When we're angry.

[31 : 46] I mean. So. These things. Cost millions. And then. You complain. And you burn them down. And it gets worse. And worse. I mean. It's just so counterproductive. Stealing.

Cables. Railway. All sorts of things. It's about our relationship. To the creation. To the possessions. And ideas. And things. Of other people.

We can have three attitudes. Towards property. One. Is. It's yours. I'll take it. Secondly. It's mine. I'll keep it. And the third. And the right way. It's God's. I'll share it. It's God's. I'll share it. That's what the. The positive. For. The eighth commandment.

Finally. Just two brief comments. To obey this command. And it is a demanding. Each command is. [32 : 41] Is demanding. To obey this command. We need to be content. If we are not content. We will. Desire. What others have. We will take. What others have.

Not everyone is equal. In this world. We've got to. Accept God's providence. And be content. Paul says. Whatever state I'm in. Whether I'm free. Or in prison. Whether I'm hungry.

Whether I'm cold. Whether I've got clothes. Or naked. I'll be content. It's one of the marks. Of Christians. It's contentment. Be satisfied. With what you got.

And if we. If we're not content. In a world. Of much advertising. Of a world. Of some people. Having much. We'll. We will be covetousness.

We will desire. What others have. We will desire. For more and more money. We will be destroyed. Through our greed. And wanting. That's why Paul says.

[33 : 37] You know. The love of evil. That. So. The love of money. And. Is. Or a root. I think. Rather. Of. Of all evil. It's a great.

Many people. For. Because of the love of money. And we're seeing that. In our country. And. But it's not only them. It's us too. We must always. When we point.

There. We must point back. We are sinners too. We are under the same temptations. To have. What someone else. Got. We must be. Content.

And the second. Concluding point. Is that this world. Is not all that there is. This life is not all that there is. Possessions are great. And we need them in this life.

But Jesus says. Lay up for yourselves. Treasures in heaven. We can't take our car with you. Our homes. With us. But we can lay up.

[34 : 34] Treasures in heaven. Which will. Will be. There forever. They are. The treasures in heaven. Will be. No one can break in and steal.

No. The rust can't corrupt. Or anything like that. It can't be defiled. It cannot fail. It cannot be destroyed. Lay up for yourselves. Treasures. In heaven.

And then. Jesus also speaks about. The pearl of great price. The man sold. Everything. To get the pearl of great price. I think. And. One aspect of that.

Is the kingdom of God. That is the greatest thing. We work for the kingdom. We seek the kingdom. We live for the kingdom of God. God. But the greatest treasure.

The pearl of great price. Is the price. Was the treasure. You know the. God gave the land to Israel. And one tribe had no land.

[35 : 31] And that was because. God. Was their treasure. They worked in the temple. They worked with the sacred things. God was their treasure. And God is our treasure.

And particularly. We think of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's our savior. We will see him. Face to face. We will see him one day. And that is the treasure.

That we are to desire. That we are to pray for. That we are to work for. Of course. We have him. By grace. Not by works. But we are to long for that treasure.

Because even if you have very little. In the realm of worldly goods. We have Christ. And if we have Christ. We have more than the richest men. In this world.

We've got everything. So let's seek him. As our treasure. And let's pray now. And let's pray for that person. That that person. Will have that treasure. And keep his or her eyes.

[36 : 24] Focused. On the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. And I'll close in prayer. Father.

I just thank you. For your word. We thank you Lord. That you speak about ownership. And possession. That we are to be stewards. Of all that you have given us.

And above all. We are to be generous givers. To those in need. To the gospel ministry. To the work of this church. To those who are poor. But above all Lord.

Let's keep our focus. On the world to come. The new creation. And the Lord Jesus Christ. Whom we'll see. Lord help us always. To desire him.

And to love him. And to serve him. And to bring him glory. Until we reach glory. And see our saviour. Face to face. Amen. Amen.

[37 : 20] Amen. Thank you. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen.

Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.