


END-TIMES ISSUES



#125 Commandment #8 – The command's "positive" side.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

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The Eighth Commandment:

You shall not steal.
Exodus 20 :15 (BSB)

YOU ARE GUILTY!

HOW??
I'VE NEVER TAKEN ANYTHING FROM ANYONE!

The Eighth Commandment:

You shall not steal.
Exodus 20:15 (BSB); also in Deuteronomy 5:19

THE PROBLEM IS THAT PEOPLE HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT THIS COMMANDMENT REALLY INCLUDES!

- ⇒ This commandment (like the others) represents a *CATEGORY* – and it involves both *obligations* and *prohibitions*.
 - ✓ Suppose you successfully avoided the *prohibitions*... have you fulfilled your *obligations*? **NO!**
- ⇒ This commandment involves the *full range of actions* ("positive" and "negative") that either *build up* or *tear down* people. And it doesn't just involve money and possessions; it affects *all of life* – including our interaction with God!
 - ✓ When we realize how extensive this commandment is, we will recognize that **we are all guilty**.

- ⇒ Our response to this commandment is a reflection of our *trust* (or lack of trust) in God.
 - ✓ It also demonstrates our willingness (or lack of it): ① to **live in obedience** to him, and ② to **accept his values** (which includes recognizing the difference between "needs" and "wants").
 - ✓ Do you recognize this commandment's connection to God?
- ⇒ The most **visible** form of this commandment involves:
 - ✓ **Theft and its opposite, work.** And the work this commandment requires involves not only providing for *our own* needs, but also doing what beneficial for *others*. (The two focuses may overlap.)
 - ✓ **Summarized**, we could describe it as a matter of "taking away" (the "negative" aspect) vs. "giving" (the "positive" aspect).
- ⇒ People's response to this commandment impacts the ability of a *society* to function properly.
 - ✓ Do you benefit society... or are you focused mainly on yourself?

You shall not steal.
Exodus 20:15 (BSB); also in Deuteronomy 5:19

Here is a basic summary that illustrates the wide range of issues that belong to this "commandment category":

The "Negative" part:

- ⇒ You shall not take, damage, or waste anything that belongs to you or to another person – whether money, possessions, time, talents, reputation, or dignity.


The "Positive" part:

- ⇒ Instead, you shall work diligently to build up and protect what God has entrusted to you and to others, and use all your gifts responsibly, for doing what is good.

OUR OBLIGATION IS TO BUILD UP, NOT TO TEAR DOWN!
(Not doing this is to "steal.")

IF this question applies to you ...

WHY IS THIS ALL NEW TO ME?




- It's **NOT** that the information is new, or that it hasn't been around.
 - ✓ It's been in catechisms and confessions, available for us, for many centuries! And the *Scripture* they are based on existed long before that!
- The problem is one of *neglect* – by the preachers &/or by the people.
 - ✓ Some people even have a "could-care-less" attitude toward the teachings of Scripture!
 - ✓ (Of course, "new-born" Christians have a legitimate excuse. They haven't had time to find out.)

"Nature abhors a vacuum."

- **Though not an absolute rule, in terms of science*:**
 - ✓ This describes the way things tend to occur in many areas of life. This applies in many moral and spiritual matters.
 - * (Vacuums *do* exist in outer space.)
- **Examples:**
 - ✓ People try to fill "voids" in their lives with all sorts of things.
 - ✓ Dust and debris tend to collect in unused corners of a room.
 - ✓ Clear out an area in a garden, and weeds start to grow there.
 - ✓ In many places, vagrants tend to move into empty houses.

More importantly:

- ✓ Remove God from your life, and something else will take his place.
- ✓ Leave your "heart" empty ... evil spirits move in (Luke 11:24-26).



HOW does this apply to our topic?

It doesn't *prove* what we observe in Scripture; rather it *illustrates* what we observe.

- **Scripture does not tell us to just STOP sinful conduct**, and leave that area of our conduct "empty."
- **Rather, it tells us to REPLACE sinful conduct** with righteous conduct.
 - ✓ The necessary "replacement conduct" may be stated directly in the passage, or implied. It may be in other passages. But it is there somewhere. **Pursuing this "replacement conduct" is part of what it means to "follow Jesus!"**
- **HERE ARE EXAMPLES** where "replacement conduct" is mentioned in the context of dealing with sinful conduct:
 - ✓ Ephesians 4:22-32; Colossians 3:5-17; Romans 13:12-14; Galatians 5:16-25; Romans 12:2; Titus 2:11-14; Romans 6:12-14; 1 Peter 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:17; etc.

How this is seen in the Eighth Commandment:

- **When we recognize that the commandments represent categories of conduct**, we will be more inclined to recognize other conduct that is a part of those categories.
 - ✓ The commandment itself (= the short statement that *represents* the category) is expressed in the "do not" form. But there are many other Scriptures that give us the "do" form of the commandment.

EXAMPLE:

"DO NOT" → He who has been stealing must **steal no longer**,

"DO" → but must **work, doing good** with his own hands, that he may have something to **share** with the one in need.

Ephesians 4:28 (BSB)

BUT THERE'S MORE TO IT! →

IT'S LIKE OUR "VACUUM" ILLUSTRATION! → It's not easy to **STOP** a *bad* habit, if you're unwilling to **START** a *good* habit! And in spiritual matters, it's *impossible*.

- **The "DO" obligation doesn't tell us to just do "something" ... but to do "something specific"** – namely:
 - ✓ **We must do work**; and the work we do must be *good* work.
 - » We can't be doing something sinful, rationalizing to ourselves that, "It is work." And, "At least I am no longer stealing."
 - ✓ **We must also be willing to share** with those who have genuine needs – i.e., we must be *generous* with the "fruit" of our labor.

WORK → [He] must **work, doing good** with his own hands,

GENEROSITY → that he may have something to **share** with the one in need.

Ephesians 4:28b (BSB)

- **Why the obligation to share?**
 - ✓ Sharing is not just a matter of how we relate to *people*; it also reflects how we relate to *God*: It shows how important God is to us, and how much we are willing to *trust* him.

A RICH PERSON DEMONSTRATED THIS FACT!

This rich person already had the money; he was *not* stealing. BUT HE WAS STILL LIVING IN SIN!

Then a certain ruler asked Him, "Good Teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

"Why do you call Me good?" Jesus replied. "No one is good except God alone. **You know the commandments:** 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, **do not steal**, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother.'"

"All these I have kept from my youth," he said.

Luke 18:18-21 (BSB)

- **He did not steal ... or commit any of the other visible sins against people!** ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ (At least in their most basic forms.)
 - ✓ We learn later (v. 23) that he was extremely wealthy. And Jesus *never* claims that the man obtained his wealth in any *wrong* way.

★ **He fulfilled the "DO NOT" part of the command!**

On hearing this, Jesus told him, "**You still lack one thing: Sell everything you own and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.**"

But when the ruler heard this, **he became very sad, because he was extremely wealthy.**

Luke 18:22-23 (BSB)

- **The problem is** ⇒ **He did not accomplish the implied "DO" part of the command!**
 - ✓ He was unwilling to let go of his riches... and follow Jesus.

★ **He went away UNSAVED!**

ACCOMPLISHED?

✓ **WORK** → [He] must **work, doing good** with his own hands, that he may have something to **share** with the one in need.

✗ **GENEROSITY** →

Ephesians 4:28b (BSB)

His response points to the problem:

- Our attitude toward what we have reflects our attitude toward God.
 - ✓ His riches were more important to him than was following Jesus.
 - ✓ This means *riches* were more important to him than *God* was.
 - ✓ This means he not only violated the "positive" side of the **Eighth Commandment**, but he also violated the **First Commandment**:

"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."
Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

- Jesus *wasn't* joking when he said this: Our attachment to what we have (or lack of attachment) will show who we are serving:

No one can serve two masters: Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and money.*

Matthew 6:24 (BSB)

* (A translation of the word "mammon"; refers to wealth and possessions.)

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"But I'm not rich. That can't refer to me! And surely it doesn't have anything to do with salvation!"

- Whether we are saved or not, **ALL that we have** belongs to God.
 - ⇒ The issue is whether or not we are willing to admit it. (Unsaved people usually don't admit it.)

... Jesus said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!
... What is impossible with man is **possible with God**."

Luke 18:24b, 27b (BSB)

- Yes, God can save a rich person. It is possible.
 - ✓ But most rich people are *unwilling* to recognize God's ownership of all that they have. (Most *non*-rich people also have this attitude.)
 - ⇒ This unwillingness is *evidence* that they are not saved.

So then, by their fruit **you will recognize them**.

Matthew 7:20 (BSB)

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"Jesus just said it to this specific rich person! It can't be for everyone!"

- You'll find similar statements and themes throughout the gospels; also examples of people doing it.
 - ✓ Matthew 4:18-22; 6:19, 24; 10:37-39; 13:44-46; 19:16-22, 27-29; 25:35, 40; Mark 10:17-22, 28-30; Luke 5:11, 27-28; 12:33; 14:13-14, 26-27, 33; 16:13; 17:32-33; 18:18-23; 19:8-10; John 12:24-25.
- You'll find examples of this "giving up everything" (demonstrations of generosity and sacrifice) in the rest of the New Testament.
 - ✓ Acts 4:32-37; 10:4, 31; Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 5:15; 8:2; 9:12-15; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:7-8; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 Timothy 1:16-18; Hebrews 10:34; 1 John 2:15-17.
- It's also in the Old Testament.
 - ✓ Sharing and generosity are mentioned quite often in the Law. And here are a few random verses from elsewhere: Psalm 37:26; Proverbs 19:17; 22:9; Isaiah 58:7-8; Daniel 4:27.

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"So, that means I need to give away all my possessions?"

- It does *not* mean you need to make a "vow of poverty"!
 - ✓ In the New Testament: Some people *did* give-up everything. Others (even the extremely poor) gave when there was a need.
 - ✓ The key issue is our willingness to recognize that *all that we have* belongs to God, and *all of it* must be used for his glory – whether it is being used for *ourselves* or for *someone else*.
 - ✓ The rich young ruler (which we just read about) was told to give up *everything*; Zacchaeus, the tax collector, gave away *half* ... *after* he had repaid four times back the people he had cheated.
 - ✓ Yet *all* of them realized...

In the same way, any one of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple.

LUKE 14:33 (BSB)

ALL THAT I HAVE
BELONGS TO GOD.

WHATEVER I DO WITH IT
MUST BE DONE IN A WAY
THAT HONORS HIM.

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"What if I don't have a job?"

- Maintain godly thinking!
 - ✓ Be careful about your *attitude*! A person can have a sinful attitude toward money and possessions, *even if he doesn't have anything!*
 - ✓ Focus on *trusting God* during this situation... and then responding properly (based on that trust).
- Maintain godly actions!
 - ✓ Don't just sit around doing nothing, and demanding that people feed you! (This type of conduct belongs in the category of "stealing.")
 - ✓ Do something! For example: There are many things a person can *volunteer** to do. God doesn't tell us to work *only when we get paid!* Demonstrate that you love God and neighbor by volunteering to do something that needs to be done, *without demanding payment!*

* (At home, in the neighborhood, through a volunteer organization, etc.)

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"Doesn't the Bible tell rich people to give money to the poor?"

- A rich person who loves God will love people. (So will a poor person.)
 - ✓ He will help people who have *genuine* needs.
 - ✓ This does *not* mean "free handouts."
 - » A person who is severely handicapped and genuinely unable to work might be given "free handouts"; but these are the exception to the rule.
 - » Those who are too lazy to work should be allowed to reap the consequences of their actions. According to Paul:

For even while we were with you, we gave you this command:
"If anyone is unwilling to work, he shall not eat."

2 Thessalonians 3:10 (BSB)

» In the Old Testament, people were instructed to *not* harvest part of their crops, and to let the poor have it instead. *But the poor had to be willing to do the work of picking the food and preparing it for eating!* No free handouts even then!

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"Shouldn't the government punish the rich and reward the poor?"

- **God does not show favoritism.**
 - ✓ **Both will be judged fairly, based on what they did with what they had.**
 - » Both can be guilty of the same sin, but can do it with different amounts of wealth.
- **God requires us to not show favoritism.**
 - ✓ **This is a principle found in both Old and New Testaments.**
 - » It is applicable to all areas of life – including in government.

You **must not pervert justice**; you must **not show partiality** to the poor **or favoritism** to the rich; you are to **judge your neighbor fairly.**
Leviticus 19:15 (BSB)

- **What is the government's job?**
 - ✓ **Specifically, to punish the wrongdoer – in this case, the thief.**
 - » Government is not instructed to punish a person's lack of generosity. God will take care of that later, at the final judgment.

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"But I have to build-up a large 'nest egg' of money, for when I retire!"

- **There are Scripture passages that tell us to prepare for the future.** The problem is that people choose to do this in ways that *contradict* our obligations. They also tend to trust *themselves*, and not *God*.
 - ✓ **God never tells us to stop working at a certain age.** What we do may change; and it might not involve getting paid (which means we may have to rely on previously-earned income). *But we are to still do all things in a way that honors God!*
 - ✓ **The modern attitude toward "retirement"** involves a lot of *distrust* in God, *laziness*, and an *unwillingness to obey the "positive" aspect of the Eighth Commandment*. *This is an expression of sinful values!*
 - » The Eighth Commandment doesn't end at retirement!
- **Scripture that promotes the modern-day concept of "retirement":**

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- **The issue: It's not about "retiring" from a paying job. Rather: ⇒ It's about our attitude toward God** – and this will influence:
 - ① what we do, if we "retire," as well as
 - ② our attitude toward other people.

[Jesus] told them a parable:
 "The ground of a certain rich man produced an abundance. So he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, since I have nowhere to store my crops?'
 Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and will build bigger ones, and there I will store up all my grain and my goods.
 Then I will say to myself,
**"You have plenty of good things laid up for many years.
 Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry!"**
 But God said to him, **'You fool!** This very night your life will be required of you. Then who will own what you have accumulated?'
This is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God."

Luke 12:16-21 (BSB)

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Only ONE of these represents complete obedience to the Eighth Commandment:

OBEYING?	CONDUCT	ITS EFFECT	TYPE OF LOVE	RESPONSIBILITY OF GOD & GOVERNMENT
NO	THEFT; STEALING OF ANY TYPE	Benefits SELF; destroys OTHERS.	Love for SELF.	⇒ God will <i>punish</i> . ⇒ Righteous governments will <i>punish</i> .
NO	WORK WITHOUT GENEROSITY	Benefits SELF; ignores OTHERS.	Love for SELF.	⇒ God will <i>punish</i> . ⇒ Righteous governments will <i>encourage</i> good conduct.
YES	WORK WITH GENEROSITY	Benefits SELF; benefits OTHERS.	Love for God and neighbor.	⇒ God will <i>reward</i> . ⇒ Righteous governments will <i>praise</i> such conduct.

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☆☆ **OUR MISSION:** ☆☆

**THERE IS SO MUCH TO THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT –
 MORE THAN WE MIGHT FIRST EXPECT!**

☆☆ **THIS WEEK:** ☆☆

Focus on the "POSITIVE" side of this commandment!

- **EXAMPLE:**
 HOW can we fulfil our obligation to WORK (whether or not we get paid) and to *also* express GENEROSITY and LOVE to others? *

* (Even doing things the *right* way – instead of *carelessly* – is an expression of love!)

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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