

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #53, Lord's Day 42

The Eighth Commandment



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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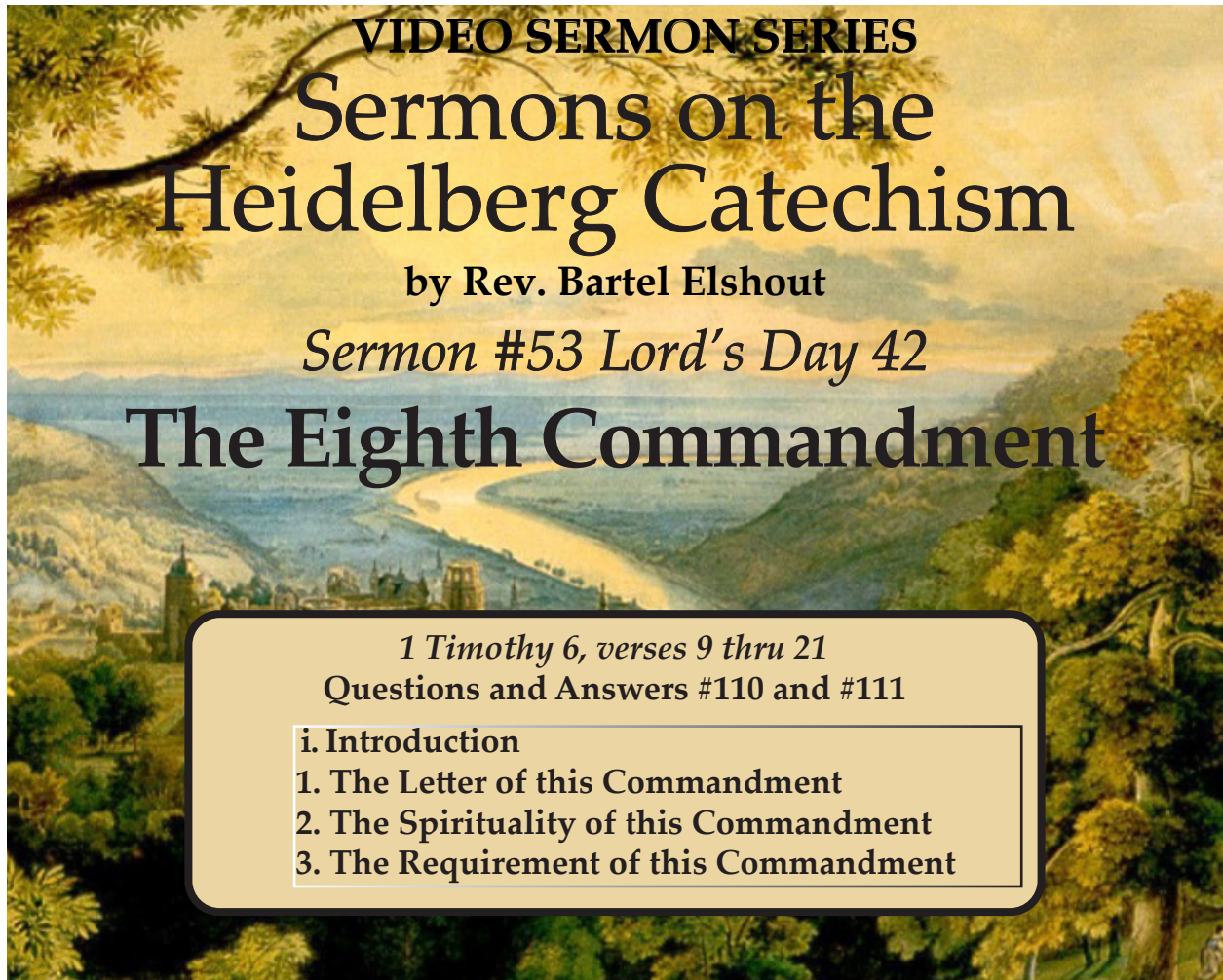
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Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

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Sermon #53 Lord's Day 42

The Eighth Commandment

1 Timothy 6, verses 9 thru 21
Questions and Answers #110 and #111

i. Introduction

- 1. The Letter of this Commandment**
- 2. The Spirituality of this Commandment**
- 3. The Requirement of this Commandment**

Introduction

Congregation, are there any thieves here tonight? That's a rather shocking question, is it not? Are there any thieves here tonight? That's how shocking Christ's words to the rich young ruler were, the rich young ruler who was so satisfied with himself; the rich young ruler who honestly believed that he had kept all of God's Commandments flawlessly. And then, Jesus exposed him for who he really was in the sight of God; and he said, "Go and sell everything you have, and then follow me." And then remarkably, it says he went away grieved. Why?—because he had many possessions. And so, Christ, by that simple exhortation, by that simple admonition, exposed the heart of that man, and ultimately, exposed him as a thief, a man who sinfully was attached to what God had sovereignly given him.

And congregation, when you are asked that question, and I ask that question of myself, it is rather unsettling. Because, by asking that question, we are compelled to examine ourselves whether we really see ourselves the way God sees us; whether we really believe that we are sinners and that we are transgressors of the law, and that includes the Eighth Commandment. But of course, the exposition of the law is given in the context of the third division of the Heidelberg Catechism, which deals with Gratitude. And there's a reason why the exposition of the law is dealt with there. Because the whole thrust of that exposition is that the believer expresses that gratitude, manifests that gratitude, when, by grace, he orders his life according to God's precepts. And so,

the law that God uses to convict of sin, and to lead us to Christ, it is that law which is the standard by which the conduct of the Christian is defined. And that includes the Eighth Commandment, the Commandment which deals with the reality that, in a fallen world, men are naturally inclined to be thieves. But by the grace of God, when by the grace of God we are renewed when the Spirit of God dwells in us, and when, by the grace of God, we again begin to live in conformity to God's precepts, that includes also this Commandment.

So let's turn to Lord's Day 42 of our Heidelberg Catechism, and let's hear how the Catechism expounds the Eighth Commandment for us, "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Question #110: *What doth God forbid in the eighth commandment?*

The Answer is: *God forbids not only those thefts and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate—or the government—but He comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor; whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, ells,¹ measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all abuse and waste of His gifts.*

Question #111: *But what doth God require in this commandment?*

And the Answer is: *That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may, and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others; further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy.*

And so, as we consider this *Eighth Commandment*, first of all, we will consider *The Letter of that Commandment*, "Thou shalt not steal." Secondly, we will look at *The Spirituality of that Commandment*, because the Catechism clearly implicates that; there is more to that Commandment than just the letter. And then thirdly, *The Requirement*, the positive *Requirement of this Commandment*, "Thou shalt not steal"—namely, that we are required, rather than robbing our neighbor of what is his, that instead, we do everything in our power to promote the advantage of our neighbor. Thus, *The Eighth Commandment; The Letter of this Commandment; The Spirituality of this Commandment*; and also, *The Requirement of this Commandment*.

1. The Letter of this Commandment

Congregation, we sang together Psalm 24, and in Psalm 24, verse 1, we read, "The earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof." Now, we will never understand the significance of this Commandment and of all that is related to it, unless we first of all focus on this very foundational truth: "The earth is the LORD's." And of course, boys and girls, I hope that you would be able to explain to me why, why does the Bible say that? And you probably would tell me, "Pastor, because God created the earth." And let's keep that in mind.

When we think of this vast, vast universe of ours, all of which has been created by his power; this vast universe of ours, which belongs to him, which he has spoken into existence, which he sustains by his power; in that vast, vast universe, there is one supercluster of constellations in which our Milky Way is located. And in that Milky Way, with its vast number of stars, its vast number of stars, there is one special star, sovereignly chosen by God, and circling around that star which we call "the sun", are the planets, all of which are unique; and among them, is our Earth. So in light of this vast universe of ours, our globe is but a small, very small aspect. And yet, we may believe wholeheartedly that it is on this plant that God has supremely manifested his wisdom. And so, in a very special way, this planet, this Earth, is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. And we need to have that perspective, congregation. We need to recognize that that what we have on this Earth is

1 An ell is an old English unit of length, used chiefly for cloth; the modern unit of the Netherlands equal to a meter.

ultimately the Lord's. Everything is the Lord's. He is the sole proprietor of all that is on this Earth. He is the sole proprietor of all that we have and of all that we own. And also, as Christians, called upon to manifest godliness in how we interact in that which God has sovereignly given us, that which belongs to him, is of utmost importance to order our lives according to the Word of God, and in conformity also to this Commandment.

And of course, we know that when God created Adam and Eve, he sovereignly appointed Adam and Eve, and the human race, to occupy this Earth, to replenish it, to bring out all that God has put in that creation. And of course, had Adam and Eve not fallen, they would have pursued that in an entirely God-glorifying way, in the recognition that the Earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. But now, we are fallen creatures, and that has radically changed our attitude towards that which is the Lord's. Because there are many different ways that we can talk about the fall of man. But we can also put it this way—when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they declared their own sovereignty. Because that was Satan's temptation. He said, "If you eat of that fruit," which was the first step that ever occurred, "when you eat of that fruit, you will be as God." And ever since then, fallen man views himself as sovereign; also sovereign over that which is the Lord's, that which belongs to Him. And therefore, ever since the fall, fallen men have been inclined to exercise that sinful sovereignty in very wicked ways, including by taking from our neighbor that which God has sovereignly given to our neighbor. That's why, ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, the history of humanity has been marred also by the transgression of the Eighth Commandment. Ever since Adam's fall, human beings are now inclined not to be satisfied with what God has sovereignly given them, and human beings are now inclined to lust for more, to lust for beyond what they have, and to use unlawful means to take from our neighbor that which God has sovereignly given him.

And you know, Naboth—Naboth understood the theology of the property and the possessions that we have. Boys and girls, you know the story (1 Kings chapter 21), is that Ahab, the king of Israel, a wealthy man who had many possessions, cast his eye upon Naboth's vineyard, and he coveted that vineyard. At least to his credit initially, he sought to purchase that vineyard. But we know that Naboth rejected that offer. And why did Naboth reject that offer? Because Naboth was a godly man, and he understood that his property, that which he lived on was God's sovereign gift to him, as was true for all the children of Israel. And in that recognition, he did not want to sell it to king Ahab. And you know the rest of the story, the wickedness, that, at the advice of evil Jezebel, the wickedness that Ahab engaged in, to secure that which was not lawfully his. And so, there was no reason for him to expand his belongings.

But that's the problem with our sinful nature, is that ever since the fall, we are discontent. Ever since the fall, we are inclined to lust ever for more. Calvin² very insightfully comments on this, when he says, "When we come to the rich, we find that they are so inflamed and covetous for the goods of this world, that we cannot satisfy them. We see that the majority of the rich would not even be satisfied had God given them the whole world to possess." And congregation, we see that in our very, very prosperous and cumulous Western world—a culture that is characterized by perpetual dissatisfaction; and so, a culture that functions, sadly, by stealing and by being stolen from, or as we read in 2 Timothy 3, "deceiving, and being deceived" (verse 13). And so, the wretched inclination of our fallen nature is not to be content with what God has given us. The wretched inclination of our fallen nature is to covet that which is not ours, that which belongs to our neighbor—very offensive in the sight of God.

2 John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564) was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and leading Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

2. The Spirituality of this Commandment

And so, the Catechism begins by saying that what God forbids in the Eighth Commandment are *those thefts and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate*—punishable by the government. And hopefully, there nobody here that would have to be punished by the government. So, in that sense, there probably is not anybody here who was guilty of an action of thievery that would require the government to punish us in an appropriate manner. And so, in our culture, theft is punishable by law. And that, of course, is the letter of the law. And so the Catechism very quickly moves from the letter of the law to the spirituality of the law. So, God forbids not only *those thefts and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate*, so it's possible to go through an entire lifetime and never have committed an act that is punishable by law, an act that would require the magistrate, the government, to punish us in an appropriate way for having been guilty of thievery and of theft. *But*—the Catechism goes on—*He*—that is, God—*comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor*. And so, that, again, underscores what I've already said. So, what belongs to our neighbor? Whatever our neighbor possesses, he possesses by God's sovereign direction. And so, when we steal from our neighbor, in whatever form that may be, we are taking from our neighbor that which God has sovereignly given to our neighbor, which is what Ahab and Jezebel were very, very guilty of. The Catechism painfully, but very honestly, sets before us the complex ways and the devious ways in which fallen man manages to do precisely that: *Comprehends...all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we design*—whereby we purposely—*appropriate to ourselves*. The word “appropriate” has the idea of property in it. In other words, where we take to ourselves that which properly belongs to our neighbor. And God abhors that sin. We need to realize that. In Zechariah 5, verse 3, we read, “This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off.”

So then, it begins to unpack this for us: *Whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right*. That's very convicting, is it not?—*under the appearance of right*. In other words, that on the surface, it appears that we are not transgressing this Commandment, but underneath the surface, underneath the surface, under the appearance of right, we are engaged in practices that result in something being unjustly taken from our neighbor, that which sovereignly has been bestowed upon them by God himself. Then it mentions several examples: *As by unjust weights, ells, and measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury*. So in other words, the Catechism lumps together all deceitful business practices *under the appearance of right*. And congregation, I've never been a businessman, but I've known enough businessmen in my life to know that, to be in the business world, to be in the business environment, is a very challenging environment for a Christian. The opportunities to engage in deceitful behavior under the appearance of right, those temptations are enormous. But I've also lived long enough to know that there are and continue to be godly businessmen, businessmen who recognize that they live in the presence of God, that God sees all things, also the manner in which we do our business—deceitful business practices.

Proverbs 11, verse 1: “A false balance is abomination to the LORD.” First Thessalonians 4, verse 6: “That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such.” I think recently I briefly mentioned that remarkable illustration by Norman Rockwell,³ that well-known illustration of the old-fashioned grocer with a scale hanging from the ceiling. On the one hand is the grocer; there's a chicken in the scale; and on the other side is

3 Norman Rockwell (1894–1978) was an American painter and illustrator, highly popular in the United States for his artistic reflections on American culture. He is most famous for his cover illustrations on *The Saturday Evening Post* magazine.

the customer. And they're facing each other, they're look each other in the eye, and they're both stealing from each other—the grocer by pushing down the scale, the customer by pushing it up simultaneously, looking each other straight in the eye. What a powerful illustration! You can find the illustration quickly online. It might be a very good discussion piece in your families, to discuss exactly what is being said here—deceitful business practices.

And that includes, I believe, that also in our commercial world, is that especially today, people are being enticed to engage in what I call deficit spending. People are being enticed to go into debt, in order to purchase that which their heart lusts after. And that's a whole new environment of temptation, because the deeper people sink in debt, the more tempted they will be to transgress the Eighth Commandment.

We can also include here, not doing an honest day's work. In other words, when you're employed by someone, that employer has a right to expect from you that on a work day, you perform that which you have committed yourself to perform. So, if we don't do that; if we underperform; if we do not live up to what we have committed, we are stealing; we are robbing our employer by not giving him an honest day's work. But the opposite is also true. In other words, when an employer underpays his employee; when an employer does not give his laborer that which he is worthy to receive, that too is a transgression of the Eighth Commandment.

I remember when I lived in Southern Ontario for seven years, something that always troubled me greatly is that, with every agricultural season, they would bring all of these foreign workers, and they would pay them a very minimal salary. For them, it was more than they could have ever made at home, but it was below what they were worthy of. As a result, many people became very, very wealthy. Big houses were going up everywhere, and in the meantime, taking advantage of these laborers, who did not even have the means to transport themselves. We saw them walking, we saw them riding bikes, and they were making more than they would have made at home, but far below, because the laborer, God's Word says, "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (1 Timothy 5:18). So, we can be stealing as employees; and we can be stealing as employers.

Then there's also the sin of governmental theft. One of the commentaries that I read really highlighted that. The government, the magistrate, which is commanded to make sure that the law is kept, they themselves can be so very guilty of transgressing the Commandment. We all realize, especially the last few months, how much money has been stolen from the American public; what abuse there has been of the money that we have lawfully paid in our obligation to pay our taxes. God's Word is crystal clear. Also, you know the well-known story of when Peter came to Christ, and Christ said, you have to pay that which is Caesar's and pay that which belongs to God. Even though, when he said it, Israel was governed by a corrupt government, a government that oppressed them; Christ said that's your obligation to pay unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. So just because our government is guilty of governmental fraud, does not relieve us from the obligation to pay to Caesar that which is Caesar's (Matthew 22:21). And I think of the wicked practice that so many governments avail themselves of lotteries and of gambling. How many people are robbed as a result of it? But the lust of money has moved governments, state governments to promote gambling because it provides a stream of income. In the meantime, many lives are destroyed. Again, in Southern Ontario, the tourist industry was revived by building casinos on both side of the Niagara River. And what always stunned me is when I found out that the police department had a suicide squad, and every week, they would pull six to seven bodies from the Niagara River of people who had committed suicide because they lost all their money, because they had been robbed blind.

There are other ways of cheating, cheating also in the educational realm. The sin of plagiarism,

when we steal someone's information and we claim it to be our own. And of course, most institutions of higher learning are deeply concerned about the potential for that kind of theft also, by means of the use of artificial intelligence.

Fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury...and also all covetousness. Covetousness—"Thou shalt not covet" (Exodus 20:17). That's what drives all of that—covetousness, which makes people permanently discontent. As you well know, we live in a culture that is designed where the whole advertising world is designed to keep you perpetually dissatisfied with what you have; always tempting you to obtain that which you do not have, even if it means that you go into great debt. So many people are living beyond their means, personally; and of course, it's true nationally as well. And there are times, I understand, that we need to take out loans for lawful purchases, but so many are robbing themselves and future generations by living beyond their means.

And so, we could go on and multiply the many, many ways in which we can transgress that Eighth Commandment. But the worst violation of this Commandment is the robbery of God himself. That's what our first parents were guilty of. The first act of sin was an act of theft. God had said, "The whole garden is yours, except that one tree" (Genesis 2:17). And Adam and Eve believed Satan's lie, and they took that which was not lawfully theirs, and thus, the fall of man began (Genesis 3:3–7). And ever since that day, we are naturally inclined to rob God of that which is his.

And so, what is forbidden by God, the Catechism says, is *All abuse and waste of His gifts*. And so, in other words, congregation, when we use that which God has given us; when we use it for ourselves; when we use it for sinful purposes; when we use it to indulge ourselves in the pleasures of the flesh, then we are abusing that which God has given us. Because whatever God has given us, he has given us for one purpose only, and that is that we would glorify him with that which he gives us, including our material possessions. In other words, what this means is that we are called to be stewards of that which God has given us. And by nature, as sinners, we utterly fail to be stewards. By nature, we are inclined to think that what we have is ours. Because as fallen sinners, as fallen creatures, we believe that we are sovereign over what we have, and fail to realize that the Earth is the Lord's and all the fulness thereof. And that everything God has granted me, all my material possessions—the money in the bank, whatever it might be, my success in the business world—all of that is God's gift. All of that is because God has sovereignly arranged our lives and our circumstances that we have what we have. And so, when we use it for ourselves, when we use it for our own pleasure, then we are robbing God of that which is his. Because God has given it to us, so that with that gift, even the gifts of material wealth and prosperity, we would honor him, and we would serve him, and we would seek the advance of his kingdom.

Oh, as fallen sinners, we are so inclined to rob God of his honor. That's what pride is. As fallen creatures, we are proud creatures. What does it mean to be proud? To be proud means to be a worshipper of yourself. We are created to be worshippers of God. But as fallen creatures, having believed Satan's lie, that we shall be as God, as fallen creatures, we are worshippers of ourselves. So when we are proud—proud of our accomplishments; proud of our gifts; proud of our possessions—we are guilty of worshipping ourselves and robbing God of the honor which is his worthy due. And who of us would dare to say they've never been guilty of that sin? Who of us would dare to say, perhaps under the appearance of right, that we have not robbed God of his honor, of his worthy due? Such is the profound nature of our sinnership. Such is the spirituality of this Commandment.

By the grace of God, God's children again begin to live according to this precept. And for the believer, it becomes a matter of grief that they so often catch themselves, that they are still oriented

on themselves; it grieves the believer that we catch ourselves at this wretched inclination of pride, this wretched inclination of seeking our own honor rather than living entirely to the honor of God. That's the calling of the Christian, is to live our lives, to use all that God has given us, with one singular purpose and one singular focus, namely, to live to His glory. And also, God's children have but a small beginning of that new obedience.

We could also rob God of his day. We need to realize that that seventh day, that day of rest is not ours to do with as we please. That's His day. That's the day that belongs to him. God gives us seven days to pursue our lawful pursuit, but that's His day. And so when we use that day for other purposes, we are robbing God of that which is his worthy due.

And we also rob God by not giving him his tithes. We have addressed it in the past, so I will be brief here. What did God accuse Israel of, in Malachi? These are stunning words. He says, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, when have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Malachi 3:8-9). And so the duty to tithe is not a ceremonial duty that was only applicable to the Old Testament. That's a moral obligation that we have towards God. And the whole purpose of tithing is to cure us of our covetousness. The whole purpose of tithing is to be perpetually reminded that our income is God's gift. And God is saying, "Of that which you earn, of that which I give you, of your increase, ten percent is mine. Ten percent belongs to me. Because ultimately, it all belongs to me. But I am allowing you to use that which I've given you, but ten percent is mine." It's quite something for God to say, "You have robbed me." And so, I hope that, by God's grace, that we are all inclined to obey that precept, to give God his worthy due. It belongs to him. And so, when I teach in Catechism, or when I do premarital counseling, I always talk about the sacred obligation of the Christian to tithe, to give at least ten percent of his income back to the God from whom all blessings flow. And that should be a priority. In other words, when we get our paycheck; when we get our dividends, our profit that we acquire by our business, we should not first see what our expenses are, and then see if there's something left for God's service. But when we get our paycheck, the very first thing we need to do before anything else, before we look at any of our bills, the first thing we need to do is give that which belongs to God, give him his worthy due, lest we be guilty of robbing him.

And so, we could go on and continue, and hopefully you would make some application yourself. But the bottom line is this, that theft, in whatever form it takes place, whatever way we're guilty of it, whatever way we're guilty of taking that which doesn't lawfully belong to us, is a sin that provokes God to wrath, because it is a sin that challenges the sovereignty of God; it challenges who he is; it challenges the fact that "The Earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof."

That's why it's remarkable that when Christ died on the cross, he was nailed to a cross in which there was a thief on either side. He was numbered with the transgressors. He was crucified with thieves. He took the place of the number one thief and robber in Israel, namely, Barabbas—Barabbas who went free because he took his place. And how encouraging that is, congregation, because that's the gospel you see. That's the gospel, that Christ took the place of a thief. Christ was numbered with thieves, numbered with liars, in order to secure the salvation of transgressors also of the Eighth Commandment. And so, also, when it comes to the Eighth Commandment, he who knew no sin, who never took that which was unlawfully his, he who knew no sin, he was made sin, he was numbered with thieves, he was numbered with transgressors.

To show you how serious the sin of theft is, look what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 9 and 10. He says, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived"—then he begins to list the sins—"neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor

effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, *nor thieves*, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Now, that does not mean that all who are listed there cannot be saved. What that means is those who live and die in those sins will perish, including thieves, those who are guilty of transgressing the Eighth Commandment. That’s why, if this were the only Commandment we would have broken, we would have made ourselves worthy of God’s wrath. And I pray that tonight, the exposition of the Eighth Commandment would confront us afresh with our sinnership; confront us afresh with the fact that we need a Savior—a Savior who obeyed the Eighth Commandment perfectly; a Savior who was numbered with thieves and nailed to the cross as a thief and a robber, though he knew no sin; and a Savior who paid the penalty also for the transgression of the Eighth Commandment; a Savior who came to save even thieves.

That’s how we started. Are there any thieves here? I hope that we all realize that there’s not a single person in this auditorium not guilty of transgressing this Commandment. Also, when it comes to the Eighth Commandment, it is exceeding broad, but thanks be to God, that Christ was wounded for our transgressions. Oh, dear child of God, he was wounded also for your transgression of the Eighth Commandment. He shed his blood to secure the pardon of your sins against the Eighth Commandment as well. That’s the richness of the gospel, that Christ has come to save to the uttermost, and has come to save law-breakers, to reconcile law-breakers with God, including those, as we all are, transgressors of the Eighth Commandment.

3. The Requirements of this Commandment

A few words yet about the positive requirement, it says here, *That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may*. That’s the positive side of it. So, rather than robbing my neighbor, in whatever way I would so, is that I do the opposite; that I go out of my way to promote the advantage of my neighbor; that I go out of my way to make sure that I do not in any way disadvantage my neighbor; that I do not do anything, also if I have a business, that would in any way be harmful to my neighbor. That’s the positive requirement of this Commandment. And so, here, the Catechism simply makes the application of what we know as “The Golden Rule” and deal with my neighbor *as I desire to be dealt with*. In Matthew 7, verse 12, we read, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Philippians 2, verse 4: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” That’s the beauty of God’s grace, congregation. When the grace of God transforms us, we become God-centered; we become others-centered, rather than self-centered. By nature, we are self-centered. By nature, we live for ourselves. And it’s that wretched inclination that makes us transgressors of the law. But the grace of God, by which we become a new creature in Christ, that new life, that new man again begins to function as God designed it originally in the creation of Adam. And before Adam and Eve fell, they were God-centered, and they were others-centered. That’s what the law requires of us, to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and my neighbor as myself.

Further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy. So the positive requirement is that I must work diligently; I must labor diligently, so that I can lawfully secure that which I need in order to live this life. That’s the positive requirement. That’s why the Bible condemns those who refuse to work. “This we commanded you,” we read in 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 10, “that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” And so the positive requirement of the Eighth Commandment is that we labor diligently so that we can provide for our families in a lawful way without being tempted to transgress the Eighth Commandment to unlawfully secure

that which we desire.

And then, this phrase that is added, that is so insightful: *So that I may be able to relieve the needy*. So, what this is saying is that we are to give according to our income, rather than live according to our income. Our culture is saying you should live according to your income. The Catechism is saying we should give according to our income. And so, when God blesses us with material goods and material wealth, the Christian's calling is to minister to the needy; to be gracious; to be inclined to give of that which God has given us. Deuteronomy 15, verse 7: "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother." *That I faithfully labor*—of course, to provide for my family, but also, *that I may be able to relieve the needy*. Ephesians 4, verse 28—so applicable to all of this: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

And so, the grace of God makes us generous. The grace of God makes us others-centered. The grace of God makes us to be compassionate towards those who are in need. And so the way we use our possessions; the way we use our income, is a litmus test of who we really are, also spiritually. The grace of God, the more the grace of God gets ahold of me, the more I realize how indebted I am to God, the more God-centered I become, the more generous we will become, in using that which God has given us, for the benefit of my neighbor.

And then, finally, perhaps now we understand why Agur prayed what he prayed. Open your Bibles please, to Proverbs 30, and we will conclude with Agur's prayer. Proverbs 30, verse 8 and 9, the prayer of a tender, God-fearing man. He says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me"—Lord, provide for me precisely what I need—"lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." And so, congregation, may that prayer be ours. May, by grace, we live our lives as the people of God, no longer obsessed with acquiring more and more possessions. Like Calvin says, as we quoted at the beginning of the service, that "The rich," he says, "would not even be satisfied had God given them the whole world to possess." What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and in the end, loses his soul? (Mark 8:36).

That's why the language of Matthew 6 so profoundly connects also with the exposition of the Eighth Commandment. We have considered that. And so, there we hear the Word of Christ as the final application of what we have tried to say about this Commandment. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19–21). Amen.

Let's pray.

Our gracious God, all-knowing, all-seeing, heart-searching God. Lord, we bow before thee, and we need to confess that we are also transgressors of the Eighth Commandment. Lord, give us grace to be honest and upright before you, to own before you who we really are, for we cannot hide from thee. Thou knowest who we really are. Thou knowest the innermost recesses of our heart. And who of us can walk away from this service not guilty of transgressing this Commandment? But oh, what a wonder, Lord Jesus, that thou wert numbered with thieves, that thou hast gone to the cross for the salvation of thieves. Oh, what a wonder that with thee there is forgiveness, that the blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanses from all sin, also the transgression of the Eighth Commandment.

And so, may the proclamation of the law drive us to the Lord Jesus Christ time and again, to find our rest in him, that we would realize, that if God would mark our iniquity, also regarding this Commandment, then who of us could stand? But oh, the wonder, there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. Dismiss us now with thy blessing. Keep us safely in this coming week, and Lord, give us grace to be a godly people in an ungodly world; and give us grace to walk in the way of thy Commandments in every aspect of our lives. Bless the gathering of our young people tonight as we will continue our study of the book of James. And remember us in Christ Jesus, thy Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.