

Living The Spirit of The Law In Everyday Life

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

In looking at the 10 Commandments we discover that God in giving them actually gives out not a list of hindrances or stumbling blocks, but the blueprint for success and blessings. They are in fact the *“Rules for Kingdom Living”*.

We have seen that these laws, given long ago by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, established the boundary lines, the parameters, for life firstly within the covenant community of Israel. The first four give instruction on the vertical dimension of life, our relationship with God, while the remaining six address the horizontal, social, relationships of our lives. We have seen their timeless application to life in any community in any age, but we have also seen that these laws are given uniquely to God’s people in order that they/we might live as God desires us to live.

“You shall not steal.” – Exodus 20:15 (ESV)

Imagine how different life would be if everyone lived by the 8th commandment: *“You shall not steal.”* Imagine ... no need for locks on your door, security systems for your home, secure passwords for your internet accounts. Like other commandments we have seen before, this one almost seems so obvious that it hardly needs to be mentioned, but given that God gave only 10 commandments for right living, apparently it does.

This law is based on the right to private property and ownership and it establishes a basic principle for any society: you shall not take what does not belong to you; a necessary understanding for life together.

Perhaps this is one we may affirm as being necessary for social living, but may not necessarily apply to us. We aren’t the kind of people who rob banks or break in to other people’s homes ... but if we are honest with ourselves we can see areas of our lives where we may readily cross over the line of this commandment.

Webster defines stealing as “taking anything without permission or right”. Does that include outwitting the IRS on an income tax report, or padding the expense voucher a little, or stretching out the lunch hour? Or would we say those kinds of things are only hedging, or being clever, or getting what is due us? (Mark 12:17)

However, there are many other forms of theft. For example, taking longer over our lunch breaks at work or arriving late and leaving early are actually forms of stealing from our employers, stealing time they have paid for. Taking advantage of employers in that way indicates a lack of love for others. Cheating someone or even delaying paying someone what you owe him or her. In Colossians 4:1, the apostle Paul also addressed a principle that applies in employer/employee relationships today. Companies can attempt to steal from people with misleading advertising and shoddy products and services. Employees can steal from their employers by wasting time or doing personal things on company time. Lazy people can try to take advantage of the goodness of others, leading the apostle Paul to write 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12.

Victims of theft know the horrible feeling it produces. The very act of someone taking what may have been an especially precious gift from a loved one really pierces our hearts and makes us feel vulnerable and unsafe. Theft has a tremendous impact not only on individuals, but on society as a whole. Theft disturbs societal stability and the results are feelings of fear and insecurity and a desire for revenge. One has only to look at some third world countries where laws against stealing are ignored to see how detrimental it is to the population. God’s laws are not only moral and spiritual; they are infinitely practical as well.

The apostle Paul, when discussing God’s commandments, sums up the entire law in the same way as our Lord Jesus did, with **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** (Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9). And, again like Jesus, he states that this is the fulfillment of the **“Law”** So, we know from such instructions that **“Do not steal,”** as with all of the Ten Commandments, is about **“loving one another”** (John 13:34-35).

Christians have received tremendous physical and spiritual gifts from God, and we should desire to give back to Him all that we have. Likewise, when we withhold the things that are rightly His—our time and talents, our possessions and our finances, indeed our very lives—we are in effect stealing from Him and effecting His kingdom. (Malachi 3:8-10)

The letter of the law is really about you doing everything. The spirit of the law is about God doing everything through you! If you want to embody the spirit of the law then allow the Holy Spirit more room to work both in you and through you. As you do this what you will find is that you will be able to love God and love people better. This will keep you continuing in the spirit of the law and not falling into the trap of the letter of the law.