

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT – A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

"Thou shalt not steal."

INTRODUCTION

In an ideal world, everyone would be completely satisfied with what they have. No one would feel a need to steal in order to feed a family or a drug habit. No one would need to steal another's spouse to find a mate. There would be no temptation to stoop to larceny or corruption in business, government, churches, or charitable organizations. There would be no scams, schemes, phony offers, bait and switch ads, or cynical con artists preying upon the innocent and elderly.

There is such an ideal world. It is called the kingdom of heaven. This realm of harmony can be experienced now – here on earth – when mankind is willing to seek it. Jesus told us: *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33)

When we become convinced that there is no lasting pleasure in material appetites or passions, which often bring pain and suffering in their wake, we will be ready to seek the kingdom of God. The Ten Commandments help to discipline our thoughts and actions as a foundation for spiritual growth.

One of the first lessons of childhood is that we should not take things that do not belong to us. Parents or guardians who insist that this code of conduct become deeply ingrained in the moral character of their children are fulfilling a vital responsibility. The laws of good government also support this ideal. The Eighth Commandment is the foundation for this important moral law. But it is not just a simple rule to live by – it is a spiritual promise!

The Eighth Commandment is not just about stealing from our fellow man. In the book of Genesis, we learn that *"God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."* (Genesis 1:31) Is it possible that we "steal" from God, when we attempt to take away the wholeness, unity, and perfection of God's "very good" creation by portraying it as being divided into the haves and have-nots, the deserving and the undeserving, the promising and the washed-up, the plentiful and the depleted – beliefs which set us up as potential thieves or the victims of thieves?

That is a limited way of looking at God's universe, which is based upon the testimony of the physical senses. By lifting up and improving our concept of God and His "image and likeness," we can gain a more expansive spiritual outlook which would eliminate any need to steal or any reason to be a target of theft.

The Bible makes a promise in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: *"And it is in God's power to provide you richly with every good gift; thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation, with enough and to spare for every good cause."* (II Corinthians 9:8, New English Bible)

All things spiritual come from God, Spirit. Our needs, both human and heavenly, are met by God. We do not need to steal from others. We only need to develop a deep trust in God, our true Father-Mother, to provide us with everything we need at the proper time. This requires faith in God, but most importantly, this faith requires an enduring trust built upon a spiritual understanding of Him.

Before we can gain this spiritual understanding of God that unlocks the treasures of heaven, harmony, in our lives, we must learn to be obedient to the laws of God that spring from this heavenly Principle. The Eighth Commandment, "*Thou shalt not steal,*" was given to mankind to protect us from unintentionally breaking the law of Love, which supports us, just as a loving parent would do. God is Love, and Love gives to all freely, unconditionally, abundantly. A heart that lives this divine Love has no fear or anxiety. It is generous with all, resists selfish motives, and is never tempted to take what belongs to another. How much better it would be to live in a world where no one ever steals, because everyone is satisfied and content with the riches given to us by divine Love.

If this sounds like the kind of world you would like to experience, you can start by digging deeper into the meaning of the Eighth Commandment, until its essence permeates your consciousness and your life.

We will now take a step toward that deeper look at the Eighth Commandment, first by exploring how it is taught in the Bible and, secondly, how it is applied in the spiritual and metaphysical demonstrations of Christian Science, as taught by the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science: Mary Baker Eddy.

[NOTE: For those unfamiliar with the religion of Christian Science (which is NOT the same as Scientology!) you can visit the [Questions and Answers page](#) on this site.]

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

A study of this theme in the Old Testament shows that the Eighth Commandment, "*Thou shalt not steal,*" is not simply about property rights, or about those who "have not" trying to take from those who "have," but is also about greed, ingratitude, and a fear of lack versus satisfaction, gratitude, and a trust in God's care for all.

To emphasize the importance of this Commandment, it is repeated a number of times and a number of ways throughout the Old Testament (KJV). We are told:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses saying: . . . Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another." (Leviticus 19:1, 11)

"Neither shalt thou steal." (Deuteronomy 5:19)

"Then said he [an angel] unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it." (Zechariah 5:3)

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying . . . The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. . . . Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God." (Ezekiel 22:23, 29, 31)

The Bible makes clear that stealing is a sin which will bring punishment. And yet, it is a sin which comes with a very clear path to **redemption**, as outlined in the Old Testament. The Bible scholar William Barclay writes:

"The law of the Old Testament does not simply condemn stealing; it has much to say about the penalty for it. The law of the Old Testament never fails to insist that restitution has to be made; in fact, the restitution is usually the punishment. One of the notable features of the Old Testament law is that it is just as eager to see that the victim is compensated as that the criminal is punished." (Barclay, William: "The Ten Commandments," Westminster John Knox Press, 1998 edition, pg. 162)

This is illustrated in the book of Exodus 22:1-12, in which Moses outlines in detail the punishments and compensations for stealing. Part of it reads:

"If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. . . . If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double."

We also learn that there is a very harsh penalty for stealing a man in order to sell him into slavery:

"And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death." (Exodus 21:16)

"If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you." (Deuteronomy 24:7)

What is also interesting in the Old Testament is the nature of certain crimes considered stealing. Both *usury* – the lending of money at interest – and manipulating weights and measures, were severely condemned. God is shown as caring for the poor and needy and demanding that those in a position to help should do so without exacting too much in return:

"If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious." (Exodus 22:25-27)

"And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase." (Leviticus 25:35-37)

William Barclay has some interesting comments on usury that show a principle beneath the commandment:

"Is this a total prohibition of lending money at interest? The real principle of this goes much deeper than that. It is not simply a prohibition of lending at interest; it is the commandment of God that no man must ever take advantage of his brother's misfortune. No man must, to put it in modern language, cash in on his brother's need. There are times when it is possible to drive a hard bargain, or to charge a high price, simply because someone desperately needs something. The law of the Bible is that no one must ever take advantage of another's need, and use that need for his own profit and enrichment." (The Ten Commandments, pg. 170)

The Old Testament has at least five instances of condemning stealing by the use of false scales and measurements, such as the verses below:

"Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God." (Deuteronomy 25:13-16)

"A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight." (Proverbs 11:1)

"Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good." (Proverbs 20:23)

We start to get the point that even in the smallest of details we must be honest and forthright. Taking advantage of others is a form of stealing that is an "abomination" to God. Barclay comments further:

"It may seem a quite extraordinary thing that the Bible should take up so much space to speak about weights and measures, and the accuracy of scales and containers and units of measurement. It is intensely significant that the assumption is that God is interested in these things, and that careful justice and meticulous honesty in these things is the natural and essential expression of true religion.

"The Bible lays it down that there is something badly wrong with the religion of the man who will worship on the Sunday and who will then go out to be a careless or a dishonest tradesman, robbing others by offering less than his best, or a man in any kind of business indulging in smart practice to make a quick profit, or a clever opportunist using someone's need as a chance to make more for himself, or an employer who is blind and unsympathetic to his employees' needs." (The Ten Commandments, pg. 171)

It is not enough to avoid stealing from our fellow man; we must see to it that we do not steal from God. According to the Old Testament, God seemed to take notice when tithes were withheld or shortchanged (a tithe being one-tenth of one's goods or earnings):

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:8-10)

In the "Glossary" of the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy, we read part of the metaphysical definition of "tithe" as used in the Bible:

"TITHE. Contribution; tenth part; homage; gratitude." (S&H, pg.595)

This indicates that the qualities of *homage* and *gratitude* are what God is expecting us to contribute. Gratitude can be symbolized by the giving of material goods or financial offerings, but sincere thankfulness should be the motive from our heart, and giving money should not be done as a superficial exhibition. Withholding heartfelt honor and gratitude for all the good that God has given is a form of stealing, and would therefore be one way to break the Eighth Commandment.

We now move into the New Testament to see how Christ Jesus taught and demonstrated the Commandment, *"Thou shalt not steal."*

JESUS AND THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

After Jesus was baptized by John, he was led into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. The very first temptation that Jesus had to face down was using his Christ-power to create a comfortable material life. We read:

"And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:3-4)

This is a temptation that faces every spiritual seeker at some point. How shall we use our developing spiritual sense, understanding, and power? Shall we use them in turning stones into bread, so to speak – using prayer mainly for personal material gain and satisfaction – or do we seek Truth for Truth's sake, feeding upon the Word of God which nourishes our spiritual identity, something matter alone could never do.

While the New Testament does not indicate that Jesus spoke much about the Eighth Commandment, it does show us that he strived to teach us about the evils of greed, ingratitude, and lust – all qualities that could lead to stealing. Jesus urges us to turn to God, and trust Him for our needs. Some of his miracles directly relate to this law of

abundance: he turned water into wine; he fed thousands with just a few loaves and fishes; he paid taxes with a coin found in a fish's mouth.

Jesus taught that if we put God first in our lives, we would have no desire to steal, and we would also not set ourselves up to be victims of those who would steal:

"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)

We also get an idea of how strongly Jesus felt about keeping our consciousness – which is our true spiritual temple or church – free from those sins which would attempt to rob God and invade His rightful territory, in this episode at the temple in Jerusalem:

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matthew 21:12-13))

How often do we let the thieves of daydreaming, fear, worry, and other sinful thoughts, set up tables in our temples of prayer or meditation? Are we accomplices to these thieves, or do we overthrow them?

"Be faithful at the temple gate of conscience, wakefully guard it; then thou wilt know when the thief cometh." (Mary Baker Eddy - Message of 1901 18:1)

We may think we do all the right things – perhaps we have never stolen anything, or shoplifted, or cheated on taxes – but Jesus tells us that stealing is an evil thought, which would defile us if left unchallenged in our conscience, whether we act upon it or not. Evil thoughts must be condemned before they take root in thought and spring into action. Jesus once explained:

*"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, **THEFTS**, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." (Matthew 15:19-20)*

Jesus taught that we must be grateful to God no matter how little we may seem to have. In Luke we see that Jesus taught that our motive means more than money:

"And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had." (Luke 21:1-4)

Not long after Jesus completed his earthly mission, the Apostle Paul would write to the Christians at Ephesus: *“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.”* (Ephesians 4:28)

As the above citation indicates, God's goodness can come to us through what appear as normal human avenues. We may be given opportunities to earn money to buy what we need, or we may be able to barter for goods or services in exchange for what we can offer. Sometimes our needs may be met by inheritances or gifts from others, and maybe, just when our prospects seem bleak and all doors of opportunity seem shut to us, we just might find what we need in a fish's mouth!

Mary Baker Eddy writes: *“What hinders man's progress is his vain conceit, the Phariseism of the times, also his effort to steal from others and avoid hard work; errors which can never find a place in Science.”* (Miscellaneous Writings 234:12-15)

What about those in extreme poverty, who might be tempted to steal just to meet basic needs? It would be hard to blame them, wouldn't it? And certainly, we want to have mercy on such brothers and sisters who have found themselves in dire circumstances, and help them in any way we can to improve their lives. But stealing is rarely justified, if ever, and would prevent us from seeing the opportunities God provides His children through infinite avenues, even if it is the temporary willingness to accept charity, when necessary. Our real need is for trust in God, divine Love.

There is always a better way than stealing for getting to where we need to be – whether that need is having food, housing, or a sense of the kingdom of heaven on earth. As we read earlier, Jesus instructed us how to begin this better way when he said:

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” (Matthew 6:33-34)

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

There is a beloved statement in the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy, which says:

“Divine Love always has met and always will meet every human need.” (S&H 494:10)

Thousands of Christian Scientists have put this promise to the test during times they needed to look away from fearful thinking about some lack in their lives. Knowing that God is Love, and that by expressing more Love in our lives, we can find answers to every problem. Mrs. Eddy tells us further:

“God gives you His spiritual ideas, and in turn, they give you daily supplies. Never ask for to-morrow: it is enough that divine Love is an ever-present help; and if you wait, never doubting, you will have all you need every moment. What a glorious inheritance is given to us through the understanding of omnipresent Love! More we cannot ask: more we do not want: more we cannot have. This sweet assurance is the 'Peace, be still' to all human fears, to suffering of every sort.” (Miscellaneous Writings 307:1)

The Bible teaches that God is Spirit. We are taught in Christian Science that God is also infinite Mind. Both are synonymous names for God in Christian Science. Therefore, the substance of Mind is Spirit. What Mind, Spirit, creates must be of the same substance; it must be spiritual. God’s creation, therefore, consists of spiritual ideas – not dying mortals or material objects subject to loss or decay. God’s highest creation is man, His "image and likeness." Man’s identity is spiritual, and God has created each of His children to be complete, perfect, wanting nothing, and including all that is needed to fulfill God’s plans for His infinite universe throughout eternity.

If we do not see this spiritual perfection now (and the five physical senses do not bear witness to spiritual reality), we will start to grasp it when we begin to spiritualize our thinking by bringing it in line with God’s ideas of good. A daily study of the Bible and *Science and Health* helps us in this spiritual journey.

These spiritual ideas that God gives us, come to us in forms we can see and utilize, even though they are in reality forms of Spirit. What is happening is that God’s ideas are present, but our interpretation of them may be cloudy or obscured by material thinking and fears. In the book of Genesis, this obscurity is symbolized by the *“mist that went up from the earth.”* As our thinking becomes more aligned with spiritual truth, we will experience more divine ideas in consciousness – ideas that are more beautiful, more tangible, and more abundant than our material senses have ever known.

With this habit of thinking, any temptation to steal from others simply vanishes. We see that stealing not only breaks the Golden Rule, but is an attempt to rob God of His perfect “image and likeness.” We lose opportunities to witness God’s care for us and others when we attempt to take matters into our own hands by stealing.

Soul is a name for God which indicates the sinless, infinite Consciousness that is aware of all creation, all identity, all beauty and goodness. In *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy, writes of Soul:

“Soul has infinite resources with which to bless mankind, and happiness would be more readily attained and would be more secure in our keeping, if sought in Soul.” (S&H 60:29)

If mankind would look through the mist of materiality to see this vision of God – the Supreme Being with infinite resources to shower upon His children – there would be no desire to steal from others. Everyone would find that God, who “*saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good,*” has already provided each one with all that we need to live well. Christian Science teaches us how to do that.

One of the first lessons in getting to know God as the source of all our needs, is learning to discipline our thinking with the Eighth Commandment. We must be willing to obey this law in humility and trust. We must ponder the lessons of Jesus about greed and ingratitude. Christian Science builds on these foundational lessons by showing that the law behind these teachings is divine. For instance: God is good. God is infinite. All is infinite good. There is nothing good lacking in God’s kingdom. God’s children are given all good to use and enjoy. But good is Spirit – it is not to be found in matter, materiality, or the physical senses. We seek God’s kingdom through our spiritual sense, through our thoughts of good that come to us from God, the divine Mind.

These spiritual concepts are taught in *Science and Health*, and many new readers of this textbook have found their lives redeemed, regenerated, and blessed with abundance. They discover that their search for God and a quest for meaning in their lives, has taken them to a new way of thinking about things. They learn that Spirit is the only reality; that matter is not what it appears to be to the physical senses, but is merely a false sense of the substance of Spirit. While the belief of matter is limited and capable of being lost or destroyed, Spirit is limitless, permanent, eternal good. In a paragraph subtitled “Self-completeness,” Mary Baker Eddy writes:

“As mortals gain more correct views of God and man, multitudinous objects of creation, which before were invisible, will become visible. When we realize that Life is Spirit, never in nor of matter, this understanding will expand into self-completeness, finding all in God, good, and needing no other consciousness.” (S&H 264:13)

CONCLUSION

Most everyone agrees that stealing is wrong. Society could not function well over the long term if people’s property rights were not respected and protected. The fact that Moses heard this as one of God’s commands shows that the choice to resist stealing is based upon divine law.

Jesus taught that our motives and thoughts are just as important as any act of sin. We can break the Eighth Commandment mentally as well as physically. Therefore, we should discipline thought towards the notion that man must earn or be given his possessions, rather than take them forcefully or deceitfully from others. And we should rise above all pettiness of thought – be generous and honest with others, never stealing their time or opportunities, their reputation or character. We do not steal by gossiping (see the Ninth Commandment!), and we do not steal our own valuable time coveting what others have (see the Tenth Commandment!).

Mrs. Eddy stresses this in one of her comments on the Eighth Commandment:

“‘Thou shalt not steal;’ that is, thou shalt not rob man of money, which is but trash, compared with his rights of mind and character.” (Miscellaneous Writings 67:7-9)

Christian Science teaches that man and the universe are in reality spiritual ideas of the infinite divine Mind, and include all that they need, all that God has given, throughout eternity. We should look to God, to Truth, to reveal our perfect completeness. We must learn to claim our right to have a sense of abundance by seeing no limits to God’s infinite ideas of goodness which thrive in the atmosphere of the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

As humanity struggles to get in touch with its spirituality and to purify consciousness in order to see and experience God's kingdom, there certainly will be times we "miss the mark." We should not condemn ourselves or others if we have fallen victim to the temptation to steal. We must recognize the sin, and denounce it. But, through the understanding of man's true identity as taught in Christian Science, we can turn from this sin as no part of our spiritual nature. "Go, and sin no more," as Jesus said to the adulterous woman he had just forgiven.

When we no longer believe that God creates a capacity to steal, we shall no longer be tempted to believe in this sin's power to harm. Divine Love is in control – on earth, as it is in heaven. Love is the great Giver, and bestows its blessings fairly and abundantly.

In summary: There is no cause, no motive, no need, no desire to steal, because man's true selfhood is spiritual and complete.

As we reach out in earnest communion with our Father-Mother God, with the humble request of the Lord’s Prayer – *“Give us this day our daily bread”* – divine Love responds with an angel message: ***you already have it!***

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