

[Exodus 20:17:] "You shall not steal."

[Luther's Explanation to the Seventh Commandment:] We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or property or get it by dishonest dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income.

1. A famous quote is attributed to Martin Luther (tough to know sometimes), "People go through three conversions: The conversion of their head, their heart, and their pocketbook. Unfortunately, not all at the same time." The experience of believers struggling to put God first even in the area of money and possessions is not a new one. The word *stewardship* has fallen out of favor. That saddens me because it's such a good word for how believers should view their possessions. A steward manages someone else's stuff. So, stewardship recognizes that we are managers of the blessings God gives to us. It is such a different perspective than the world shoves down our throats. It's telling us to get everything we can—and of course it's trying to get everything it can from us as it's telling us to do so! The worldly attitude was what Jesus had to deal with as He interacted with the man of our reading for today. And in that interaction, Jesus upholds the Seventh Commandment.
2. {Read verses 13-14.} Jesus is using the word Man here like we would use the word today—or words like it: fella [or] dude [or] sis. It's not unlike our, "Man, come *on!*" Jesus indeed is a Judge. Jesus Himself reminded us that He is the Judge of the living and the dead at the end of time (John 5:27). Judge for that: yes, judge for this: no. It wasn't His job to judge this man's inheritance squabble. Jesus cuts to the chase as to why with His penetrating statement in the next verse. {Read verse 15.} Jesus cuts right to the heart of the issue: the Seventh Commandment issue, as we would say in our Lutheran shop-talk. Was this man fearing and loving God first with his money and possessions? Nope. Was this man helping his neighbor (blood brother, even!) "improve and protect his property and means of income"? Nope. By Jesus' answer, we know that the dispute the man was bringing to Jesus had to do with the sin of greed. Jesus judges the heart. Identifying with our possessions instead of with the gift of Christ's righteousness was a snare then, remained a snare in Luther's time, and remains a snare for us today.
3. Consider how we equate possessions with life even in how we talk today. Someone has a high or low "standard of living." And it's all comparative. The standard is determined by money and stuff. The quality of the living is directly connected with the money and stuff. And contentment is a rare bird, even frowned upon. Part of the world telling us to get everything we can is the world always pointing out to us that someone else has more, someone else has a higher standard of living.
4. Before we talk about real standards, let's talk about real contentment. 1 Timothy 6 tells us what the proper perspective is for the believer. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. God first! Contentment with what we really need! Eternal perspective! All of these Jesus will bring up in His parable. It is strong law because we still struggle to keep God first, to be content with

what we have, to have an eternal perspective, no matter what standard of living we're blessed with.

5. So, on to real standards! What does our "life" consist of? 1 John 5:12 tells us, Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. We need the Son because only the Son kept *God's* standard. If we're going to compare ourselves to anyone, we all need to compare ourselves to the Lord! Jesus upheld the Seventh Commandment. He didn't put money and possessions before God. Any time we fail to measure up to God's standard, are we not stealing the honor and glory due God? That's tough to hear. It's precisely our attitude of putting self first in all things that Jesus came to give Himself for. And so we are forgiven for the mentality of the man in Jesus' parable. Christ's life was demanded in place of our lives. The cross is the standard by which our lives are measured. {Read verses 16-21.}
6. Real life is so much more than stuff that supports biological processes. Real life is spiritual. Real life is our relationship with God. God reveals to us that we are accountable to Him. And when that fills us with dread, as it did for Adam and Eve who hid from Him, God pursues us with His Word to give us life again. We confess our sin of greed and are forgiven. We strive to live with God first in our lives because our sin is forgiven. Our life is not just physical stuff compared to the standard of our neighbor. Our life is spiritual compared to the standard of God Who made us His own family: Jesus our Brother Who was rich toward God, shedding His holy blood for us.
7. How we demonstrate richness toward God I can't prescribe for you. God has made you the steward of the blessings He's given to you. The important thing for us as we follow Jesus is to see Jesus, our Savior and Example. Jesus upheld the Seventh Commandment and taught us to do the same. We don't steal from God or our neighbor. We put God first in how we use the abundance of possessions over and above our daily bread that we have. Fearing and loving God also serves our neighbor as we support the work of His kingdom.
8. And lest I'm unclear, this is *not* a "give more offerings" sermon. Frankly, if the motivation is wrong, then I'd be asking you to build the bigger barn here. That would be a sin. Instead, take Jesus' point in all your offerings to God. Examine your heart with regard to the abundance of your possessions. Whatever you're using them for, use them in Christ. Make God even the God of your money. Being rich toward God flows from that.
9. As God's stewards, we get to cheerfully uphold the Seventh Commandment. We don't find our contentment in some nebulous, future high standard of living. Our contentment is in our life in Christ now that He won for us because He loves us. Amen.