

## THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

### Thou shalt not Steal.

**T**HE foregoing Commandment (as you have heard) requires Chastity in our Persons: This which I have now read unto you, requires Honesty and Uprightness in our Dealings. A Vertue immediately founded upon that first practical Principle of all Humane Converse, which our Saviour lays down, *Matth. 7. 12. Whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*: And recommends it to us, as the brief Summ and Epitome of all the Scriptures; *For this is the Law and the Prophets*. A Principle, that carries such innate Light and clear Evidence in it self, that the very Heathens do frequently inculcate it in their Writings, as the primary Dictate of that Morality which they taught. This is a Maxim, which we all assent unto, not by any elaborate Instructions, or dint of Arguments, or any long train of Consequences; but it strongly masters our Understandings by its native Evidence, and springs up in us an unpremeditated Resolve of Reason. Both God & Nature have set up this Standard in our Consciences: And usually there needs no other Judge of our Actions towards others, than by comparing them with what in the like Cases we would think just and fit to be done towards our selves. It may be we are all partial to our selves in our present Concerns: And whilst we look only that way, we may possibly

possibly seek all Advantages to promote them, though to anothers Detriment. But both Reason and Religion teach us to put our selves in their Stead, and then to manage all our Transactions with them, as we our selves would judge just and reasonable, were their Condition ours. And therefore when thou dealest with another, thou shouldst first be both Parties to thy self. As for instance, a Servant should set down, and consider with himself what Respect he would require, were he in the same Circumstances with his Master, and had Servants under him. Children should consider what Duty and Obedience they would expect, were they Parents of Children: Subjects, what Honour and Submission they might reasonably demand, were they Magistrates; and so in any other Relation. And when they have thus seriously pondered it in their own Thoughts, let them then perform the same Duties to others in their real Condition, which they judged to belong to them in their personated Condition. For it is a never failing Rule for the Direction of our Practice, that what thou judgest due to thy self, wert thou in another Man's Condition, is certainly as due to him in his own; and if thou actest not accordingly, thou betrayest a great deal of Selfishness and sinful Partiality. This is a Rule applicable to all Affairs; and there is scarce any one Occurrence of a Man's Life, but he may regulate himself in it according to this Direction: And indeed there is scarce need of any other. Whatsoever thou hast to transact with thy Brother, though perhaps thou mayst spy Advantages upon him; and such, as if thou shouldest take, possibly he might never know, or never be able to redress; yet then take thy Conscience aside, and seriously ask whether thou couldst be content, and think it honest and just to be so dealt with thy self; if not, whatsoever the Temptation be, or how much soever thou mightest gain by hearkning unto it, reject it with scorn, as that which would induce thee to violate the first Principle of common Honesty among Men, and contradicts

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contradicts all the Laws both of Nature, and Scripture. Were this Rule but more generally observed among Men, the World would not have that Cause to cry out of Rapine, Extortion, Oppression, Fraud and Injustice; that now it hath: The Rich would not grind the Faces of the Poor, nor the Poor causlessly clamour against the Rich: Superiours would not tyrannize over their Inferiours, nor Inferiours murmur, nor rebel against their Superiours; but an equal Peace, and uniform Justice would overspread the Face of the whole Earth, and *Righteousness would run down our Streets as a mighty Stream.* And therefore let me once again recommend it to you; for indeed I cannot press it too often,) that you would frequently set this Golden Rule before your Eyes, to do nothing to any other Person, which, were you in his capacity, you would think unjust to be done unto your selves, (and whatsoever you would expect from others, as your Due, were you in their Place, and they in yours, to perform the very same to them: For otherwise you cannot but condemn your selves in your Actions, whilst you do that, which upon this Supposition, you cannot but be convinced is unjust, and withhold that which you know to be due, and which your selves would expect should be yielded you by others. This is a Dictate of Nature and right Reason; this is the Summ of the Law and the Prophets; and all those various Precepts which are given us in the Scriptures, for the conduct of our Lives, are but as so many Lines that meet all in this Centre; and if we apply it to each particular Command of the second Table, we shall find them all founded upon this, and to be interpreted by it. We are required to honour Superiours, to abstain from Murther, from Adultery, from Theft, from false Accusations, from coveting what rightfully belongs to another; and all this according to the same Measures that we would have others to perform these very Duties to us. So that self, which is now the great Tempter to wrong and injure

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jure others, were it governed according to this universal Maxim, would be the greatest Patron and Defender of other Men's Rights and Dues.

I have the longer insisted on this, both because it is of such general influence into the right ordering of our Conversation; and also because the most visible and apparent violation of this natural Law, is by the Sin of Theft forbidden in this Commandment, of which I am now treating.

Now *Theft* in the general, is an unjust taking, or keeping to our selves what is lawfully another Man's. He is a Thief, who with-holds what ought to be in his Neighbour's possession, as well as he who takes from him what he hath formerly possess'd.

All *Theft* presupposeth a Right and Propriety: For where nothing doth of right appertain unto me, nothing can be unjustly taken or detained from me.

Now here *First*, Certain it is, That God is the great Lord and Proprietor both of Heaven and Earth, and of all things in them, *Psal. 24. 1. The Earth is the Lord's, and the Fulness thereof. And. 50, 10. Every Beast of the Forest is mine, and the Cattle upon a thousand Hills.* By him, and of him are all things; and for his Will and Pleasure's sake they are, and were created.

*Secondly*, This great and absolute Lord hath granted unto Man a large Charter of the World; and when he had taken an exact Inventory of those Goods with which he had furnished this great House, the Universe; (*He saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good, Gen. 1. 31.*) then he sets Man to live in it, as his Tenant, and freely gives him the Use of, and Dominion over all the Works of his Hands. *Gen. 1. 28. Replenish the Earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over all the Fish of the Sea, and over the Fowls*

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of the Air, and over every thing that moveth upon the Earth. So the Psalmist, *Psal. xix. 16.* *The Heavens, even the Heavens are the Lord's; but the Earth hath he given to the Children of Men.* A large and Regal Gift, whereby he hath made over all sublunary things unto Man, reserving unto himself the Sovereignty and supreme Lordship of all, and requiring only from Man the Homage and Payment of Obedience. Yet,

*Thirdly*, This large Charter and Donation gave no particular Propriety unto any; neither if Man had continued in his happy and innocent estate, would there have been any need of *Mens* or *Thins*; or any partition of these earthly Possessions; but the common Blessings had been enjoyed in common; and all things which Covetousness and Corruption now ravine after, would have been as promiscuously enjoyed and used, as the common Light and Air; and each particular Man's share in those Blessings, would have been sufficient and satisfactory. But,

*Fourthly*, Sin, entering into the World, their Desires grew immoderate after these earthly Enjoyments, and their Attempts to attain them injurious unto others, so that it became necessary to prescribe Bounds and Limits to them, and to divide among them what before lay in common among all; that each man knowing his assigned Portion, might rest satisfied with it, and be restrained from the unjust Invasion and Usurpation of another's Right. And,

*Fifthly*, and *Lastly*, This could no otherwise be effected, but by humane Laws, by mutual Compact and Agreement, declaring what should be accounted as every Man's Right and Propriety: So that it is Law which is the great Determiner of Propriety; and there is nothing *Mine* or *Thine* farther than this assigns it unto us: Indeed Equity must sometimes inter-

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pose to moderate the Letter of the Law ; for in some Cases, should we rigorously prosecute our Right, and insist upon every Punctilio that we may call our Due: This, although it would not be unjust, yet it would be Justice turned into Gall and Wormwood; it would be a Breach and Violation of the Law of Christ, and of Charity, which requires us rather to part with our own in small Matters, than to be vexatious, or contentious in recovering, or defending it.

Thus you see how all Right and Property first came into the World: A General Right, by the Donation of God; a particular Right, by the Sanction of Laws, allotting to each Man his Portion; which to invade, or usurp from him, is Injustice, or Theft.

Whence it follows, That where there is no Society in occupation of any part of the Earth, the Right accrues to the first Possessor; and where things are found which appertain to none, they fall to the first Seiser; for there can be no Theft committed where there is no precedent Title. If any therefore should providentially be cast into some Desert, and uninhabited part of the World, that general Charter that God hath given unto Mankind of possessing the Earth, empowers them to seize on it as theirs, and they may lawfully make use of the Blessings of it in common, till by mutual consent they shall divide to each other their Part and Portion: But after such a Partition made, to use the same Liberty, is no longer lawful; but Theft and Robbery.

Thus you see what *Theft* is; and that this Law of God, prohibiting us to steal what is another's, doth presuppose a Law of Man, which makes Property, and causeth Things to become either ours, or another's.

Now there are many kinds of Theft.

*First*, The highest and chiefest is that which is committed against God by Sacrilege. Now Sacrilege is an alienating

from God whatsoever he hath appropriated to himself, or is upon good grounds dedicated to the encouragement and maintenance of his Honour and Service. Indeed the alienating of what hath been given to Superstitious or Idolatrous Uses, cannot be justly branded with this black Mark of Sacrilege; for it was not so much given unto God, as unto Ignorance and Superstition: And therefore our Ancestors have done well and piously, in dissolving those Nests and Cages of unclean Birds that were so nutritious and burthensome in these Kingdoms; but withal, in my judgment, would have done much better, if they had converted their Revenues to some publick Use, either for the Benefit of the Church, or Common-wealth, rather than to their own private and particular gain. But where any thing is indeed consecrated unto God, and set apart for the maintenance and encouragement of his Worship and Service, it is no less than Sacrilege, and robbing of God; to alienate any part of this to any secular Uses, or to detain it from that Use unto which it was separated. And of this God himself grievously complains, *Mal. 3. 8, 9. Will a Man rob God?* As if it were a Sin so heinous, as that it is hardly to be supposed any Man would be guilty of it: What! not to allow that God has share among them, who had liberally afforded them all things to enjoy! *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.* Certainly those Things which are appointed for the Worship and Service of God, whether they be originally by Divine Right, or not; yet they cannot be alienated, nor detained without involving the Persons, or the Nation that doth thus, in a most direful Curse: For this is no other than a robbing God of his Right. And how far these Nations may be concerned in this Sin, and how deeply sunk under this Curse, I leave it to the consideration of those who have no other Interests to sway their Judgments, but that of Piety and Honesty.

Secondly,

*Secondly*, Theft is committed against Men by an unjust seizing, or detaining what of right belongs unto them. And this may be done either by Fraud, or Force: And therefore our Saviour in reciting the Commandments mentions them both, *Mark 10. 19, Do not steal, Defraud not.* This is a Sin that God hath threatned with many severe Curses and Punishments.

*First*, The Temporal Punishment which the Scripture awards unto it, is a four fold, and sometimes a five-fold Restitution, as you may see, *Exod. 22. 1.* And therefore *Zacheus*, when he was converted, offers a four fold Restitution to those whom he had wronged, *Luk. 19. 8. If I have taken any thing from any Man by false Accusation, I restore him four fold.* And yet besides this Restitution, it seems that sometimes the Offenders were to be put to Death, especially if the Circumstances of their Theft added Cruelty and Oppression unto it. This appears in the Parable of *Nathan*, *2 Sam. 12.* When he had most artificially aggravated the Crime of the rich Man, in taking away the poor Man's Lamb, he so raised *David's* Compassion and Indignation, that he pronounceth this Sentence, *Verse 5. 6. The Man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the Lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no Pity.* So that you see, that even under the Law of *Moses* it was not unlawful in some Cases to punish a Thief with Death, although the usual and prescribed Punishment was Restitution. Indeed our Law condemns them to Death, nor is it justly to be reprehended, for rooting out such Banes and Pests from the Common Wealth. For since Punishments are to be inflicted, not so much out of Revenge as Caution; not because some have offended, but to deter others from offending, it is but reasonable that the Penalty should answer this end; which we might very well doubt, whether among us any lighter than Death would do, since

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we see so many still persist in this wicked Course of Life, notwithstanding the Severity of the Punishment the Law provides for them. *Skin for Skin, and all that a Man hath will he give for his Life.* If therefore the Fear of Death it self cannot be forcible enough to deter them, certainly the Fear of Restitution would be much less effectual; and such a gentle and mitigated Punishment would but open a wide gap to all manner of Robbery and Rapine.

But besides the Punishment which is threatned by the Law, Consider,

*Secondly*, God leaves a Curse upon what is gotten by Theft and Deceit; a Curse that will blast and consume all such wicked Increase. They put it into a Bag with Holes; and by some unperceivable Providence it strangely wafts and slips away between their Fingers. But usually Luxury and Intemperance devours what is got by Theft and Rapine, God by his righteous Judgment making one Sin the Vengeance of another. But however, some secret withering Curse seizeth upon it; and what is thus wickedly added to our former Possessions, will rub its Rust and Canker upon them all; and if Restitution be not duly made, will insensibly prey upon them and consume them. And therefore, saith the wise Man, *Prov. 21. 7. The Robbery of the Wicked shall destroy them; and, Jer. 17. 11. As the Partridge sitteth on Eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth Riches, and not by Right, shall leave them in the midst of his Days, and at his end shall be a Fool.* Many times God raiseth up such against them, who shall deal with them as they have dealt with others; and when these Sponges are full of what they have unjustly suck'd up, shall squeeze them, and make them refund their ill gotten Treasure. Thus God threatens the *Chaldeans, Hab. 2. 8. Because thou hast spoiled many Nations, all the remnant of the People shall spoil thee.*

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*Sec.* Such unjust Gettings tend only unto Poverty : And in this Sense it is no Solœcism to say they have but gained a loss, and treasured for Themselves, and their Posterity, Want and Beggery. And therefore as you desire to thrive in the World, and to have your Earthly Comforts multiplied, so be sure that no gain of Robbery, or Oppression, or Fraud and Deceit be found in your hands ; for this will devour even what you have gotten lawfully.

*Thirdly,* Anxieties and Perplexities of Mind do alway accompany ill-gotten Wealth : For it is a Sin so much against the very Light of Nature, that Conscience, if it be not utterly stupified and senseless, will be still molesting and haunting them with troublesome Thoughts and Reflexions. Besides, the Fear of Detection, and the Shame and Punishment which will follow upon it, must needs be a continual Disturbance unto them : Whereas what is gotten with a good Conscience, and in an honest and lawful Calling, whether it be more or less, it brings this Contentment with it, that a Man may quietly sit down and rejoyce in that Portion which the Providence and Bounty of his gracious God, and heavenly Father hath here afforded him ; he drinks no Widows Tears, nor Orphans Bloud ; he eats not the Flesh of the Poor, nor breaks the Bones of the needy ; his Conscience gnaws not upon him whilst he is feeding on what his honest Labour and Industry hath prepared for him ; and although it be but a Bit of Bread, and a Cup of Water that he can procure, yet is he entertained at a continual Feast ; His Fare may be but mean ; yet his Cheer, his Joy and Comfort is great ; and the coarsest Morsel he eats is far more savoury to him than all the heightened Delicates of rich Oppressors, whose Consciences mingle Gall and Wormwood with their most pleasant Bits, and knaws and grinds them as they grind the Faces of the Poor and needy. And therefore, saith the Wise Man, *Prov. 16. 8. Better is a little with Righteousness, than*

*than great Revenues without Right. And the Psalmist, Psal. 37. 16. A little that a Righteous Man hath, is better than the Riches of many Wicked.*

*Fourthly*, Robbery and Deceit provokes God to cut Men off by some untimely Stroke and immature Judgment; and that, either by the hand of Humane Justice with Shame and Reproach, or of Divine Justice with Wrath and Vengeance: For so we find it threatned, *Psal. 55. 23. Thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the Pit of Destruction: Bloody and deceitful Men shall not live out half their Days.* That is, they shall not lengthen out their Days to that period which the course and strength of Nature might seem to promise them; but the Hand of God shall cut them off in the vigour and midst of their flourishing Years.

But howsoever it may fare with them in this Life; howsoever they may escape the Reproach of Men, and the Sword of Justice: Yet,

*Fifthly*, They shall certainly be eternally cursed, and eternally miserable: Their ill gotten Goods shall not be able to redeem their Souls, or bribe the Justice of God, or give them the least Solace and Comfort. And what wretched Fools are they, who must eternally perish for gaining of Things that perish too; and bring Everlasting Torments upon themselves, for that which before brought them Vexations and Disquietments, *1 Corinth. 6. 10. Nor Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.* Where then shall their Portion be, but in that Lake which burneth with Fire and Brimstone unquenchable? Where the Lord will spoil their very Souls, as the Wise Man's Expression is, *Prov. 22. 23. Rob not the Poor, for the Lord will plead their Cause, and will spoil the Souls of those that spoiled them.*

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And thus you have seen what various Ways God hath threatened that he will punish this Sin.

Before I can proceed farther, here are two Questions to be answered.

The first is, Whether in no case it be lawful to steal? What if the necessity be so urgent, that I must certainly perish, or else relieve my self by this means?

I say we ought not to do it in any Case; For Theft is in itself a Sin, and there can be no necessity to sin: For every Man is bound rather to chuse the greatest Evil of Sufferings, than to commit the least Evil of Sin. Indeed such Necessity doth somewhat mitigate the Heinousness of the Offence; but that is not at all considerable in the Direction of our Practice, since it continues a Sin still, and deserves Eternal Damnation. The Wise Man tells us, *Prov. 6. 30, 31. Men do not despise a Thief, if he steal to satisfy his Soul when he is hungry.* But this must be understood only comparatively, viz. That the Reproach and Infamy which attends such an one, is not so great as that of an Adulterer, as it appears *Verse 32.* As if he should say; to be an Adulterer, is a far fouler Reproach than to be a needy Thief. Yet he adds, *If he be found, he shall restore seven-fold, he shall give all the Substance of his House:* That is, though his Necessity and Hunger may take off somewhat from the Shame; yet it shall not from the Punishment of his Offence; but he shall restore that which he hath stolen seven-fold. Not that the Restitution should be seven times as much as the Theft; for the utmost that the Law requires was but a five-fold Restitution, *Exod. 22. 1.* But as the Word seven-fold is most frequently used in Scripture to signify that which is compleat and perfect; so is it here; he shall restore seven-fold; that is, he shall make a full and satisfactory Restitution. Since therefore the Punishment of Theft shall not be relaxed upon

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the Plea of Indigence and Necessity, it is apparent that Necessity cannot justify any from the Guilt of Theft. And therefore let your Wants be what they will, or can be, you ought not to supply them by any such wicked and unlawful Courses, whatever \* *Aquinas* says to the contrary. If God hath given thee Strength and Ability, thou oughtest to labour, and to use thine honest Industry to procure Necessaries; if not, thou oughtest to implore the Charity and Benevolence of others, whose Hearts God may open to thy Relief. Or if thou shouldst meet with such cruel *Dives's*, who will contribute nothing to thy Support, thou oughtest rather with godly *Lazarus* to die in thine Integrity, than to steal any thing from them; which although it be their Superfluity, yet it is not thy Right without their Donation: And this is in answer to the first Question.

The Second is, What we shall judge the *Israelites* spoiling the *Egyptians* of their Jewels, or which we read, *Exod. 12. 35, 36.*

I answer, In this Action there was no Theft committed. For,

First, The Supreme Dominion of all Things, is the Lord's, and he may justly transfer the Right and Property where he pleaseth. Now they were commanded by the Lord to take these Things of the *Egyptians*; and therefore they were rightfully their own, being made so by him who hath the Sovereign Power of all Things, both in Heaven and Earth.

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ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ κόσμου ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐν τῇ γῇ.

Secondly, These Things which they thus took, might be well considered in lieu of their Wages, which was not given them for their long Service in *Egypt*. And therefore it was

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was but righteous in God to consign over these Riches of the  *Egyptians*  to the  *Israelites* , as a reward for their tedious Servitude. Now those, who by the Command of the Supreme Lord of all, take that which is but a due Reward for their Labour, cannot certainly be condemned as guilty of Theft. And this (it seems) was \* their Plea, when in the time of  *Alexander the Great* , so many Ages after the thing was done, the  *Egyptians*  sued the  *Jews*  by a juridical Process, to recover what was taken from them. But,

\* Jun Gerson in Talmud. German.  
Responsum  
Ægyptii

*de Hebræis vasa Aurea & Argentea. Contra Hebræi mutuas Petitiones instituant allegantes sibi quoque eorundem Patrum Nomine, ex eodem Scriptura Instrumento Mercedem, restitui oportere illius operariae Servitutis, pro latèrinis ædificatis, pro Civitatibus, & villis ædificatis. Tertull. contra Murcion. l. 2.*

*Thirdly*, I answer, This Example is extraordinary and special, and not to be pleaded, or introduced into Practice. For certainly it is, that they had a most express Command from God to spoil the  *Egyptians* ; But whosoever shall pretend any such Warrant now, by revelation or the impulse of his private Spirit, may well be censured for Enthusiasm, and condemned for Robbery.

And thus I have done with the first and greatest kind of Theft, taking away what rightfully belongs to another, whether God or Man.

*Secondly*, Another kind of Theft is Oppression, and unreasonable Exaction; and this especially is the Sin of Superiors towards their Inferiors, taking Advantage, either upon their Weakness, or their Necessity, to impose most unequal Conditions upon them, and such as they cannot bear without their Detriment, or Ruine, contrary to that Law which God gave unto his People, *Levit. 25. 14. If thou sell ought unto thy Neighbour, or buyest ought at thy Neighbour's hands; ye shall not oppress one another.* Thus those who set their Lands

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to the Sweat and Toil of others at too hard a Rate, so that the laborious Tenant cannot subsist by his Industry; those that let out Money at a biting Interest, or rigidly exact it from insufficient Persons; Great ones, who fright the meanner into disadvantageous Bargains, and force them, through Fear, to part with what they enjoy, at an under-price; these, and other like, though they may not be condemned by humane Laws, which give too much permission to Men to make the utmost Advantage of their own; yet they are guilty by the Law of God; and their Sin is no less than Oppression; which is a Sin hateful both to God and Man. The Prophet *Micah*, Chap. 3. 2, 3. calls it a *plucking off their Skin from them, and their Flesh from off their Bones, and chopping them in pieces, as for the Pot, and as Flesh for the Cauldron.* All Unmercifulness, and hard Dealings with others, is a kind of Theft; for the Law of Nature, and much more the Law of Charity, binds thee so to deal with others, that they may have no Cause to complain of thee to God; and in the Bitterness of their Spirits to imprecate his Wrath and Vengeance upon thee.

*Thirdly*, Another kind of Theft is detaining from another what is his due, either by Equity or Compact: And how many are there whose profuse Riot and Luxury are maintained upon the intrusted Goods of others, whilst the poor Creditor in the mean time hath no other satisfaction but good Words, and scarce any thing to live upon but his own Tears and Sighs? And how many withhold the Hire of the Labourer, who when he hath wearied out himself in their Service, is denied that small Reward which he requires for his necessary refreshment? Yea not only denying it, but even deferring it beyond the time that they can conveniently be without it, is a kind of Theft and Oppression, *Deut. 24. 14. Thou shalt not oppress an hired Servant that is poor and needy; at his Day thou shalt give him his Hire, neither shall the*

*the Sun go down upon it : For he is poor, and setteth his Heart upon it ; lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be Sin unto thee.* Yea, in all our Bargains and Agrements, though they be never so much to thine own Prejudice, thou art bound to stand to them, unless the other will voluntarily release thee from the Obligation. For this is one of the Characters given of a godly Person, *Psal. 15. 4. He. that sweareth, and covenanteth to his own hurt, and changeth not ;* but upon Demand, is ready and willing to fulfil his Agreement : How much more heinous and abominable is it, when they have already received the full value of their Compact, unjustly to with-hold what they have agreed to give ; which is no better than to take their Labour, or their Goods from them by Violence and Robbery ; yea, and in one respect worse, in as much as it adds Falshood to Stealth.

*Fourthly,* Another kind of Theft is in buying and selling ; and this, is a very large and voluminous Deceit : For the Subtilty of Men hath found out so many Artifices to defraud and over-reach one another, that to recount them, is almost as hard as to escape them. Here come in the false Weights, and the false Measures which are *an abomination to the Lord.* *Prov. 11. 1.* False and counterfeited Wares, over-commending, or undervaluing of Goods for advantage ; and many other unjust Contrivances, which Men's Consciences can better suggest to them, than any Discourse. The Apostle hath sufficiently cautioned and threatned such Men. *1 Thes. 4. 6. Let no man go beyond, or defraud his Brother in any Matter ; because that the Lord is the avenger of such.* Believe it, there is a Day coming when the false Weights shall be themselves weighed, and the scanty Measures measured, by a Standard that is infallibly true. Possibly thou maist deal so cunningly, that those whom thou over-reachest can have no advantage against thee, nor right themselves by Law : But remember that the great Judge will avenge them upon thee at the last day..



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day. Then all Accounts shall be balanced, and so much found resting due, which thou shalt certainly pay; though not to those whom thou hast wronged; yet to the Justice of God, who is the great and universal Creditor.

There are likewise many other kinds of Theft; as Prodigality in wasting what should satisfy the just demands of others; taking of Wages and Reward for what we do not endeavour conscientiously to perform; selling that which we have no right to dispose of, or things which ought not to be sold; taking Bribes for Justice, or Rewards for Injustice. But I shall not particularly insist upon these, and many others that might be mentioned.

And thus we have seen what the Negative Part of this Precept is.

But because every Negative implies in it a Positive, let us see what is the Duty required from us. And that is twofold.

*First*, That every one of us should have some Calling.

*Secondly*, That all of us should be contented in that Estate and Condition of Life, wherein the Divine Providence hath set us.

*First*, *Thou shalt not steal*: therefore every Man ought to have a Calling, whereon he may comfortably subsist, and by his Labour and Industry may provide at least Necessaries for himself and Family: *For he that provideth not for his Family, hath denied the Faith*, (saith the Apostle,) *and is worse than an Infidel*: Some there are who live without any Calling at all; such are like idle Drones, that consume the Labours of others, lazy Vagabonds, to whom the greatest Charity would be Correction; who only serve to devour misplaced Alms; and defraud the truly poor of their Relief: Yea, if I should rank with these a company of superfluous, debauch'd

debauch'd Gentlemen, I think I should do them no great Injury ; such, I mean, who are neither serviceable to God, nor their Country , who have nothing of true Worth and Gentility in them ; but are a Company of lewd and desperate Roysters, the most unprofitable Members in the Commonwealth, and good for nothing but to kill and destroy one another in their drunken Quarrels. I know there is no necessity for Manual Employment and Labour to those whom God hath liberally endowed with his earthly Blessings ; but yet they may have a Calling, and within their own Sphere may find Employment enough to take up their Time and Thoughts ; and such as may make them the most beneficial Men on Earth, and truly honoured and loved by others. For by their Authority, their Example, the Ampleness of their Demesnes and Revenues, and the Dependence that others have upon them, they may be as influential to promote Goodness and Vertue, as too commonly they are to promote Vice and Villany ; and to such truly generous Spirits, who intend to be so employed, let me commend the careful perusal of an excellent Treatise directed unto them ; Entituled, *The Gentleman's Calling*. But yet withal, if they should condescend to some stated Vocation, and Course of Life, it would be no disparagement to their Gentility ; for certainly *Adam* was as much a Gentleman, and had as large Demesnes as any of them ; and yet God thought fit to place him in *Eden*, that he might dress and keep the Garden.

But as some have no Employment ; so,  
*Secondly*, Others have an unlawful Employment : Such whose only Work it is to instruct Vice, and excite Men to it. And how many such are there, who live by the provoking and encouraging the Wickedness of others ; and continually make use of all the Allurements that might entice unto Evil, and recommend Debauchery first to the Fancy, and then to the Will and Affections :

*Thirdly*,

## An Exposition upon

*Thirdly*, Others have indeed an honest and a lawful Calling; but they are negligent and slothful in it. Now Sloth tendeth to Poverty. *Prov. 6. 10, 21. Tet a little Sleep, a little Slumber, a little folding of the Hands to Sleep: So shall thy Poverty come as one that travelleth*; drawing nearer and nearer to thee by soft and silent degrees; and *thy want as an armed Man*; who, though his Pace be slow, by reason of the weight of his Armour, yet his Assaults are more irresistible and destructive. And Poverty tempts to Theft. *Prov. 30. 9. Lest I am poor, and steal.* And therefore this Command which forbids Theft, must by consequence enjoin Labour and Industry in those lawful Callings wherein the Divine Providence hath set us; according to that of the Apostle, *Eph. 4. 28. Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*; and so by his Industry, of a Thief become a Benefactor and Alms-giver.

\* Discontent and Covetousness are the Root of all Injustice. He that thinks himself wronged that he hath not as much as some others, will be apt either through Fraud or Violence to increase his own by wronging of others.

*Secondly*, It requires us to be contented with that Portion of Earthly Comforts which our heavenly Father allots unto us. *Heb. 13. 5. Be content with these things ye have.* And certainly he that is not content with what God allows him, lies under a grievous Temptation, by fraudulent and unjust Courses to carve out his own Condition to himself; and to invade the Rights and Properties of others\*: Let us therefore check this repining Temper betimes, and not think that we have too little, and othes too much; but whatsoever God be apt to affordeth us, let us account it sufficient Provision, and a Child's Portion; and although it be but Food and Rayment, neither the most delicate, nor the most sumptuous; yet *having Food and Rayment, let us be therewith contented*; as the Apostle exhorts us, *1 Tim. 6. 8. Let us look upon all other Things as superfluous, or indifferent*; and not murmur, although we should never obtain them: For whatsoever is needful

## The Eighth Commandment.

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needful to thy Subsistence; God's Providence and Blessing upon thy Industry, will furnish thee with it; and what is not needful to this, is not worth thy Envy and Repining.

And so much for the Exposition of this Commandment.

I shall only subjoin a Word or two unto those who are conscious to themselves that they have wronged others of what was their due, and either with-held, or taken from, what by Law and Equity belonged to them: Let such know that they are bound to make them a perfect and plenary satisfaction, by making an entire and plenary restitution, if the Thing they have stolen or purloined, be still extant, and in their hand; or if not, then by making a full and satisfactory compensation. Yea, be the thing great or small, more or less, though it should seemingly tend to the loss of thy Credit, by acknowledging such a Wrong; or visibly tend to thy impoverishing or undoing to restore it; yet notwithstanding, thou art bound to restore every Farthing of what thou hast wronged and defrauded thy Brother. Nor is it enough to confess the Sin before God, and to beg Pardon at his Hands; but thou must likewise render unto Man what is his due, and what thou unjustly keepest from him; whether it be his by thy Promise, or by his own former Possession, as ever thou hopest to obtain Pardon for thy Sin from the Mercy of God; yea, and thou art bound likewise to the very utmost of thy Power to make him recompence for all the damage which he hath in the mean time sustained by thy unjust with-holding his Right and Due from him; or else thou shalt never obtain Pardon and Remission for thy Guilt. And the Reason is, because as long as you detain what is another's, so long you continue in the commission of the same Sin; for unjust Possession is a continued and prolonged Theft: And certainly Repentance can never be true nor sincere, while we continue in the Sin of which we seem to

*Sires aliena propter quam peccatum est, reddi possit, & non redditur, penitentia non agitur, sed simulatur; non remittetur peccatum, nisi restitutum ablatum. Aug. Ep. ad Macedonium. 54.*

H h h

repent;

repent; and thy Repentance not being true, Pardon shall never be granted thee.

But you will say, What if those whom we have wronged be since dead? How can Restitution be made unto them?

I answer; In this Case, thou art bound to make it to their Children, or their near Relations, to whom it is to be supposed, that what thou hast wrongfully detained, would have descended, and been left by them; or if none of these can be found, nor any to whom of right it may belong, then God's Right takes place, as he is the great Lord and Proprietor of all things. And thou oughtest, besides what thou art obliged to give of thine own, to bestow it on the works of Charity and Piety; for it is then ascheated to him: Yet withal, thou hast great reason to bewail that thou hast so long deferred the restitution of it to the right owner, till now thou hast made thy self incapable of doing it.

This possibly may seem an hard Lesson; and doubtless it is so in a World so full of Rapine and Injustice; but yet as hard as it is, this is the Rule of Christianity; this is the inflexible Law of Justice; and without this, you live and die without all hopes of obtaining pardon, by continuing in your Sins impenitently.

And thus much for this Eighth Commandment.

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