

A Sermon on Exodus 20:15.

Lessons: Malachi 3:8-18; John 10:1-11;  
Arcana Coelestia 8906:1.

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"Thou shalt not steal." (Exodus 20:15.)

All the Ten Precepts of the Decalogue look to the universal reigning of the Divine Human in all things of man's love and faith, in all the good and true with man, in all things of his will and understanding. If this end is not with us in the keeping of the Precepts, then they become with us a mere moral and civil code, less than they are with the gentiles. The goods which are commanded in these Precepts are the Lord's. They are the goods which He made receptible to men when He fought and suffered to glorify His Human. The evils forbidden in these precepts are the evils which prevent the reception of the goods and trues of the Divine Human in the mind of man. They prevent the Lord's reigning universally in the goods and trues in the love and faith with man. For this cause alone they are sins against God. The man of the Church should not think of these Precepts in any other way. If the man of the Church does think of these Precepts in any other way, and we must face the fact that often we do think of them in another way, then it is because the thought is influenced by one or another of the evils forbidden in them.

Of the seventh Precept, "Thou shalt not steal," it is said in the Arcana Coelestia: "Thou shalt not steal, signifies that his spiritual goods must not be taken away from anyone, and that those things which are the Lord's must not be attributed to self." (Arcana Coelestia 8905.)

Looked at from a merely natural viewpoint, the evil of theft does not appear as bad as the evil of murder or of adultery. But it is said in the Word that this evil enters more deeply into man than other evils, because it is conjoined with cunning and deceit. (Doctrine of Life 81.) It is a colder crime, in which the understanding of a man is closely involved. There is a conscious use of the false in this evil. There are two great evils with men from which all others spring, the love of commanding all things from the love of self, and the love of possessing all things from the love of the world. One is of the love of evil, and the other of the love of the false.

Looking from the outside inwards, the love of the world is a lesser evil than the love of self, the love of possessing is a lesser evil than the love of commanding all things, the false is lesser than the evil. But if we regard things as they proceed from within towards the outside, then we can see that there is a love of possessing all things which originates from the love of commanding all things, there is a love of the world which is out of the love of self, and there is the false which is out of evil. And these are more developed, hardened, confirmed forms of those terrible evils, and are deeper. In this series, the false is worse than the evil. The false is the last refuge of the evil, and it is the very stronghold of the evil in the human mind. From this stronghold the evil can win back to itself the whole mind by its cunning and deceit. In this we can see that the latter Commandments forbid evil and false things which are worse than the things forbidden in the former.

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It is said that "Thou shalt not steal" means that his spiritual goods must not be taken away from anyone. This is the internal sense of this commandment because spiritual wealth and riches are the cognitions of the good and true, and in general all things of faith and of charity. (Arcana Coelestia 8906.) To steal is to take these away from anyone. This is done especially by those who teach and persuade men to what is heretical and false, when yet they know or can know what is true out of the Word. (True Christian Religion 318.) Through false and heretical ideas the cognitions of the good and true are stolen from their real use of serving to make man rational and spiritual. They are misdirected and made to serve some other end. This can easily be seen in the total closing of the whole New Testament by the falsities by which the Divinity of the Lord's Human was denied, and by which salvation by faith alone was foisted on the Christian Church. In the New Church we must reflect that the origins of these falsities are with every man. Externally there is the appearance that we have been delivered from them by the teachings of the Third Testament which expose them. But, internally they are ever working to misdirect the Church, to lead all its cognitions, all the beginnings of faith and charity, in a wrong direction, away from the Lord to self. It is of terrible importance that every false thing which would give the wrong direction to the Church in its development should be seen and shunned. Otherwise the Word is again closed in the Church, and a new beginning must be made elsewhere, if the human race is to be saved.

Inmosty "Thou shalt not steal" means that the things which are the Lord's must not be attributed to self. It is needful to reflect much on this commandment, that the things of the Lord must not be attributed to self. All things of faith and of charity are from the Lord, and belong to Him, and they are altogether not from man himself. (8906) In explanation of this truth, the Arcana Coelestia quotes from John 10:1-13. "He who entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, he is a thief and a robber...I am the door. Through Me if anyone entereth he will be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture. The thief cometh not but to steal and to kill and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." To enter by the door is to acknowledge the Lord, that from Him is everything of faith and of charity, for these then inflow from Him. But to attribute those things to others, especially to self, is to take them away, thus to slay and destroy. (8906.)

In what does a man attribute to himself the things which are of the Lord with him? How can he steal from the Lord? There is a right of possession in the human mind, an ownership which is the Lord's. With the man of the Church this ownership is in the following order: That the Lord gives to man from without His Word. From it the man takes up the scientifics and cognitions out of the sense of the Letter of the Word. These have but one use, namely, that by the influx of good from the Lord into the affection of them the man may become rational from the Lord. Thus man comes into the true rational conclusions as if from himself from the Lord. These rational truths have but one use, that a man might in them receive the spiritual out of the celestial, and thus, by the reception of them, man might become spiritual or celestial. The order of possession thus is that the spiritual belongs to the celestial, the rational to the spiritual, and the scientific to the rational. In this order all belongs to the Lord Who is the celestial itself. This is the Divine Human order with man.

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Now a man can steal things from this order of possession and claim them for another order of his own imagination, of his love of self. He can be so carried away by the love of the scientifics and cognitions of the sense of the Letter of the Word that he imagines that in them he has already all celestial and spiritual things. If he does this, the rational can never be born in him and the celestial is perverted. Because he never goes beyond the mere sense of the Letter of the Word, he imagines that he is not attributing the Lord's things to himself. But he has stolen everything from the Divine Order, from the Lord's right of possession in himself. By this, he gives the whole Word over to an apparent human order, so that everything produced out of it he thinks to be his own and not the Lord's.

But again, if a man does not fall into that form of stealing, he may fall into a still deeper one. If the rational is born in him, and he comes into valid conclusions as to the true therefrom, he may suppose that in this way, by reasoning out of scientifics, he can come into things spiritual and celestial. But the rational things are only vessels for the receiving of things spiritual from the Lord. They are not spiritual, nor can they produce anything spiritual. And here we can see the cunning and deceit of the evil of spiritual theft, that whereas if man does not become rational, he can never receive the spiritual and celestial, and whereas the rational is just that which must receive, and in this a man appears to live from himself, the love of self can produce falsity out of that appearance, and claim what is spiritual and celestial for his rational. And if he confirms himself in this, he will kill the vessels of celestial and spiritual things, will kill all things of faith and charity.

The lust of a man to possess what is spiritual and celestial for himself is spiritual theft. In its essence it is to claim for the external man that which in him belongs to the internal man, and thus to the Lord. It is to claim that which belongs to the Divine Human to oneself. It is to rob the Lord of His Own Word in your mind.

It is said in the Word that in the beginning of regeneration all claim for themselves that which is the Lord's, namely, the good and true that is with them. But in that first state there is innocence and ignorance. (Arcana Coelestia 4002.) In the first states of regeneration the Lord uses the supposition that the good and true is man's own, because in no other way could he be prepared and introduced to the good and true. But when a man has been prepared, and is able to receive what is spiritual out of celestial origin in his rational, if then he uses his rational to confirm the good and true as his own, he is a spiritual thief.

In the Israelitic Church, there was a law that if man sold one of his brethren, one of the sons of Israel, and made gain thereby, he should be put to death. (Deuteronomy 24:7.) A man out of the sons of Israel signified they who are in the trues and goods of faith, and in the abstract sense the goods and trues themselves of faith. To steal and sell a man and make gain by this signifies to alienate the goods and trues of faith from the Lord and make them serve some other love in man. Of this it is said that the trues and goods of faith, because they are from the Lord, are in a free state, nor do they serve unless the Lord alone. But when alienated, they come into a servile state, for they then serve some evil of the love of self and the world,



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thus some cupidity of the body. Thus the good and true die. (8906e.)

Now you know that it is said of Judas Iscariot that he was a thief, and held the bag of money for the Lord and the disciples. (John 12:6.) And Judas betrayed the Lord, selling Him for thirty pieces of silver. In this act, Judas represents the heart of the evil of theft, that by cunning and deceit he would sell the Lord Himself to those who hated Him. In this he represents in the man of the Church that evil and false which would claim to himself that which is the Lord Himself with man, the spiritual of the celestial, the true out of good.

Before the Lord can entrust anything of that faith and charity, that good and true, the spiritual riches of the Holy City, Nova Hierosolyma, to a man, a man must see this thief, this evil of stealing in himself, and acknowledge it and shun it.

Of the Lord Himself it is said that He will come as a thief. This is said because a man may steal all things from the Lord and adorn his love of self and the world with them to make himself look like an angel of light; but in the time of judgment the Lord will come and take all those things back to Himself, and the man will be left with nothing. But for those who see this evil and acknowledge it, in themselves, they, because they become the sons of God, come also into the right of possession of the goods and trues of faith from the Lord, that is, they are held in all the good and true, and are given the appearance that they are theirs, and are given the eternal enjoyment of them.

AMEN.