

## Deceitful Scales and the 8th Commandment

Let us turn to our Bibles to Hosea 12. Hosea 12, 7 through 8. Let us listen intensively to the word of God. Hosea 12, 7 and 8. A cunning Canaanite, deceitful scales are in his hands.

He loves to oppress and Ephraim said, surely I have become rich. I have found wealth for myself and all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that is sin. Let us pray.

In these opening words God of this section, Prophet Hosea is describing many, at least certainly those with position of power and businesses and the like and Ephraim, the northern tribes, who use deceitful scales that is they violated the Eighth Commandment in so many ways. In fact they they love to oppress and take the monies from others God. We ask that as we dig into this text to see how it looks in life God the Eighth Commandment and our own hearts to be sure examined in accordance to your law and that we Lord would flee the love of oppression whatever that may look like in our lives and to embrace Lord justice and truth and an honest scale and an honest measure.

We pray the same especially for our society and businesses around us Lord and that we as Christians would expect much and pray to that end and worked as we as we can to uphold the holiness of your law and the glories of the gospel in the name we pray amen. Although the Lord is greatly concerned with his honor and praise, the first four commandments, the first table of the law, He also cares for us. He cares for our welfare with body and soul and it is the body part of that couplet, body and soul, that is specified in these verses not just the body directly of course but like health and sickness, we have other verses about that, but also the things that affect the body such as work and money, the economy, deceitful scales and unjust measures for example.

After all His Holy Writ is not just written about private matters but public matters often over and over again especially in the Old Testament. Justice is baked into His law. Murder, adultery, thievery are all wrong and even unbelievers admit this.

In these verses we see the Lord's anger over economic manipulation. Stealing by any kind of means is still thievery. Here the prophet describes an older method manipulating the scale.

They also described as those who love oppression in the next part of that verse. With the context of money of course, in stealing this must mean they love to exploit, we would say today, economically exploit people and groups of people. I don't mean of course what the socialists have in mind but simply describing all the ways someone with money and influence and businesses and like or even politics can bend the rules to harm others because of their greed.

That's clearly what's going on here with deceitful scales with somebody who loves money so much that he's willing to lie and cheat about it and take advantage of people. But first he calls them Canaanites, a reminder again that word also means merchant. It's quite interesting.

We have that in English. We have words like fast that are opposite. Stand fast or move fast.

Which is it? It depends on the context. So here clearly it's a play on words it seems to me, emphasizing it seems how ungodly they were acting towards one another. You're like a Canaanite, not just any kind of merchant, but the Canaanite merchant, an unbelieving pagan who's deceitful and loves to oppress.

In fact they brag about being rich, verse 8, surely I've become rich. Of course he's being rich by deceit and lies. And all my labors, look how wonderful I am.

I'm ripping people off. So given these particulars, let's look at the broader commandment against stealing to understand what it is against as well as what it entails for holy living as Christians in the world that we find ourselves in, especially in the American capitalistic scene.

## **What is the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment?**

What is the eighth commandment? The simplest of course is thou shall not steal.

You shall not steal, but we know it's more than that. It's not just don't take what's not yours. Recently I ran across some gloves out on the street, across from our house, and a packet still on the sidewalk.

It would have been real easy to walk away, found some nice pair of gloves. But I took a picture and sent it on a Facebook group. I'm going to take care of it.

These kind of incidences happen in our lives now and then. What are we going to do about it? Take seriously the eighth commandment or use it to our advantage? Even unbelievers know this rule and often live by it. If someone had taken your gloves, that is an unbeliever, an unbeliever would be quite unhappy that you took his gloves.

He knows stealing is wrong. But the eighth commandment of course, thou shall not steal in Exodus 20, is a summary of a broader principle of thievery and stealing and the like. It's of course cast in a negative form as most of the commandments are.

Thou shall not steal. Behind these words is deep truth. It is a summary of a deeper truth.

It just says thou shall not murder implies the flip side. Thou shall therefore preserve life. So too, avoiding stealing applies working and getting things in an honest and upright manner and not through deceit and manipulation.

Similarly, all the means, causes, occasions, and provocations as we know that lead up to and support or undermine this commandment are also built into this summary thou shall not steal. Like we tell our little kids don't leave the stuff outside because it could be, what, stolen because it's a means, cause, and occasion to thievery. And so we should not pass laws that encourage laziness on the other hand with respect to social matters.

Laws that encourage one way or the other, means, causes, occasions, unto thievery. So those are all the principles built into this commandment. More importantly of course, it covers the heart.

Thou shall not steal is not simply about the outward action but also the heart, especially the heart. After all, stealing begins with the heart, our soul, our mind. Don't even think about stealing.

Not enough to say no to our lusts but we should smother it in the womb. We should meditate upon the truth of God's Word in the gospel and repent of the sin of desiring to take what is not ours. And it's predicated of course upon ownership and work.

How can you have thievery if we all own everything that is around us? Which is of course some theories of life and economics. It's all ours. They don't really believe that.

It's usually people with power and influence saying it's really mine and I'm using this rhetoric to hide behind to steal from the rest of you as a politician or a leader or king or whatever. It assumes even behind this predicate of ownership and work amongst us as humans, behind all that is God's ownership of all things. He has granted it to us.

Man is a steward of what God has given us in this world. Ephesians 4:28, let him that stole steal no more. Stop.

But rather let him labor. He should work, working with his hands of things which is good that he may have to give to him that needs. The two go hand-in-hand.

Not just don't steal. Work and work an honest labor, an honest day's job as we used to say. And this should also remind us this language of thievery, stealing, owning, and ownership.

First Corinthians 6:20 should remind us of Christ. For you were bought at a price therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's. We're talking about the eighth commandment in this language of buying and stealing and taking and the like being bought at a price is here describing our redemption and our Lord and Savior.

It should humble us to put things in perspective that we are his servants and we should do these things and not steal from one another, steal from unbelievers. It's not like there's a special rule only for Christians. But whoever they are, even your enemy, you don't steal from them.

But rather uphold this commandment by the power of God within us and Christ buying us at a price of course the price being his blood shed for us that we would be his and redeemed by him and the power of the Spirit is a wonderful picture and a wonderful glorious thing. And as we know him buying us with his blood means he also lived for us and he fulfilled as I mentioned in my prayer the eighth commandment. All the commandments.

He obeyed it the entirety of the Ten Commandments in thought, word, and in deed. So yes we are going over the Eighth Commandment but we should not lose sight of the fact that Christ obeyed it for us and that we don't redeem ourselves by obeying the Eighth

Commandment. Somehow we can make up for all our sins not just through repentance as we heard this morning but now we can make it up by this new life of being sanctified and Jesus will accept me all the more because I've obeyed the Eighth Commandment.

That's not how it works. We do it because we have been born again. Christ has bought us and that we are saved and wish to honor him and know that our best efforts at fulfilling this commandment will still fall short. But that should not discourage us. Rather we should persevere because of our love for our Savior who bought us the price of his own blood.

## **Deceitful Scales and the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

So the second point is deceitful scales and the Eighth Commandment.

So here's the negative part right which was the commandment forbid and I'm using the language of the text here deceitful scales and the Eighth Commandment. Question 75 of the Shorter Catechism. What is forbidden in the Eighth Commandment? The Eighth Commandment forbids whatsoever does or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbor's wealth or outward estate.

That's a very simple summary you know the Larger Catechism. A lot more detail there. Now there's some obvious violations that we know we should avoid.

Outright stealing and thievery and the like. One of the classic texts it's used in this Shorter Catechism as I recall as I have my notes here. Removing landmarks.

I remember reading about that when I was a kid. Thou shalt not remove the landmarks it says in Deuteronomy. I'm like what is going on here? Why is this a big concern about landmarks? Because they set out the property of the land and you're moving it you're saying I got a little more land now.

It's like moving our fence line right? I don't have a fence in my backyard. My neighbor has the fence. He kind of built it for me as it were.

I didn't ask he just went ahead and did it. I would have paid the money if you asked because we're sharing it. The other side of the house I don't have a fence at all.

If I put up a fence and move it a couple inches or foot or whatever and kind of get a little more property. Don't know. That's still thieving.

That's still thievery. That's still stealing. That's still wrong.

All kinds of ways in which we can steal. That's one of the more famous ones of the Old Testament because they used landmarks for the property of the twelve tribes back then. Engrossing commodities to enhance price.

This is obvious as well though we don't think of it very often. Taking advantage of crisis for example like when California had earthquakes or has earthquakes and problems or fires and

the like and all of a sudden water costs you know 20 bucks an ounce or something like that. They're blowing it out of proportion.

In fact we have laws against price gouging. It's a form of thievery. Proverbs 11 26.

The people will curse him who withholds grain but blessings will be on the head of him who sells it. So it is a good thing to sell and to buy. The Bible has that.

You want to call that capitalism? That's fine. That's good. But it should be done with fairness and honesty and with a willingness to sell the product and not hedge the market so that you can make even more money and people now curse you for withholding the grain.

So that it's what? Worth more. It costs you more now. And we see this over and over again of course with manipulations in the market and businesses and the like.

It's unfortunate. And behind again other obvious violations behind all this is the heart matter. Coveting and envying and greed and the like.

It is within our hearts that stealing begins. The satisfaction with what we have and what God has given us. This is why Thanksgiving is a good thing to have once a year to remind ourselves even more than once a year with our family and say, you know, look kids be thankful what you have.

I know I'm sure we all kind of grew up with that way. You should be thankful what you have kid. Let's say a little more nicer.

Avoid it I think if you can when it becomes something necessary. I got to say it now because the kid didn't learn the lesson. Well maybe do a little more often so the kid does learn the lesson.

Write it down once every few months for the children to know that it is good and we should be satisfied with what the Lord has given us. Pining after someone else's goods. Someone else's prosperity.

Not even something specific. It could be more broad. Well look what they got.

I don't get anything like that. It's wrong and it begins in the heart. Less obvious violations that are only less obvious because they're not as easy to see.

You can see in grossing prices because you're in the middle of a crisis and all of a sudden you're like why does the water cost \$20 a gallon? Well this is crazy. But stealing from the middle class or from the poor as a whole. That's a little less obvious because lots of different mechanisms we can use in our society especially and what goes on behind closed doors and the like.

There are many verses as we know about poor. Plenty of verses about poverty in the Bible. This is why I like to highlight the middle class because people forget about that.

It's there. It's there in Micah 2 chapter 2 verses 1 through 2. We read, Woe to those who devise iniquity and work out evil on their beds. So they can't even go to bed peacefully.

They have to think about what I'm gonna do in the future to rip people off. What? He loves oppression. Verse 7. At morning light they practice it.

As soon as they get up they got to go out there and rip off people and make lots and lots of money because it is in the power of their hand. Verse 2. They covet fields and take them by violence. Also houses and seize them.

So they oppress a man in his house, a man and his inheritance. Pastor, you may ask, how is that about the middle class? Well, because poor people don't own anything. They don't own land or houses.

They're at the beck and call of someone with money and resources. They're poor. They're often slaves of some sort especially in the Old Testament.

To steal fields and houses implies there's someone who owns them. They are therefore not poor because poor, the basic definition is subsistence living. You're basically drowning if you can even live at all.

Whereas middle class is you're kind of comfortable. You still got to work at it. Rich, you don't even have to work.

Those are the three broadest ways of describing these things. That's how it was historically. That kind of stark contrast.

The rich is very small. The middle class is pretty small. And then poor is pretty much everyone else historically all over the place.

So Micah 2.8. It continues through chapter 2. We read, "...Lately my people have risen up as an enemy. You pull off the robe but the garment from those who trust you as they pass by like men returned from war. The women of my people have you cast out from their pleasant houses.

For their children have you taken away my glory forever." So verse 9, it's kind of obvious. They have pleasant houses. Not just houses, but nice houses.

Again, at least middle class. Something like that. And then verse 8 is a little less obvious to us.

"...Lately my people have risen up. They pull off the robe or strip off the garment from those who trust you." That is, of course, they steal it. They're taking it from you.

You don't own it. That word for robe there or cloak is very unique and it at root means something magnificent or glorious. So it's probably a very nice cloak.

Not just a tattered cloak. Again, someone more than poor. And Micah 2.9, as I said, they lost, they're losing their nice houses.

Pleasant homes, not shacks and the like. The word means pleasant or delicate. Something very nice.

And so again, something only the middle class can pull off. Which is to say, all this to say here out of Micah 2, 1-2, Micah 2, 8-9, that you can't just say, well you can only rip off the poor. There are people kind of think that way.

It's really a bad sin if you rip off the poor. No, it's also a bad sin if you rip off the middle class. You rip off rich people.

I mean, you're stealing from rich people. Rich people stealing from rich people. I'm sure that happens as well.

That's wrong. It doesn't matter what it is. But what makes it especially a problem in our society is that we have a shrinking middle class.

And I think we all, I think, know that that's dangerous. What's going to happen if the poor can't work their way to the middle class? Because they certainly can't jump to being rich. It takes time to work your way up and save and the like.

And so we need to pray and do what we can, which is, I know, very limited. I can't do much other than preach about it, to ask the Lord to protect our society. It's not good if the middle class shrinks and the poor class expands.

That's a bad recipe for our society. So it's a picture here then in Micah 2 of rich or political leaders oppressing the middle class. And we ask yourself, of course, it does.

It does happen today, unfortunately. And we pray that it would stop somehow in some way. Other examples, misuse of rezoning.

This is something I remember from the early 2000s, where they used eminent domain and it started becoming abuse. It used to mean common, basic public spaces like a park. You'd use eminent domain to make a park and the like.

And then all of a sudden it became, well, let's put Walmart in. That's helpful for people. Well, what? I guess if you have money to go to Walmart? And it started growing from beyond that.

So rezoning is a problem. Other kinds of rezoning, of course, devalue home prices. A prior administration got caught forcing low-income housing into extra-expensive neighborhoods all across the nation.

They were using federal law to equalize the middle class and the rich. Of course, it wasn't super rich. It wasn't in the president's backyard.

It was the rest of us. That's a form of stealing, isn't it? Think about it. The violation of the 8th commandment, devaluating the house.

But it's not just the money of devaluating the house, but the human conditions. Because who wants a factory across from your house or a what kind of zoning is that? So you can perhaps argue, and people do, well, that devalues your house. Yeah, but money isn't everything.

It also is dangerous to my body and my family and my children. Don't want that. So let's have better rezoning, please, so you can fulfill not only the 8th commandment, but the 6th commandment and other commandments of the Word of God to maintain a society and a future for our children and grandchildren.

The root of this problem here of deceitful scales, of loving to economically oppress and to steal and manipulate and rezone or whatever else the case is, varies to be sure. In the case of the administration, it seemed to be more racial. They were going after rich middle-class or white people and the like, and they wanted to bring more poor people or whatever the case was, because they hate the middle class.

They hate the whatever it was. I don't think it was greed because the president wasn't making money off of it. Don't know what it was.

But often it is greed. That's a big problem. Inordinate prizing and affection for worldly good.

You can have it. It's good to desire a vacation. It's good to desire some nice clothing.

But if it's inordinate, if it goes out of control in desiring these things, prizing them, these worldly goods around us, then we have a problem. Because we live in America, this is an ongoing temptation. Who has clothing here? Who has more than one outfit here? Who has more than one pair of shoes here? Who has a computer? More than one computer.

A smartphone. More than one smartphone. A TV.

Disposable income even. Beware materialism. That's part of the warning here.

Deceitful scales. God is not pleased with their desire and lusting after the things of this world, after money and the goods of the things that we find around us. When left unchecked, it turns into thievery and manipulation.

All things are from the Lord to be used in moderation. In moderation. Not to suck us into pining after them where we can't sleep or have it on our minds all the time and therefore ignore the weightier things of the law and of life.

And so it's important to set things aside, our time in our lives, so that we can set our mind on things above and not on things of the earth. Colossians 3.2. So okay, I'm done with the money. Maybe it's tax season right now.

Maybe it's stressing you out. Get someone else to do it for you. Take some relaxing time.

Say okay, it's not about the money. That's not what's important. It's God and his kingdom.

And so we are called, in our society especially it seems to me, I'm preaching myself, to be doubly careful to examine our hearts that we not lust after things around us and want more and more and never be satisfied. Lest we end up violating the Eighth Commandment. The way you ask this is, do you possess your possessions or do they possess you?

## **Honest Measures and the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

Third point, the positive part, I decided to change the language a little bit to reflect elsewhere in the Bible.

Honest measures, honest ways and measures is the way the phrase we often use. So honest measures or scales and the Eighth Commandment, the positive part. Question 74, the Shorter Catechism.

What is required in the Eighth Commandment? The Eighth Commandment requires the lawful procuring, right, gathering and getting and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others. You want to fight materialism? Want to fight greed and lust? You want to set your mind on things above and not on things of the earth? Then we have all kinds of ways to walk away from greed and lust within us. Look to the positive things to be done.

And we have some description here of these positive things that keep us busy, keep our minds active to good things in this world. And Larger Catechism, question 141. So part of this Larger Catechism answer, which is of course very long, what are the duties required? A provident care, that is a careful care, and study to get, keep, use and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustenance of our nature and suitable to our condition.

And an endeavor by all just and lawful means to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of ourselves as well as our own. Estate of others, excuse me, as well as our own. So this is all to say it's okay to work for necessary things in life like food and shelter.

You're not more holy somehow like the monks we talked about Sunday School class who live up in the mountains and say, I don't really own anything. It's a communal owning of things. That makes you more holy or something? No.

You can still lust in your heart of course. So it's okay to work for the necessary things in life, food and shelter, but also for, as the Larger Catechism says, things convenient and suitable to our condition, as they like to say. That is our calling and station in life.

Vacations, nice things in life, even progress in our wealth to grow it, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate, the material things of this life of others as well as our own. And of course it's for God's glory and for the good of each other. The best

Christian wants lots of money not because he likes to have lots of money because he wants to give more to the church, more to the poor, and more to their kids and grandkids.

And that's what it is. It's about other people. That's what love is.

It's about loving other people, not yourself. And of course violation of the Eighth Commandment is often just about yourself, although you can have, as it were, family crimes and family stealing and deceitful measures right out of business or a company run by a family that can all be greedy together. What are the practical ways therefore to do these things? Hard work and labor.

Ephesians 4:28, let him who stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the things which are good, work, labor, strive that he may have to give to him that needs. Idle hands are the devil's tools, especially for the youth. It keeps them busy and out of trouble.

Keep them working. Work, however, is a means to an end. It's not a means to greed, although it could be if we don't watch our hearts in this matter.

It is better to be poor in this context of greed and satisfied than rich and never satisfied, always pining, wanting more and more. I've got to have the next best car, the next best house, a bigger house, a bigger car, more friends, more partying, or whatever the case is. So hard work can help, but you need more than hard work helping.

As it says in Ephesians 4:28, you work instead of stealing. Why? So that you can give to those in need. So acts of mercy can help tamper down that lust or greed that you may struggle with in your heart.

In order, it says that they work with their hands in order to this end. Of course, it's not the only end. You give it to the church as well.

You give it to your family, certainly, first and foremost, that he may give to him that needs, that is, in material wants or lack of the things that they need in this life. In other words, we're working for others, not for ourselves. For our family, of course, wives and children, the wife and children, grandchildren for the future, the church for tithe and outreach, and even for the nation as good patriots.

Yes, we should pay our taxes in that sense, although we pray that the taxes would be used for righteousness. And monies for the deserving poor. Those monies here in Ephesians 4:28 aren't specified what that looks like, how much you give.

It depends on your family. It depends on your circumstances, to be sure, in your heart before God. But you can give it to the church, and so the diaconate will give it to those in need.

And by God's grace, our church has had a robust diaconate over the years. Or local charity. That's between you and God.

You could find a good charity that would be helpful to people in their need. Now pray, therefore, for leaders to use just scales. And by leaders, I don't mean just judges, kings, elders, priests, prophets, but also fathers and business leaders.

Anybody with social or political and economic power, large corporations, CEOs, and the like, that they would not run the business for only money and greed. And that's something we I think see often in the news, if we pay attention. You're not going to see a news source say, they fired 10,000 people here at this big megacorps because they're greedy.

It's not the headlines. But often, if you dig into these things, at least in my experiences, I've dug into them, it seems to be the case. It comes down to the bottom line, which is we want to make a little more money.

3% profit margin, 5%, 10%. We want more, more. We're never satisfied.

But they should run companies for the good of their employees, as well. We're here as citizens of this nation. We have lots of money.

We're rich. We're relatively rich, or maybe you're not. There's a small, medium-sized business, whatever the case is.

Yes, it's good to work for money in the sense of, I want the money to help my family. But I also want the money to help other people. And how are we helping other people? By giving them jobs and paying them a living wage, if we can.

That should be the mindset, it seems to me. That's the mindset of a father. He's caring and considerate for his family.

He wants the best for each child in that family. And I think we had more businesses and taught this over the years. I don't know how to do it.

They're not gonna hire me out to give this long lecture to all these CEOs. Think differently about your employees. Have a fifth commandment perspective on this matter.

But we can pray to that end and do what we can in our lives to think that way, instead of trying to squeeze out every last ounce of work out of the workers, as though they don't have a life. But they do it that way. I've seen it.

I've been in the, as they say, in the real world, as an engineer and as a worker. And I know that's a problem. May they and all of us love justice and fairness instead.

That's the flip side of this. Deceitful scales are certainly unfair and unjust, not just locally. I don't think the picture here is deceitful scales between private individuals only.

But men with influence and power, especially that rises to the occasion, it's affecting lots of poor people or lots of middle-class people, just lots of people in general. With their heinous activities here, that it reaches to this level that the prophet knows about it and God warns them, don't go down this path. This is wicked.

This is evil. Don't love oppression. And not just justice in the courts, but in everyday financial transactions.

Not manipulating the market as we know about 2008, 2009, as you recall. And I know what's going on today. To what degree? I don't know.

We have derivatives and all these playing of dangerous game with making money off of losing money. Absolutely incredible. I think that should be outlawed.

It's too dangerous. You're already making, it's okay, you're already making money. Or they want to make so much money they go in and buy these corporations, buy hospitals.

I've been reading about this as well. And drive them into the ground because they got to make every last penny count. And it's not about helping people who need help at a hospital.

There's been lots of cases of that as well. That's just wrong. That's greed.

How to stop that? I don't know. What kind of laws you need to pass? I'm not a politician. I'm just telling you there's something wrong when big corporations come along and buy up tracts of homes, residential homes.

What? Why would you want to buy up? Because they're making money off of it. If you can imagine you buying off more and more homes, what's that going to do the housing market? Is it going to make houses cheaper? More expensive because you can't find a house. It's not good.

This is the problem we have in the America. I don't know what they have in Europe but this is this kind of obsession with money. It's not good.

We know unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord. Proverbs 21 10. 20 10 excuse me.

On the flip side, fairness and even going above and beyond is a blessing and a good thing. May the Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us against materialism and greed, both individually and our families and corporately as a nation and businesses. May the Spirit empower us to work to give to others as well.

And in all things to remember you are not your own and that Christ has bought you with his blood. You are his. Let us pray.

Father God above, may we be satisfied. May we hold back and indeed perhaps at times even double down and simply saying I'm not going to buy or do or go and do these things but rather read your word, pray and help those who need help. Father Son of the Holy Spirit to be with us we pray that we'll be wise with our finances and the monies and the things that we have and use them for a right end.

Your glorious namesake would be magnified in all that we do. Amen.