

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
August 29, September 1 & 2, 2007
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
GOD PROTECTS OUR PROPERTY – Exodus 20:15

“That’s mine. You can’t have it. Get your sticky fingers off of my computer. Why should I give you anything, you wasted all your money and used it for booze and drugs. I worked hard for what I have and I’m not about to share it with anyone. All the church is ever after is my money too. People will steal you blind, if you aren’t careful.”

Today we again take up our study of the second table of God’s law. As we do so, we focus on the seventh commandment, “You shall not steal.” This commandment is very timely and applicable for us in the 21st century. With the emphasis on greed, the unethical financial practices of many businessmen, the number of bankruptcies, foreclosures and sheriff’s sales; it is good for us to look at money, property and possessions and consider who they really belong to and what is their purpose in our lives.

God gave the human race the seventh commandment for a purpose. Through this commandment **GOD PROTECTS OUR PROPERTY**. The Bible clearly teaches us certain truths about property, money and possessions. It is good for us to review those truths and then ask ourselves, “Do I really believe this and do I practice this in my life?”

The Owner of All Property

That’s mine. Is it really yours? So often we can become extremely possessive. We hang on to things and believe that they are ours. In reality none of us own anything. When you and I were born into this world we did not have a single possession that we could call our own. We were given clothes that our parents bought for us. We were given food that we did not work for. We were provided with shelter so that we did not have to live out on the streets.

As we got older and were able to work, we did things so that we earned money and were able to purchase things for ourselves. But those things wear out and break, they get used up and we have to replace them. We take care of them and use them. But do these possessions really belong to us? The Bible says, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” (Psalm 24:1) God says, “The silver is mine and the gold is mine.” (Haggai 2:8) He also says, “The land is mine and you are but aliens and tenants.” (Leviticus 25:23) So in reality we don’t own anything. It all belongs to God. The possessions that we have are on loan from God. Each of us has been blessed by God with a certain amount of wealth. Some have more possessions and others have less. We are to manage what has been given to us.

So who really owns what is in our possession? The Lord God, our Creator and Savior is the real owner. He is the owner of what we have.

How Did We Get What We Have?

Now how did you come to have what you have? Many of us might say, “Well, I worked hard for what I have.” We have acquired many of our possessions through work. We have used the talents and abilities that the Lord has given us to earn a living. With the money that we have earned through our work, we have purchased the things that we have. However, we must remember that it is still the Lord God who has blessed the work of our hands. There are many people in this world who work much harder than many of us and they barely are able to survive. God has been gracious to us and has blessed our work.

Some of the things that we have in our possession were given to us by others. We have received gifts of money and of items from others. We also may inherit things from family members and loved ones when they die. They leave to us some of the belongings that were entrusted to their care during their lifetime.

So our possessions have been gained by work, gift and inheritance.

For What Purpose are We To Use Our Possessions?

Why do we have the money we have? Why do we have all the possessions that God has given us? As we study God’s Word we learn that we have our possessions for several purposes.

Paul writes in his letter to Timothy, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8) Our money and possessions are to provide for the needs of our family. Notice, I said needs not wants. What do we need to live? Food, clothing and shelter. So we use our earnings to provide for the basic needs that we have. Unfortunately, many in our nation today do not know the difference between needs and wants. As a result we see people going into debt and paying exorbitant interest rates on credit card debts and other debts for things that are not necessities but wants.

What other purpose does God give us money and possessions? Paul again writes to the believers in Corinth, “Now about the collection for God’s people. Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set a sum of money aside in keeping with his income, saving it up so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) We are to set aside a certain amount of our money for God’s church. In fact, God asks for the first fruits of our earnings. How often haven’t we heard people say, “I give what I have left over to the church?” God doesn’t want our leftovers. He wants us to put him first when it comes to our income and possessions. In the Old Testament God commanded a tithe. What’s that? It’s ten percent. So for every ten dollars I earn, one dollar goes to the Lord. For every one hundred dollars I earn, the Lord receives ten dollars. That’s tithing. In the New Testament God does not command the tithe. However, that does not mean that I throw the Lord what I have left after taking care of everything else. That is what the

Jews in the prophet Malachi's time were doing. Listen to what God had to say to them, "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into my storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (Malachi 3:8-10) Are we robbing God of what we should be giving to him because we want it all for ourselves? Now why do we give to God's church? So that what is happening right now might take place. If we didn't bring our offerings to the Lord, we wouldn't have someone to proclaim the Word of God to us. We wouldn't have someone to accompany our singing on the organ. We wouldn't have this beautiful building in which to glorify and praise our God.

There is another purpose that God speaks of when it comes to our possessions and money. The Apostle John writes, "If anyone has material blessings and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18) We are to help people in need. As a congregation the members of St. Mark's often respond willingly and generously to help those in need. The giving tree in the narthex is one example of how the Good Samaritans are trying to make these needs known to all of us so that we can help those in need. After all that is one of the reasons God has given us the possessions and money that we have.

Why Are We Using Our Possessions and Money in This Manner?

The last question is why are we doing this? As followers of Jesus Christ we have received a greater blessing than any piece of property or huge amount of money. We have been given the gift of a Savior. That Savior has rescued us from an eternity of despair and hopelessness. That Savior has secured for each of us an eternal home that can never be stolen from us. It is a home of peace and joy that never ends. That Savior has assured you and me that we will never be alone in this life. He will always be with us. He will always work everything that that happens in this life for our good. In addition to the gift of our Savior Jesus Christ, you and I have received the gift of faith. As Paul writes, "It is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is a gift of God not of works so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is amazing that God would give you and me faith. Through his almighty Word that created this universe and everything in it, he has also created faith in our hearts to trust Jesus as our Savior. He has given us the faith so that we confess, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

When you have treasures that are more valuable and more precious than anything you will ever possess or see on this earth, then you realize that the money and possessions we do have are to be used for my family and myself, for God's people, the Christian Church and to help others in need. Because as children of God, we love because he first loved us. Amen.