Is It a Sin to Steal?

Stealing is a problem all over the world. It is found in every culture and society. In order to understand what stealing is, let us ask some questions and then answer them from the Bible. What is stealing? How do people steal? Is it a sin to steal? Should there be punishment for stealing? How can one be forgiven who has committed this sin?

What is stealing? A person who steals is known as a thief or robber. A thief is a person who takes something which belongs to another without the owner agreeing to it. For example, suppose that I have a radio. You know that I have it, and you would like to have it for yourself. One day when I am away from my house, you come in and take my radio without asking me. You are a thief! You have taken my possessions without my permission. No one has the right to take the property of another without the consent of the owner. If one does so, he is guilty of the sin of stealing.

There are also other ways one can steal. If a student cheats in school, he is guilty of stealing. He has taken information from someone else and said it was his. This is dishonest. It is sin!

Another way one can steal is by borrowing something and never returning it. No matter how small or cheap the object is, one is guilty of stealing if he borrows it and does not return it.

The worst kind of stealing is stealing from God. Many people steal from God without knowing it. When we do not give as God has prospered us, we are robbing God (I Corinthians 16:1-2; Malachi 3:8). Many also steal time from the Lord. Those who claim to be Christians, but do not go to church on Sunday, are stealing time from God. Those who do not take time to teach others the gospel are also guilty of stealing time from the Lord.

Why do people steal? Some steal because they think it is necessary in order for them to have food and clothing. Perhaps they have no money and do not know how they are going to provide for their family so they steal from someone. They think their need justifies their wrong-doing. But stealing is never right! The main reason, however, that most people steal, is because of greed or covetousness. Greed is a terrible sin. It causes people to do many evil things including stealing (Colossians 3:5).

From the beginning of time, stealing has been a sin. It was forbidden in the Law of Moses (Exodus 20:15). It is forbidden under the Law of Christ (Romans 13:9). Paul commanded the Christians at Ephesus: *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need"* (Ephesians 4:28). Christians do not steal, but work to provide for their own needs and to be able to help those who are in need.

Why is stealing so bad? It is bad because God says it is. Stealing is a sin. Instead of loving his neighbor as himself, the thief takes his neighbor's possessions. How many of us would want someone to take our possessions without our permission? The Bible teaches that we are to do to others the way we want them to do to us (Matthew 7:12).

The punishment for stealing in the Old Testament was very hard. Sometimes thieves were put to death. Whatever was stolen had to be replaced and extra had to be added. Thieves need to be punished today just as they were long ago.

The person who steals needs to stop

now! He needs to repent just as the Corinthians did (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Repentance requires that he makes things right with the one from whom he has stolen. Then he needs to confess his faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Acts 8:37) and be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2:38). God will forgive a thief who truly repents and becomes a Christian. What about you? Are you guilty of stealing? Then you need to repent and do what God has commanded you. If we can help you, please let us know.

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