

TEACHING GOAL

To study special considerations of the eighth commandment with regard particularly to civil government.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. Which is the eighth commandment?
A. The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal.
- Q. What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?
A. The eighth commandment forbids whatsoever does or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbor's wealth or outward estate.
- S.C. 75, L.C. 142, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 97-98

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Matthew 22:15-22

Support Passages: Isaiah 1:18-26; Leviticus 19:35-37; Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 20:10; Ezekiel 22:18; II Samuel 24:24

BIBLE STORY

Luke 19:2-10; Zaccheus makes restitution.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 20:10, ESV)

APPLICATION

What is immoral for individuals is also immoral for corporations and institutions. As we are not to steal, neither is the government to steal. Debasement of money is a very serious national sin that defiles the land, profanes God's name, and brings people into bondage to debt.

SUMMARY

Our attention in this lesson is turned to corporate responsibility to the eighth commandment. According to our study text in Matthew 22, the Pharisees were once again trying to trap Jesus. Hoping to force Jesus to incur the wrath of either one or both of the Roman government and the Jewish government they asked him, "Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" If Jesus responded negatively, the Herodians who were witnessing the affair would report to Herod and therefore the Roman government under whose authority Herod was governing that Jesus had committed treason. The Herodians favored the Roman tax. If he responded affirmatively, the Pharisees themselves would report to the Jewish Sanhedrin that Jesus was a Roman supporter. Either way they assumed that Jesus would find himself in disgrace.

Jesus' response, however, was completely unexpected and confounded those who would trap him. He asked to be shown the coin used for the poll-tax. When a denarius was produced which of course had Caesar's likeness and inscription on it Jesus instructed his hearers to "render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The poll-tax in fact was paid with Roman currency which the Pharisees possessed and used. The coin which contained Caesar's likeness and inscription belonged to Caesar and as it was used as legal tender by the Pharisees they therefore subjected themselves to civil responsibility to the Roman government. Jesus answer was to the effect that if you are using Caesar's property you are to use it on his terms and it is interesting that Jesus apparently was not in possession of such coins.

Thus we learn that civil government may legitimately tax those whom it governs, but God is also entitled to his own. To Caesar belongs coins, tribute and money. To God belongs tithes, first-fruits, vows and sacrifices. The Pharisees rendered to neither one what was properly due. While the civil government may be entitled to certain taxes, it may not take more than what is due. Zaccheus, acting for the Roman government just that. He exacted more tax than what was due and was therefore guilty of fraud according to Luke 19:8. By way of repentance and restitution he returned four times the amount overtaxed.

There are however other means by which a government defrauds its citizens. According to Isaiah 1:22 governmental fraud is perpetrated by debasing silver currency with dross or impurity or by watering down goods that are used for barter. This is clearly an act of governmental theft. In addition the support texts refer to unjust weights and measures as a means of theft. While our government is careful to regulate the instruments of measurement used in business and commerce it in fact defrauds the nation by systematically debasing our currency which contributes heavily to inflation. A prime cause of inflation is the increase of money supply beyond a standard.

Inflation is what happens when gold and silver are no longer used to back the currency in circulation. Our silver then becomes dross. Unrighteousness prevails. Inflation, which is in essence stealing, becomes the national norm. Those that saved money early in this century have had their money stolen from

them. The elderly and those living on fixed incomes have become the prey of thieves.

The Scriptures teach us that currency debasement is an abomination to the Lord and brings very difficult times to the nations of the earth. The solution to this massive problem in our own country and in many others is not at all easy but is it the same solution that must prevail for all of our problems with sin. We must repent. The nation must be converted and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Our great social evils can only find relief through repentance unto life.