

28 PROTECTING PROPERTY AND HONOR

She was proud to be a Native North American, proud of her ethnic heritage.

But once when she was little, she had talked to her great-grandmother about the history of her people. She'd never forgotten how the tears burned in her eyes when she heard the story. As the white people moved west, her people were driven from their lands. It was a cruel story.

But what hurt her now was the way some classmates at school talked. They said things about her—things that weren't true—just because she was a Native North American. It made her feel so separated from them.

One day when some students were saying hurtful things again, a new girl turned to them and told them to stop it. They laughed at her, but they did stop saying the mean things. She looked at the new girl. Here was someone she would love to have as a friend. Here was someone who was brave enough to be kind. The two girls smiled at each other.



BETTY GROSCHIN

3 STATEMENTS

- Don't take what is not yours; help others keep what is theirs.
- Your words have power to hurt people or help them.
- God doesn't want you to be isolated and alone, so God gives you community.

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Source

ALL KINDS OF STEALING

"You shall not steal." With those words of the Seventh Commandment, God seeks to protect your property and your neighbor's property. But as you might guess, the Commandment does more than that.

Stealing causes hurt. Imagine how you would feel about someone if you knew that person had stolen something from you. It would seriously hurt your relationship. And that is what God wants most to protect.

Sometimes nations steal from other nations and unthinkable hurt results. This is what wars are made of. When relationships between two nations are broken, millions can die. The great-grandmother in the opening story saw that kind of hurt firsthand. And the scars and pain can last for generations.

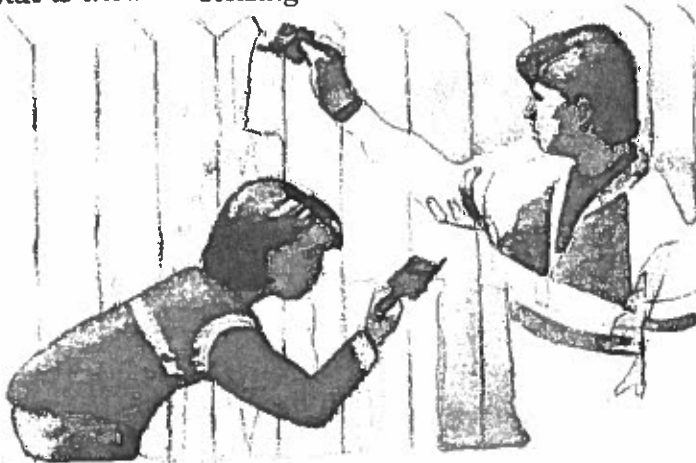
Maybe you aren't the kind to rob a bank or steal your neighbor's TV. But don't walk away from this Commandment, thinking that it doesn't apply to

you. There are all kinds of stealing that God wants you to avoid.

You've heard the expression "Finder's keepers, loser's weepers." What if you found something and you had a good idea whose it was? To keep it and let the loser weep is hardly the loving thing to do. You have stolen what you have found.

Some people cheat the government on their income tax returns. But the government is God's way of taking care of citizens. The less money the government has, the less it can help its poor, the less it can defend and protect its citizens. To keep money that belongs to the government is not loving. It is stealing.

Don't take what is not yours; help others keep what is theirs.



In addition to *not* stealing from your neighbor, there are things you need to do. Luther says if you are going to be truly loving, you will help your neighbors improve and protect their property and means of making a living. *Don't take what is not yours; help others to keep what is theirs.*

For instance, let's say you have a job. Your boss, expecting 100% performance from you, promises to pay you. If you get 100% of your wages but only put out 70% of your ability, you are taking more wages than you deserve. That isn't loving. It is stealing.

Or maybe you buy a new cassette tape that many of your friends want. So they don't need to buy it, you make a copy for each of them. That, too, is stealing, because the tape is protected by copyright laws.

There are all kinds of stealing. But one of the worst things someone can do is to rob someone else of his or her good reputation.

Your words have power to hurt people or help them.

WORDS CAN HURT

"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." That old jingle is wrong. Words *can* hurt.

"And the tongue is a fire . . . set on fire by hell. For every species of beast . . . has been tamed by human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing . . . this ought not to be so" (James 3:6-10).

Those words, written almost 2000 years ago, are still true today. You have seen it happen in school. With just a word or two someone can hurt someone else terribly.

But sometimes what hurts the most isn't what we hear people say to us. What hurts the most is what people say about us behind our backs. Gossip. All it takes is just a few people to spread some lies and a reputation can be damaged.

It's so frustrating because you can't do anything about it. You can be kind and loving. And still if someone wants to, that person can steal your good reputation. How can you be protected against those kinds of stabs in the back?

God has given us the Eighth Commandment to help protect us: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." God is on your side when you are the focus of gossip. God is against gossip.

"But," you may say, "what I said about her was *true*. So I'm not gossiping. I'm telling the truth!"

Hold on a minute. Jesus described the Ten Commandments with one word: love. Ask yourself, "Is what I am about to say the loving thing to say?"

So you found out something true about someone. Before you go broadcasting it all over the place, ask yourself, "If I were that person, would I want people to know about this?" If it isn't loving to say, don't say it.

Thumper (the rabbit in *Bambi*) was pretty close to being right: "If yo

can't say somethin' nice, don't say nothin' at all." There would be a lot less hurt in this world if people followed Thumper's advice and just kept quiet.

But Thumper was only half right. The Eighth Commandment tells us more than to keep quiet. We sin not only by the things we say, but by the things we leave unsaid.

If you hear someone saying hurtful things about someone else, you can do one of three things. 1. You could join in and gossip. (*Wrong!*) 2. You could be like Thumper and just keep quiet. (*Better, but still wrong!*) 3. You could speak well of that person. (*Right!*)

But, be warned: if you do speak up for someone else, you may get hurt yourself. Like the girl in the story at the beginning of this session, you may get laughed at.

But it's worth it. For one thing, you will be doing the loving thing, and there is such freedom in that. For another thing, when you speak kindly about someone you help that person. Some people never seem to get a break. All it takes is for one person to be kind and defend them. It could change their life.

Your words have power to hurt people or help them. This is what relationships are built on. That's what God is calling you to do with this Commandment.

There is one place where God wants you to tell the truth, even if it damages someone else's reputation. And that is the courtroom. For good order, for protection, and for freedom, God has given the government the job of judging who is innocent and who is guilty of certain crimes. If you are called to the witness stand, then you must witness truthfully.

In the meantime, don't gossip. Don't spread lies or truths that will hurt your neighbor. Defend your neighbor, speak well of your neighbor, and explain his or her actions in the kindest way.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Do you know what you have when you put loving relationships together?



JACK MESSLER

You have people enjoying people; you have people caring for people; you have people trusting people. You have a community.

God saw way back in the beginning that it wasn't good for a human to be alone. So God created other humans. God calls us into relationships for company, for help, for the wonder of love, and for the joy of community.

The last seven Commandments nurture and protect community as they nurture and protect relationships. *God doesn't want you to be isolated and alone, so God gives you community.*

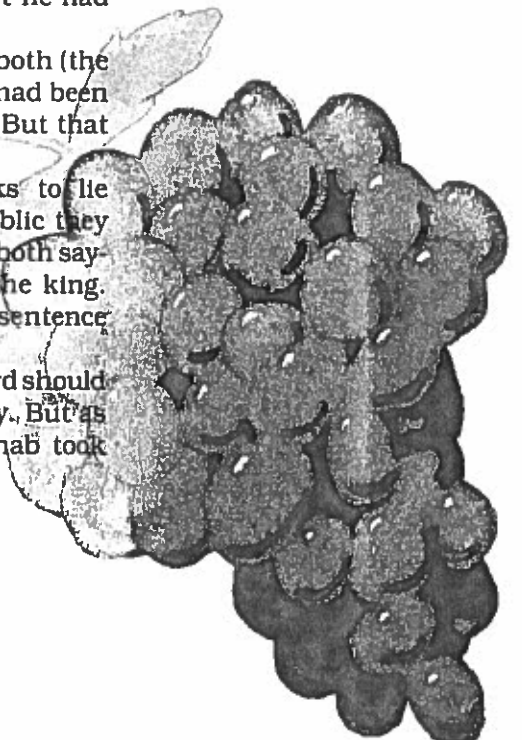
When we steal or spread rumors, we destroy community. And when that happens, some hurtful things happen.

The Bible tells the story of a king who admired his neighbor's vineyard (1 Kings 21). King Ahab thought he had to have that vineyard.

So he asked to buy it. Naboth (the neighbor) said no, because it had been in the family for generations. But that didn't stop Ahab.

Ahab hired some crooks to lie about Naboth. One day in public they gave a false witness against Naboth saying he had cursed God and the king. The lie was believed and the sentence was death by stoning.

Now by rights, the vineyard should have stayed in Naboth's family. But as soon as Naboth was dead, Ahab took possession of the vineyard.



God doesn't want you to be isolated and alone, so God gives you community.

For the pain that Ahab caused Naboth and his family, God punished Ahab's family severely, all because Ahab longed for property more than community.

By contrast, the apostle Paul holds up for us some loving guidelines to build community. Follow these guidelines and you will be gathered into a trusting community. Read Ephesians 4:15-16, 22-32. Here is a picture of what Christian community should look like.

1. In your own words, how are Christians supposed to communicate (verse 15)?

2. Write verse 26 out in your own words.

3. What Commandment says the same thing as verse 28?

4. What Commandment says the same thing as verses 29-31?

5. We're supposed to treat others the way God has treated us. How is that (verse 32)?

I THINK

Think about ways you have been hurt because someone disobeyed the Seventh and Eighth Commandments. Have you ever had anything stolen? How did it make you feel? Have you ever been hurt by something someone said? How did that feel?

Now think about how you may have hurt someone else because you disobeyed these Commandments. Have you ever stolen anything? Have you ever hurt someone by what you said? How did you feel? Do you think God has forgiven you?

Shaping life

RIGHTS OF THE POOR

The Seventh and Eighth Commandments tell us what *not* to do and what to do.

The Seventh Commandment forbids you to steal. It also calls you to share. The necessities of life are a gift to you from God. If you have anything extra, God wants you to share with those who don't even have enough to live on. "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Hebrews 13:16). God even offers this promise: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full" (Proverbs 19:17).

The Eighth Commandment forbids you to hurt others with your words. It also calls you to "Speak out for those who cannot speak . . . defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

Read Amos 4:1-3 and Amos 5:21-24. What mood would you say God was in? What do you think is most important according to God: proper worship or justice for the poor? Which matters the most to God: a beautiful church building or feeding the hungry? Do you think your church has the right priorities? If Amos were talking to you what would he say?

Memory

Memorize the Seventh and Eighth Commandments and their meanings. As an additional challenge, memorize one or more of the following: Ephesians 4:15-16; Ephesians 4:22-23; Ephesians 4:32; Hebrew 13:16.

Because of the civil war in El Salvador, thousands of people have been driven from their land and are left homeless. They have no voice. They have no rights. They have no home.

The Lutheran Church in El Salvador under the leadership of Bishop Gomez decided to speak and act for the poor and needy. At great risk, the church has courageously set up resettlement camps so that the displaced people can have a home again. One such camp has been called *Fe y Esperanza*—Faith and Hope.

People in El Salvador live in constant fear, knowing that the government might at any time arrest, draft, torture, or kill them. And yet the Lutheran community is doing the loving thing. It is bravely obeying the Commandments. And the people are filled with *fe y esperanza*.

Addressing a North American audience, Bishop Gomez once said, "Brothers and sisters, use the privilege of being North American in complement with your role as Christians to be the salt and light of the world. Turn your attention to the poor countries, to

the needy countries. And I think with attention to the Word of God, you will be able to do a lot, so that in so many countries where there is so much misery and sorrow, the situation will change a little bit."

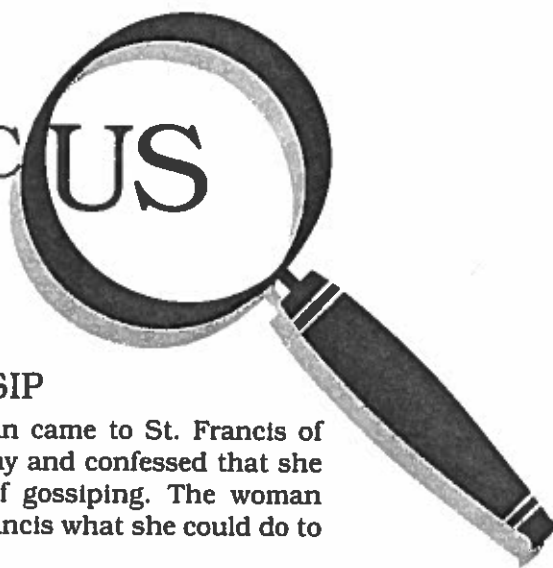
1. How do you think you might share with the poor and the needy? (If you have extra money to spend, what could you go without so you could share your money? If you are poor and have little spending money, what could you do with your time for those who are in need?) Write your ideas in the margin.

2. List three ways in which you could speak on behalf of the poor and needy. How can you be "the salt and the light of the world"?



DIVISION FOR GLOBAL MISSION/ELCA

FOCUS



ON GOSSIP

A woman came to St. Francis of Assisi one day and confessed that she was guilty of gossiping. The woman asked St. Francis what she could do to be forgiven.

St. Francis told her to pluck some feathers from a goose and lay one feather on the doorstep of every person about whom she had been gossiping.

The woman did so, and returned to St. Francis. He then told her to collect all the feathers she had left. She went to do this but found the feathers scattered all over town.

She returned again to St. Francis and told him what had happened. He said to her, "You wish to repent. That is good. But you can never take back the words you have spoken. They have already done their harm. But confess your sin to God and God will forgive you."

Activity 1

Talk to the person in your congregation who is in charge of hunger concerns. Find out what you can do to help. You may want to channel your efforts into a local food shelf in your community. Or you may want to find out what you could do on a global level. Contact your church-wide office for suggestions.

Activity 2

Study your congregation's budget. What percent of the budget goes *outside* your parish to missions and hunger and justice concerns?

Activity 3

Here is a challenging project for your class or youth group. Raise 10,000 pennies and give the money to a local or global hunger program.