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# Words of Truth

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## Who Is A Thief?

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Who is a thief? You would think that this is an easy question. In some ways, it is an easy question. When you think of the Scriptures, some quick things will likely come to mind. A guy named Judas has this recorded about him: *“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein”* (John 12:1-6).

Thieves are often thought of as sneaky. Such is right. A thief comes unannounced and robs people of their belongings (Obadiah 1:5, Matthew 6:19, and Matthew 24:43). Christians know that being a thief is wrong (Leviticus 19:11, Jeremiah 7:9-10, Romans 13:9, and I Peter 4:15). We know that stealing will not get us to Heaven (I Corinthians 6:9-11). These are things most of us know about thieves even without much thought. However, there are some things that do not come right to mind when thinking about who a thief is. We are going to discuss some of those things in this article. We’re going to start with a point that applies on multiple levels. We are going to start by discussing how people are thieves when they are unlawfully a burden on others because of their laziness.

### A Thief – A Man That Refuses To Work

The word of God teaches us to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). The word of God teaches us to help truly needy saints (Romans 15:25-27). However, the Scriptures make a clear distinction between those who need our help and those whom we should not help. Consider what God says concerning those who are lazy and will not work to provide for themselves and their families: *“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing... The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour... For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat... But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel”* (Proverbs 20:4, Proverbs 21:25, II Thessalonians 3:10, and I Timothy 5:8).

From what we have read, we know that a person who refuses to work is worthy of starvation. What we have not discussed is how that has anything to do with that type of person being a thief. Think about something for a moment... What are people who can work, refuse to do so, but take money from others to be lazy? What are people that can work, refuse

to do so, but take taxpayers money on programs like welfare, food stamps, and social security disability? Aren't those people taking something, by sneakiness and dishonesty, which does not belong to them? Aren't those people taking something that has been set-aside for others who truly may need it? What does God tell people like that to do? Consider this: *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth"* (Ephesians 4:28). Someone who supplies for themselves by taking what does not belong to them, rather than working, is a thief!

There is an application here for preachers of the Gospel and elders of the church to be made. Those who dedicate their lives to preaching the Gospel, as most realize, are to be supported financially to preach the Gospel (I Corinthians 9:1-14 and Philippians 4:11-17). Qualified elders (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9), who have dedicated their lives to shepherding the local church (I Peter 5:1-4), are worthy of financial support as well (I Timothy 5:17-18). What are these men doing if they are supported to do work that they are not doing? What about preachers who steal sermons from the Internet or from outline books and yet take money for work they are not doing? What about elders that are lazy, not overseeing the flock, but taking money to do so? It is not new for greedy individuals to use the work of God as a way to be greedy (Isaiah 56:10-12, Micah 3:11, and II Peter 2:1-3). These men are thieves! Furthermore, when they pervert the Gospel that takes on a whole other side of theft.

### **A Thief – An Individual Who Teaches Error**

Consider something that God says here: *"Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD"* (Jeremiah 23:30-32). As God said, a man who holds the truth back is stealing it from those who need it. False teachers, even when they are not completely motivated by financial gain, are thieves on a spiritual level!

### **A Thief – One Who Takes Advantage Of Those Looking To Serve God**

Consider this biblical account: *"And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves"* (Mark 11:15-17). Think of the many businesses that even "brethren" establish to profit from the worship to God. So-called "Christian" book stores, publishing companies, etc. take advantage of those whom are looking to worship God. As Jesus stated, they're thieves!

### **Conclusion**

There are many more applications to be made. This subject really does have great depth. We should examine ourselves (II Corinthians 13:5) and be sure we're not thieves in some way. As Paul asked: *"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal"* (Romans 2:21)?