

Thou shalt not steal or cheat

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.

I was a junior in high school. It was an advanced placement class and there was a lot of pressure to perform. My friend was walking back to his seat after turning in his test paper when I succumbed to temptation. “What is the answer to question X,” I whispered. He told me the answer as he continued down the aisle.

Now I can’t remember whether I really wrote down his reply. But I do remember the intense soul-searching that occurred after this incident. The point was not whether I used his answer or not. I had cheated the moment I asked for it. I had disobeyed God’s commandment, “Thou shalt not steal”.

Often this commandment is confined to stealing objects. And it is correct that taking any object which is not yours is stealing and is unacceptable to God.

Stealing is a denial of the power and presence of God. God supplies every human need and will do so as we turn to Him for answers. When the children of Israel turned to God, He provided water from a rock and manna from the sky. While such an occurrence may seem a remote miracle, thousands who turn to God today find their human needs met through practical and tangible means. Stealing is like turning our back on God and denying his power and ability to provide for us.

The same is true with stealing intangibles, like ideas. When I asked my friend for the answer, I was denying the power of God, the one divine Mind, to supply the right idea. I was also denying my ability to listen to God, to hear and accept right answers. This I did not want to do. God is the source of all intelligence. I needed to reaffirm my relationship to divine Mind rather than deny it.

Stealing, in this case cheating, made me feel very lonely. I felt as if I’d cut myself off from God, the source of all good, and was left to my own meager devices.

The dreadful implications of cheating and stealing dawned on me. It was not being caught by a teacher or violating human rules. It was the consequence of denying God and disobeying His divine law.

I realized there was no such thing as cheating just a little or justifying stealing. One is either affirming God's presence and ability to guide us, or one is ignoring God. I knew that I would be blessed by learning to listen to God for answers rather than turning to people. People make mistakes. God always gives us the perfect answer. As the Psalmist said, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Psalms 84:10)

It made no difference whether someone found out about the cheating or not. God knew. And my relationship to God was dependent upon my own thoughts and actions not on whether someone else knew about it.

I realized that I needed to change my thinking. Obedience to God rather than test scores needed to be the first priority. I knew as I ceased to sin and became obedient to God's law that the sin would be erased from my life. As the Bible says in Psalms 37:26,27 "He is ever merciful...Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore."

There are no shortcuts. God's path is the only path and the most direct. Stealing or cheating is only a confusing detour.

No one ever found out about that incident. But I never cheated again. In fact when there were easy opportunities to see answers, I would physically turn away or inform the person that answers were visible rather than even have the appearance of cheating. I would rather fail completely than cheat on one little answer.

This intense loyalty to God's law, Thou shalt not steal, protected me in college. My senior year I was accused by executives of a major corporation of industrial espionage. The details are too complex to explain. But the professor involved decided that if I told him I was innocent, it was true, and defended me without reservation. All charges were dropped and I later became employed by that same corporation.

What blessings occur from uncompromising obedience to God's command,
"Thou shalt not steal"!

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