

## A LOOK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT

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*// Read Acts 4:32-5:11*

What strikes you about the attitudes and behaviour of the first Christians compared to those commonly held today? Why not take 5 minutes to rewrite Acts 4:32-37 as if it was a report on the church today, rather than the 1st Century church. What shocks you, and what encourages you?

How do the attitudes of 4:32-37 compare with those of Ananias and Sapphira in 5:1-11?

*'There were no needy persons among them.'* (4:34) You may like to take some time to think about any 'needy people' that you are aware of in church. What things can you do (either as an individual or as a group) to help meet those needs?

How does this passage rule out both communism and consumerism?

In 1958, Martin Luther King said these words:

*'Any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.'*

Is he right? How can such a reality transform our attitudes and behaviour?

In 4:32, we read that 'All the believers were one in heart and mind.' What do you think this means? In what ways does this unity challenge us and spur us on? Why is this so important when we think about generosity with our money & possessions?

study notes  
week nine

**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

### WAY IN

*Reflection: Everyone knows that stealing is wrong. And yet, as you come to this commandment, you might like to ask God to reveal areas in your life in which you have not treated people and their property in a way that honours God. After praying, sit for a few minutes in silence before beginning the study.*

Have you ever had anything stolen? What happened and how did it feel? If you were to meet the thief now, how would you feel about them? What would you say?

### A LOOK AT EXODUS

*// Read Exodus 20:15*

What do you think are the most common forms of theft that we are aware of in our society? Can you think of any other, more subtle, acts of theft that we don't commonly recognise? Are there ways in which we are ever complicit in these?

Why do you think that this commandment was given? Who does it protect? Why?

Read the following passages: Isaiah 1:21-23, Amos 8:4-6, Micah 2:1-2. The Old Testament often links theft and the effect it has on people, especially those that have been treated unfairly. For the community of God's people they are to treat each other fairly and with respect. What strikes you about these passages?

In James 1:17, we read that 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father'. How does awareness of this change how you view the things you own? How does it affect your attitude to other people's property?

If everything we have is from God, and for God, then we are merely stewards of everything we 'own'. Our primary task is to use all we have for God's purposes. What might this look like in terms of the following:

*a) Time; b) Skills; c) Finances; d) Relationships; e) Family life*

How does 1Timothy 6:7 help us with doing this?

*// Read Luke 19:1-10*

One of the most hated things in the first century was that Jewish tax-collectors like Zaccheus were stealing from fellow Jews on behalf of the Romans, and pocketed any excess themselves. This theft was so despised as were the tax-collectors themselves (note v7: 'sinner'). What is interesting about Zaccheus' response to Jesus in verse 8 (see Exodus 22:1-4)?

It is notable that having met Jesus, Zaccheus becomes aware of his sin and then actively chooses to correct his behaviour by generously repaying those he has stolen from. So, he encounters Jesus and then changes his behaviour with radical generosity. If you are a Christian, what does this mean about the kind of lives we should be living?

How does Malachi 3:6-10 impact this? What does this life of radical generosity look like today?

### QUOTE TO REFLECT ON

*'These are the days in which it is urgent that Christians function as a community of economic memory. We must keep alive the older perspectives whereby people had a clear understanding... of their mandate from God to serve as stewards in the human household. This could be one of the most important services that we can perform in the contemporary economic milieu: to remind our fellow humans about whose creatures they really are and about what best contributes to our true profit.'* (Richard Mouw)

Is he right? How should we go about this?