

Question: What does the Bible mean when it talks about “man-stealers” in 1 Timothy 1:10?

Answer: Let’s explore the relevant passage:

1 Timothy 1:8-10

[8] We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

[9] We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,

[10] the sexually immoral, those practicing homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

Theological Insights on “Man-Stealers”:

The term “man-stealers” (translated as “enslavers” in many bible versions or “kidnappers” refers to those who illegally abduct or steal people, often for purposes of slavery or exploitation. This was a severe moral and social evil in biblical times, and the Bible speaks harshly against it. It is closely linked to human trafficking

and slavery, both of which are considered grave sins in the eyes of God.

Biblical Context:

1 Timothy 1:10 gives us a list of sinful behaviors that the law was meant to address, and “man-stealers” (or enslavers) are explicitly included. The word here indicates the kind of sin that violates the dignity of a human being and disrupts God’s intention for humanity to live in freedom and mutual respect.

The Apostle Paul underscores that the law is intended for those who practice these evil deeds, highlighting that the commandments of God are meant to keep such sinful behaviors in check.

Old Testament Background:

The idea of stealing people, or kidnapping, is not a new concept and is condemned in the Old Testament as well.

Exodus 21:16 : “Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper’s possession.”

This law emphasizes the gravity of human trafficking and the severe consequences for those who steal people for exploitation.

Deuteronomy 24:7, “If someone is caught kidnapping a fellow Israelite and treats them as a slave or sells them, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you.”

This echoes the seriousness of the crime of stealing people. The punishment is death, showing that God values the sanctity of life and human freedom. Kidnapping was considered an affront to God’s justice and the dignity of the person created in His image (Genesis 1:27).

New Testament Teachings:

While the Old Testament law prescribes death for the act of kidnapping or man-stealing, the New Testament, particularly in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, does not promote physical punishment for such crimes in the same way. Instead, the focus is on addressing these crimes through legal systems

(Romans 13:1-7) and promoting justice within society. However, the gravity of the offense is no less—man-stealing is still considered a grave sin, deserving of moral and legal condemnation.

In Romans 13:3-4, Paul explains the role of government in punishing evil:

Romans 13:3-4, “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

This supports the idea that crimes like man-stealing should be dealt with by the authorities to maintain justice in society.

Modern Implications:

In modern terms, “man-stealers” would refer to human traffickers

and those who exploit people for slavery, forced labor, sexual exploitation, or illegal organ trade. This evil continues to be a serious issue globally. As Christians, we are called to stand against such injustice. While we are not permitted to take the law into our own hands, we must report such crimes to the authorities, pray for the victims, and work toward societal healing and the elimination of these evils (Matthew 5:13-16).

The Role of the Church and Prayer:

Though the New Testament does not advocate for death penalties, it encourages believers to fight against such wickedness through legal and spiritual means. We are called to be the light of the world and to act as advocates for the oppressed (Isaiah 1:17, Proverbs 31:8-9).

Additionally, we should pray for God to remove the spirit of evil that fuels human trafficking and exploitation in our communities. Through prayer and action, we can help bring about justice, protect the vulnerable, and ultimately work toward healing in our societies.

In conclusion, “man-stealers” in 1 Timothy 1:10 highlights one of the most grievous sins—stealing people for exploitation. The Bible

condemns such acts, emphasizing their destructive nature. As Christians, we must work against this evil through legal means, prayer, and advocacy for the victims, while trusting that God will bless our efforts in purging such wickedness from our communities.

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