



Exodus 20:15

PROTECTING PROPERTY

The command “you shall not steal” assumes that there is something to steal—something that belongs to someone else and not to you. You should not steal someone else’s ox or donkey—or his car, cell phone, or computer—because it belongs to him and not to you. Therefore, the eighth commandment assumes private ownership of property. Property was to be owned by individuals, not by the government or by society as a whole... The eighth commandment is unique. It protects property and possessions. By implication, we are right to think it also protects another person’s time, talents, and opportunities—everything over which people have been given stewardship. We are not to steal someone else’s property, time, talents, or opportunities.

—Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics*

The Ten Commandments reveal God’s righteous character. They also summarize the foundational principles for ethics and for life. These principles are not only for our own well-being but also for the survival of the community as a whole. The society that neglects and rejects these basic moral principles will eventually destroy itself.

THE COMMAND

You shall not steal. (Hebrew, *lo tignob*)

- **This command prohibits the stealing of _____.**

If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep... If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double. (Exodus 22:1, 4)

- **This command prohibits the stealing of _____.**

Whoever kidnaps a person must be put to death, whether he sells him or the person is found in his possession. (Exodus 21:16; cf. Gen. 40:15)

- **This command prohibits the _____ that often accompanies the defrauding of others and taking what is theirs.**

You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. (Lev. 19:11)

Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. (2 Sam 15:6; cf. Gen 31:20)

Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight... Use honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. (Leviticus 19:13, 36a; cf. Prov. 11:1; 20:10)

No one has to teach young children the injustice of theft; they know from an early age that to lose a possession to someone else unjustly is wrong. —R.C. Sproul

Steal. Hebrew, *ganab*, “to take what rightfully belongs to another by stealth, fraud, or force; also to deceive (lit, ‘to steal the heart’).”

He who steals a little steals with the same wish as he who steals much, but with less power.

—Plato (427-347 BC)

A system of private property protects for each person a sphere of moral self-supervision and self-determination against the threat of enslavement or exploitation.

—David Little

There is a wrong of taking because there is a right of keeping... Ownership matches a facet of our human beingness. Stealing things which other people own violates more than civil rule; it violates persons.

—Lewis Smedes

There are many types of thieves. The worst of them all is the one who 'steals the mind' of people.

—Bava Kamma (AD 190-230)

THE REASON

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

—Genesis 1:28

- We are created for relationship and _____.
- Having dominion gives each of us the _____ of governing, managing, utilizing, improving, stewarding, and caring for the things which God has given us.
- Thus, stealing is a rejection of my responsibilities and a violation of the boundaries which God established between you and me.

THE PRINCIPLES

1. Private property is a God-given _____ (cf. Deut. 19:14).
2. Any governmental system that eliminates private property and takes things from people for its own power or to redistribute to others is oppressive and guilty of stealing (cf. 1 Samuel 8:10-18).
3. God has established two primary ways by which we come to own something—by a gift from love or by wages from work. Stealing violates both of these legitimate means (Ephesians 4:28).
4. My life will be evaluated by how well I _____ the things which God has given me (Matt. 25:14-30; cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-5).
5. Learning to be a generous giver—not a greedy taker or stingy hoarder—is one of the best ways to obey the spirit of the eighth commandment (Prov. 11:24-25; 2 Cor. 9:6-7; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

The drive to create, produce, and enjoy useful products comes from a morally good God-given instinct that he placed within the human race before there was any sin in the world. —Wayne Grudem

Steal a little, they throw you in jail; Steal a lot, they make you king. —Bob Dylan

The theory of communism may be summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property. —Karl Marx (1818-83)

There is no difference between communism and socialism, except in the means of achieving the same ultimate end: communism seeks to enslave men by force, socialism by vote. It is merely the difference between murder and suicide. —Ayn Rand (1905-82)

The total number of victims of communism over the last 100 years is close to 100 million. That makes communism the greatest catastrophe in human history. —David Satter

There is no more insidious evil sapping away the integrity and uprightness of the nations of the earth today than this lust of possession without toil... —G. Campbell Morgan

I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker. —Helen Keller

The world asks, "What does a man own?" Christ asks, "How does he use it?" —Andrew Murray