

Stop, Thief!
Exodus 20:15
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Tim Jones, parish priest of St. Lawrence and St. Hilda, told his congregation in York, Northern England, “My advice, as a Christian priest, is to shoplift,” according to a CNN report December 22, 2009. He went on to explain: “I do not offer such advice because I think that stealing is a good thing, or because I think it is harmless, for it is neither. I would ask that they do not steal from small family businesses, but from large national businesses, knowing that the costs are ultimately passed on to the rest of us in the form of higher prices.”

We must be reading from different Bibles, because in my Bible, Exodus 20:15 says, “You shall not steal.” Again, this command is a simple, two-word Hebrew phrase with a wide application even for our world today. It is especially applicable to Christians.

The Prohibition

This command prohibits taking something from another without permission. Let’s think about some of the forms of stealing:

1. Robbery
2. Kidnapping
3. Shoplifting, often called the “Five-Finger Discount”
4. Identity theft
5. Employee theft
 - Employee theft is called the fastest-growing crime in America, according to the FBI. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that 75 percent of employees steal from the workplace and that most do so repeatedly. One-third of all U.S. corporate bankruptcies are directly caused by employee theft.
 - a. We can steal time from our employers.
 - b. We can steal goods from our employers.
6. Fraud, which is deception for personal gain or to damage another
 - a. Insurance fraud
 - b. Telemarketing fraud
 - c. E-mail fraud—e-mails telling you that there is a large sum of money available
 - d. Political fraud
7. Cheating
 - a. Cheating on tests
 - According to surveys in *U.S. News and World Report*, 80 percent of “high-achieving” high school students admit to cheating, while 51 percent of high school students did not believe cheating was wrong. The article said 75 percent of college students admitted cheating. Almost 85 percent of college students said cheating was necessary to get ahead.
 - b. Cheating on taxes (Matt. 22:21)
8. Plagiarism, which is the use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.
9. Copyright theft
 - Downloading music and movies on the Internet without paying fees or without permission from the owner is copyright theft. The same is true of copying CDs to give to friends.
10. Failure to pay debts
11. Gambling
 - Gambling is nothing more than legalized stealing where a person takes from another without giving anything in exchange. These are just a few of the ways we can steal.

The Theology of Stealing

Whether you know it or not, there is a theology that underlies stealing.

- I cannot trust in God's provision; therefore, I will take whatever I want or need, when I want to and how I want to.
- I do not love other people; therefore, I will take what God has given to them so I can have it.

Think about it for a moment. Those two underlying theological premises are in diametric opposition to the two great commands Jesus gave in Matthew 22:37–40.

Biblical Theology

What two important theological principles can we glean from this passage?

1. Private property is a biblical concept.

The right to private property did not originate with capitalism; it originated and derives its authority from God.

- a. We need to respect the private property of others
- b. We need to return or make restitution for goods that we have taken without permission. No wonder Karl Marx hated religion so much. It countered his social philosophy.

2. Hard work has been and always will be God's plan for our lives.

Work is not the result of the Fall. Before the Fall, God made it clear that the man and woman were to work in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15).

3. Hard work provides us with the opportunity to share with those in need and accomplish God's purposes (Eph. 4:28).

Christian author Jerry Bridges has observed that there are three basic attitudes we can take toward possessions. The first says, "What's yours is mine; I'll take it." This is the attitude of the thief. The second says, "What's mine is mine; I'll keep it." Since we are selfish by nature, this is the attitude that most people have most of the time. The third attitude—the godly attitude—says, "What's mine is God's; I'll share it."

Before we close our look at the seventh commandment, I want to look at one very serious form of theft.

Grand Theft: Stealing from God

- We steal from God when we fail to give Him our worship (1 Chr. 16:27, 28; Ps. 95:6).
- We steal from God when we do not give our tithes to Him (Mal. 3:7–9).
- We steal from God when we receive His saving grace and then do not tell others about Him (2 Cor. 5:11–21).
- We steal from God when we don't use the gifts and talents He has given us to honor Him and minister to others (1 Pet. 4:10).
- We steal from God when we fail to use our time wisely for His glory (Ps. 90:12; Eph. 5:15, 16; Col. 4:5).
- We steal from God when we claim ownership of what we have instead of acknowledging that all we have is from God (1 Chr. 29:14; Ps. 24:1).
- We steal from God when we fail to bring glory to God (Is. 43:7; Prov. 30:9).

The Ultimate Thief

We steal from God, but I want you to know that someone is stealing from you, and you may not even know it.

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

—John 10:10

Satan wants to steal your life and take it to hell. Jesus wants to give you abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven. Would you rather follow the life-stealer or the life-giver?