

Ten Commandments
Lesson 9 Article

The command prohibits stealing of any kind. The concern here is not so much for the rights of the individual to property, as for the destructive impact of stealing on relationships within the covenant community. Thus the penalty for theft in the O.T. is not jail, but restitution, by paying back at least twice what was stolen (cf. 22:9). Payment made to the victim is intended to restore harmony by balancing the books, and is not punitive.¹

A person has a right to life, freedom and property. These rights are respected and protected by the commandment not to steal. No society can establish trust when theft and burglary are rife. Terrible pain and disruption come from such crimes as kidnapping and slavery. Death itself can result from the theft of someone's livelihood or savings.²

Stealing is a double sin. It is a sin against God, for it accuses him of not giving adequately, and it is a sin against love, for it is a denial of loving one's neighbour as oneself. At the same time it is very often a condemnation of the one stolen from, for he has not met the need of another from his abundance. We need to balance this command with, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). One form of stealing, which is all too common among Christians, is our failure to give others all the praise and credit they deserve, for they think that if they do it, they in turn may not receive their fair share. They forget that it is the heavenly Father's estimate and not man's that really matters.³

By these words the right of property received formal acknowledgment, and a protest was made by anticipation against the maxim of modern socialists—"La propriété, c'est le vol." Instinctively man feels that some things become his, especially by toil expended on them, and that, by parity of reasoning, some things become his neighbor's. Our third duty towards our neighbor is to respect his rights in these. Society, in every community that has hitherto existed, has recognized private property; and social order may be said to be built upon it. Government exists mainly for the security of men's lives and properties; and anarchy would supervene if either could be with impunity attacked. Theft has always been punished in every state; and even the Spartan youth was not acquitted of blame unless he could plead that the State had stopped his supplies of food, and bid him forage for himself.⁴

¹ Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible reader's companion* (electronic ed.) (64). Wheaton: Victor Books.

² Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.) (53–54). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

³ Ellison, H. L. (1982). *Exodus*. The Daily Study Bible Series (114). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

⁴ *Exodus Vol. II*. 1909 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.). The Pulpit Commentary (134). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.