

The **second** reason is the peculiar danger involved in theft, for no sin is so dangerous. After committing other sins a person may quickly repent, for instance, of murder when his anger cools, or of fornication when his passion subsides, and so on for others; but even if one repents of this sin, **one does not easily make the necessary satisfaction for it.** This is owing to the obligation of **restitution** and the **duty to make up for what loss** is incurred by the rightful owner. And **all this is above and beyond the obligation to repent for the sin itself:** “Woe to him who heaps together what is not his own; for how long will he load himself with thick clay?” [Hab 2:6 Vulgate; “clay” should be “debts”]. For thick clay is that from which one cannot easily extricate himself.

The **third** reason is the uselessness of stolen goods in that they are of no spiritual value: “Treasures of wickedness shall profit nothing” [Prov 10:2]. Wealth can indeed be useful for almsgiving and offering of sacrifices, for “the ransom of a man’s life are his riches” [Prov 13:8]. But it is said of stolen goods: “I am the Lord that love judgment, and hate robbery in a holocaust” [Is 41:8]. And again: “He who offers sacrifice of the goods of the poor is as one who sacrifices the son in the presence of his father” [Sir 34:24].

The **fourth** reason is that the results of theft are peculiarly harmful to the thief in that they lead to his loss of other goods. It is not unlike the mixture of fire and straw: “Fire shall devour their tabernacles, who love to take bribes” [Job 15:34]. And it ought to be known that **a thief may lose not only his own soul, but also the souls of his children, since they are bound to make restitution.**

THE LAW OF GOD THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



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The Ten Commandments

Commandment 7



THE LAW OF GOD

The Ten Commandments or Decalogue (10 words) was given by God on Mt. Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai) to Moses around 1280 BC. They are the core of the moral teachings of Israel and have come down to Christianity as part of Divine Revelation. The Church in commenting on the Commandments sees in them the totality of the negative and positive moral law, the things we should not do, as well as the things we should do. This is to say, they embody the entire natural law, what reason can discover of morality from the nature of the world and man. However, as St. Thomas Aquinas noted, not every society, much less every man, discovers the entire natural law, so God has revealed it in the Commandments so it could be known with certainty by all men, of every society, and every age.

The Bible gives two versions of the Ten Commandments, in essential content identical, one in Exodus and another in Deuteronomy. The enumeration of the commandments (which is number one, which is two etc.) are traditional and neither contained in the texts nor obvious. The Catholic Church has traditionally used the Deuteronomy account and followed the division of the text given in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Scriptures made by second century BC Jews in Egypt and used by the early Church as its Old Testament. The Anglican Church and the Lutheran Church also use this account. The other Reformation churches use the Exodus listing, and adopted the Jewish enumeration of the Hebrew text. The Commandments are probably best known from the traditional formulas used in catechesis.

Commentary is by Saint Thomas Aquinas. By universal consent, Thomas Aquinas is the preeminent spokesman of the Catholic tradition of reason and of divine revelation. He is one of the great teachers of the medieval Catholic Church, honored with the titles Doctor of the Church and Angelic Doctor.

Commandment 7

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You Shall Not Steal.

The Lord specifically forbids injury to our neighbor in the Commandments. Thus, “You shall not kill” forbids us to injure our neighbor in his own person; “You shall not commit adultery” forbids injury to the person to whom one is bound in marriage; and now the Commandment, “You shall not steal,” forbids us to injure our neighbor in his goods. This Commandment forbids any worldly goods whatsoever to be taken away wrongfully.

Theft is committed in a number of ways. **First**, by taking stealthily: “If the good man of the house knew at what hour the thief would come” [Mt 24:43]. This is an act wholly blameworthy because it is a form of treachery. “Confusion... is upon the thief” [Sir 5:17].

Secondly, by taking with violence, and this is an even greater injury: “They have violently robbed the fatherless” [Job 24:9]. Among such that do such things are wicked kings and rulers: “Her princes are in the midst of her as roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves, they left nothing for the morning” [Zeph 3:3]. They act contrary to God’s will who wishes a rule according to justice: “By Me kings reign and lawgivers decree just things” [Prov 8:15]. Sometimes they do such things stealthily and sometimes with violence: “Your princes are faithless companions of thieves, they all love bribes, they run after rewards” [Is 1:23]. At times they steal by enacting laws and enforcing them for profit only: “Woe to those who make wicked laws” [Is 10:1]. And St. Augustine says that every wrongful usurpation is theft when he asks: “What are thrones but forms of thievery?” [*City of God* IV, 4].

Thirdly, theft is committed by not paying wages that are due: “The wages of him whom you have hired shall not abide by you until the morning” [Lev 19:13]. This means that a man must pay every one his due, whether he be prince, prelate, or cleric, etc.: “Render therefore to all men their dues. Tribute, to whom tribute is due, custom, to whom custom” [Rm 13:7]. Hence, we are bound to give a return to rulers who guard our safety.

The **fourth** kind of theft is fraud in buying and selling: “You shall not have divers weights in your bag, a greater and a less” [Deut 25:13]. And again: “Do no unjust thing in judgment, in rule, in weight, or in measure” [Lev 19:35-36]. All this is directed against the keepers of wine-shops who mix water with the wine. Usury is also forbidden: “Who shall dwell in your tabernacle, or who shall rest in your holy hill?... He who has not put his money out to usury” [Ps 14:1,5]. This is also against money-changers who commit many frauds, and against the sellers of cloth and other goods.

Fifthly, theft is committed by those who buy promotions to positions of temporal or spiritual honor. “The riches which he swallowed, he shall vomit up, and God shall draw them out of his belly” [Job 20:15], has reference to temporal position. Thus, all tyrants who hold a kingdom or province or land by force are thieves, and are held to restitution. Concerning spiritual dignities: “Amen, amen, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the sheepfold but climbs up another way is a thief and a robber” [Jn 10:1]. Therefore, they who commit simony are thieves.

Why stealing must be avoided

“You shall not steal.” This Commandment, as has been said, forbids taking things wrongfully, and we can bring forth many reasons why it is given. The **first** is because of the gravity of this sin, which is likened to murder: “The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; he who defrauds them of it is a man of blood” [Sir 24:25]. And again: “He who sheds blood and he who defrauds the laborer of his hire are brothers” [Sir 24:27].