

The Seventh Commandment

Thou shalt not steal.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not take our neighbor's money or goods, nor get them by false ware or dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and business.

1. How does faith in the God of the First Commandment (see also the 1st Article of the Creed) regulate how we feel about our, and others', things? How does this exercise our faith? *Heb 13:5–6; Luke 9:57–62; Luke 19:1–10.*
2. God protects our things from others, but also our hearts from ourselves, by this commandment. How? *1 Tim 6:6–10; Matt 6:19–34; Luke 16:1–16; Matt 5:38–48; Matt 19:16–30.*

From Luther's *Large Catechism* (I: Ten Commandments)

^{223–224} After your person and spouse temporal property comes next. That also God wishes to have protected, and He has commanded that no one shall subtract from, or curtail, his neighbor's possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get possession of another's property wrongfully, which briefly comprehends all kinds of advantage in all sorts of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. Now, this is indeed quite a widespread and common vice, but so little regarded and observed that it exceeds all measure, so that if all who are thieves, and yet do not wish to be called such, were to be hanged on gallows, the world would soon be devastated, and there would be a lack both of executioners and gallows. For, as we have just said, to steal is to signify not only to empty our neighbor's coffer and pockets, but to be grasping in the market, in all stores, booths, wine- and beer- cellars, workshops, and, in short, wherever there is trading or taking and giving of money for merchandise or labor...

²²⁶ All these are far worse than sneak-thieves, against whom we can guard with locks and bolts, or who, if apprehended, are treated in such a manner that they will not do the same again. But against these no one can guard, no one dare even look awry at them or accuse them of theft...²³¹ This is, in short, the course of the world: whoever can steal and rob openly goes free and secure, unmolested by any one, and even demands that he be honored. Meanwhile the little sneak-thieves, who have once trespassed, must bear the shame and punishment to render the former godly and honorable. But let them know that in the sight of God they are the greatest thieves, and that He will punish them as they are worthy and deserve...

²⁴⁶ Now, whoever is willing to be instructed, let him know that this is the commandment of God, and that it must not be treated as a jest. For although you despise us, defraud, steal, and rob, we will indeed manage to endure your haughtiness, suffer, and, according to the Lord's Prayer, forgive and show pity...

^{250–251} [B]riefly, in a summary, as in the former commandments, it is herewith forbidden, in the first place, to do our neighbor any injury or wrong (in whatever manner supposable, by curtailing, forestalling, and withholding his possessions and property), or even to consent or allow such a thing, but to interpose and prevent it. And, on the other hand, it is commanded that we advance and improve his possessions, and in case he suffers want, that we help, communicate, and lend both to friends and foes.