



Exodus 20:15

(15) Thou shalt not steal.

King James Version

By itself, the command seems clear enough, but it has important ramifications to life. It affirms God's mind regarding a right Americans may take for granted because we live with this right without thinking about it very much—until someone steals from us. This commandment is God's affirmation that every human being has the right to private property and that others have no right granted by [God](#) to take that property from them without lawful permission.

In contrast, communists tell [the world](#) that owning property *is* theft. In other words, everything belongs to everybody! Not so by a long shot. The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness ([Psalm 24:1](#)), and He gives it to whoever He pleases. In addition, He extends the right to all men to work *lawfully* to pursue ownership of their own private property. Once we understand this commandment, it removes all doubt that communism, in which all property is actually owned collectively by the state, is a form of government that does not have God's approval.

In addition to affirming the right to own property, this commandment, in its spirit, also covers the principle of generosity more directly than any other, and it does this by condemning its opposite. From this commandment therefore arises the principles of the *give* and *get* ways of living life. Which will we follow in our lives?

This commandment covers much more than mere thievery. It includes deliberate and accidental damage done to another's property, as well as fraudulent retention of it through [carelessness](#) or indifference. It also delves into the questions of whether wealth was acquired fairly in business and

whether people are getting a fair share of the good things of life. In addition, it poses the question: Is the rich man wealthy due to merit, or have the rules of the game been cleverly, avariciously, and unlawfully tilted in his favor so that the few privileged can continuously steal from the powerless? This latter principle is a central theme of the [book of Amos](#), showing that abuse of this commandment is a major reason [God's wrath](#) is falling on the people of Israel.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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