



[Ephesians 4:28](#)

(28) Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

New King James Version

God's intention is clear. We are to gain property and possessions by honest work and/or inheritance from those who have the right to give them. We must come into possession of things in a way [God](#) approves.

The verb "labor" indicates exertion to the point of exhaustion. In addition, Paul admonishes us not merely to work to satisfy our personal needs and desires, but also to be able to give freely any excess to others in need. The admonition implies distributing the excess personally rather than indirectly through an agency. He adds in [Acts 20:35](#), "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord [Jesus](#), that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Stealing is totally against the grain of God's way of life. Our God is a working, creating God ([John 5:17](#)), and we cannot be in His image if we are gaining possessions through stealing. In the spirit of [God's law](#), a person not only steals by taking another's possessions, but also by refusing to work in order to share and give to others in need.

This commandment does not reach its fullest expression until the ninth and tenth are added to it. Stealing frequently has its genesis in a desire to have something one has no money to purchase, or the unwillingness to work [patiently](#) until one does. Deception then enters. A person will try to acquire a desired possession in such a way that others will think he procured it honorably. We can stop this [sin](#) at any point in the process, but few make any effort to restrain their lust, deceit, and itching fingers.

Robert Kahn was correct in saying, "There are a hundred ways to steal but only one way to be honest." In order not to steal, we must be scrupulously honest. What good is

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it if we are one-half or three-quarters honest? What if God was honest with us only part of the time? Could we trust Him? Can others really trust us if we are only partially honest? Do we lock our doors because we trust everybody? Thievery creates distrust, fear, and suspicion, destabilizing institutions and communities.

The reason we should refrain from stealing is not just to avoid sinning. This in itself is very good, but scrupulous honesty produces integrity, wholeness. Such integrity enables us to live confidently before God and man. The apostle John writes in [1 John 3:18-19](#): "My little children, let us not [love](#) in word or in tongue, but in deed and in [truth](#). And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." Personal integrity is a major source of positive, confident living.

A conscience can be either a good or bad guide because it is educated by an individual's experiences. Practicing scrupulous honesty builds character and educates the conscience in the right direction so that it will send the right prompting at the right time. We cannot allow ourselves room to rationalize stealing. We must be scrupulously honest always, or our character will descend on a path of degeneracy.

There are hundreds of ways to steal, and dozens of excuses for stealing, but only one way and one reason and one law of integrity. That way is honor, that reason is a clear conscience, and that law is God's. He says, "You shall not steal." Never. In any way. From any one.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
[The Eighth Commandment \(1997\)](#)

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