

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments

Session 9: Commandment 8: Do Not Steal

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

1) Abstract:

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's lecture **explores the eighth commandment, "Do Not Steal,"** within the context of the Ten Commandments and ancient law codes. He highlights the **diminishing severity of punishment for theft** compared to other offenses like murder or adultery, as seen in the progression of the commandments and historical legal systems such as Hammurabi's Code and Old Testament law. Tomasino emphasizes that **Old Testament law places a higher value on human life than property**, with capital punishment for theft reserved primarily for kidnapping, unlike Hammurabi's stricter code. He further discusses **the various forms of theft, from physical robbery to modern digital piracy and even wasting time at work or withholding tithes**, ultimately arguing that stealing demonstrates a **lack of trust in God's provision** and bypasses God's intended methods for distributing resources, primarily through diligent work. The lecture concludes by underscoring that **God is the ultimate owner of all things**, and humans are merely stewards.

2) Briefing Document:

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Diminishing Severity of Injury in the Ten Commandments: Tomasino posits that the Ten Commandments, as they progress, show a "diminishing sense of directness of injury" in their interpersonal injunctions. While murder and adultery carry extreme consequences, stealing, though still serious, is presented with less direct injury. However, this doesn't diminish the importance of property rights, which society needs laws to protect, especially for the less powerful.

2. Historical Legal Contexts of Theft:

- **Code of Hammurabi:** This ancient law code is highlighted for its extreme severity regarding theft, often imposing the death penalty. Examples include:

- Stealing from the temple or court, or receiving stolen goods, was a capital offense.
- Breaking into a house to steal resulted in death at the point of entry and burial there.
- Robbery was also a capital offense; if the robber wasn't caught, the community compensated the victim.
- Tomasino states, "Hammurabi's code probably has the strictest laws regarding stealing of any of the other ancient law codes that we have."
- **Old Testament Law:** In contrast to Hammurabi's code, Old Testament law generally punished most theft with fines.
- Restitution was mandatory; if the thief had nothing, they could be sold into temporary bondage to work off the debt.
- Double restitution was required if a stolen animal (ox, donkey, or sheep) was found alive in the thief's possession.

3. The Special Case of Human Theft (Kidnapping): One type of theft that consistently warranted a capital offense in the Old Testament was the "theft of a human being," likely referring to kidnapping for the purpose of selling into slavery. This underscores the principle that "people trump possessions." Tomasino mentions a scholarly argument that *all* Ten Commandments were originally capital offenses, and thus "you shall not steal" specifically referred to kidnapping, though he views this as "a big leap of reason."

4. The Principle: "People Trump Possessions" / Life Over Property: A fundamental principle evident in Old Testament law regarding theft is the supremacy of human life and well-being over material possessions.

- "People are more important than possessions."
- Unlike some ancient laws that differentiated penalties based on social status or the sacredness of the stolen item, the Bible "doesn't make that distinction."
- There was "no open season on thieves in Israel." While self-defense during a nighttime break-in was permissible ("If a thief is caught breaking in, and he is struck, and he dies, there is no blood guilt"), killing a thief *after* the immediate

threat has passed, or for the sole purpose of recovering property, was considered murder ("But if the sun rises on the thief, the killer has blood guilt").

- The example of Shedrick Babbles in Dallas, 1995, who killed teenagers for stealing hubcaps, is used to illustrate how modern legal interpretations (in this case, Texas law) can contradict biblical principles where "Life is a more basic right than ownership."

5. Stealing as an Insult to God and Lack of Trust in His Provision: Beyond hurting one's neighbor, stealing is profoundly theological.

- **God as Ultimate Owner:** "According to the Bible, God not only created all things in heaven and earth, but ultimately God is the owner of all things in heaven and earth." This includes "the cattle on a thousand hills." A thief "undercuts that process" of God's rightful distribution.
- **Lack of Trust:** Stealing "demonstrates a lack of trust in God's provision." Instead of relying on God to provide, a thief takes matters into their own hands. Psalm 62:8-10 advises, "Do not put trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods."
- **Bypassing God's Methods:** Stealing "bypasses God's methods of creating and distributing goods," which are primarily linked to work and labor.

6. Work as God's Established Method of Provision: Tomasino emphasizes that work is not a curse but God's intended method for humans to achieve blessings and meet their needs.

- **Work in Eden:** Genesis 2:15 shows man was placed in Eden "to work it and to keep it," indicating work was part of paradise, not a result of sin.
- **Work After the Fall:** While sin made work harder ("by the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food"), there is "no exoneration from work."
- **Condemnation of Sloth:** Proverbs 21:25 states, "the craving of a sluggard will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work."
- **New Testament Affirmation:** Paul's command in 2 Thessalonians: "anyone unwilling to work should not eat." He also urges, "those who steal must give

up stealing; rather, let them labor, doing good work with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy" (Ephesians 4:28).

7. Modern and Subtle Forms of Theft: Tomasino applies the commandment to contemporary contexts, highlighting less obvious forms of theft that Christians might rationalize:

- **Stealing from Large Corporations:** The argument that stealing from "oppressors" like Walmart is not a sin is refuted, as it still violates the principle of not stealing and negatively impacts the thief's character.
- **Computer Crime/Piracy:** Copying software, downloading music/videos without payment, and sharing copyrighted material are explicitly identified as theft, particularly harmful to "smaller people" trying to earn revenue.
- **"Sleeping on the Job":** Wasting time at work or not performing duties while collecting a paycheck is considered a form of theft. Tomasino cites studies indicating significant amounts of wasted time by employees, linking it to higher prices and company struggles.
- **Stealing from God (Withholding Tithes and Offerings):** Malachi 3 is referenced, where God accuses the nation of "robbing me, in tithes and offerings." Tomasino uses an analogy of a cousin defaulting on rent for a cottage to illustrate how withholding from God what is "owed" (or agreed upon through biblical principle) is theft. This highlights how one's use of money reflects their relationship with God.

8. Summary Principle: Stewardship and Trust: The core principle behind "Do Not Steal" is recognizing God's ultimate ownership of all things and our role as stewards. God has the right to dictate how we earn, use, and share money. Adherence to this principle leads to "more joy in life" and fosters trust in God's continued provision.

3) Study Guide:

Study Guide: The Eighth Commandment – Do Not Steal

I. Overview of the Eighth Commandment

- **Placement and Severity:** The Eighth Commandment, "You Shall Not Steal," is presented by Dr. Tomasino as having a diminishing sense of directness of injury compared to earlier commandments like killing or adultery. While still serious, it is generally considered less severe than those involving direct harm to life or marital relationships.
- **Property Rights:** This commandment inherently emphasizes the importance of property rights, suggesting that society needs laws to prevent the powerful from taking from the less powerful.
- **Biblical Emphasis:** Property rights are explicitly built into the Ten Commandments and are a significant focus in the Old Testament law codes.

II. Historical and Legal Contexts of Theft

- **Ancient Law Codes: Code of Hammurabi:** This code is highlighted for its extreme severity regarding theft, often prescribing capital punishment for various forms of stealing, especially from temples or the state, or for housebreaking. It also punishes those who receive stolen goods.
- **Ur-Nammu's Code:** Mentioned as being less severe in its penalties than Hammurabi's.
- **Old Testament (Israelite Law): General Penalties:** Unlike Hammurabi's code, most theft in the Old Testament was punished with fines and restitution.
- **Inability to Pay:** If a thief could not make restitution, they could be sold into temporary bondage to work off their debt.
- **Capital Offense:** The *only* type of theft that typically resulted in capital punishment in the Old Testament was the stealing (kidnapping) of a human being, particularly for the purpose of selling them into slavery. This underscores the principle that "people trump possessions."

- **Distinction in Response to Theft:Nighttime Break-in:** Killing a thief caught breaking into one's home at night (when intent is unknown) resulted in no "blood guilt." This protects the right to self-defense and family protection.
- **Daytime or Apprehensible Thief:** If a thief was caught during the day, or if they could be apprehended and made to make restitution, killing them was considered murder, incurring "blood guilt." This emphasizes that vengeance is out of proportion to the wrong suffered and that property is not worth a life.
- **No Class Distinction in Punishment:** The Bible does not differentiate penalties based on the social status of the thief or the victim, unlike some other ancient law codes where stealing from higher classes or temples meant harsher penalties. "People are more important than property."

III. Core Principles Behind the Commandment

- **People Trump Possessions:** This is a fundamental principle in Israelite law regarding theft. Human life and freedom are valued above material possessions. The example of the Texas case (Shedrick Babbles) contrasts sharply with this biblical principle.
- **Trust in God's Provision:** Stealing fundamentally demonstrates a lack of trust in God to provide for one's needs. Instead of waiting on or working for God's provision, a thief bypasses God's established methods for distributing goods.
- **God as Ultimate Owner:** The Bible asserts that God is the ultimate owner of all things in heaven and earth. We are merely stewards of His creation. Stealing is an insult to God because it usurps His right to determine how things are distributed.

IV. God's Established Methods for Distribution of Goods

- **Work/Labor:Genesis 2:15:** Work was part of God's original design for humanity in Eden, not a curse. It is a means of achieving God's blessings and participating in creation.
- **Genesis 3:19 (Post-Curse):** While work became harder after the Fall ("by the sweat of your brow"), it remained the ordained method for obtaining sustenance.
- **Proverbs 21:25:** Condemns the "sluggard" who refuses to work.

- **2 Thessalonians and Ephesians 4:28 (New Testament):** Paul emphasizes the importance of working for one's living and using one's labor to share with the needy, directly contrasting it with stealing.

V. Modern Applications and Subtle Forms of Theft

- **Explicit Theft:** Robbery (using force) and burglary (using secrecy/treachery) are recognized as distinct forms of theft. The Bible views theft with force (oppression) as more serious.
- **Oppression as Theft: Armed Robbers & Blackmailers:** Directly using force or threat to take goods.
- **Wealthy Malefactors:** Those who use power/position to deprive others of rights or property, such as cheating widows, orphans, or exploiting workers.
- **Withholding Wages:** Explicitly stated as a violation of "Do not defraud or rob your neighbor" (Leviticus 19).
- **Subtle Forms of Theft: Computer Crime/Piracy:** Copying and distributing digital content (music, software, videos) without permission or payment. This hurts smaller creators disproportionately. Rationalizations (e.g., "they charge too much") are still considered theft.
- **"Sleeping on the Job"/Wasting Time at Work:** Taking paychecks without providing commensurate work in return is deemed a form of theft from employers.
- **Stealing from God (Withholding Tithes and Offerings): Malachi 3:** Accuses the nation of "robbing God" in tithes and offerings.
- **Principle of Stewardship:** God owns everything, and He has the right to instruct how His resources (which He entrusts to us) are to be used, including financial support for His work.
- **Lack of Trust:** Withholding from God's provision demonstrates a lack of trust in His ability to provide.
- **Matilda's Story:** An illustrative anecdote demonstrating the attitude of one who enjoys benefits without fulfilling agreed-upon obligations, likening it to how some treat their obligations to God.

VI. Consequences of Theft (Biblical Perspective)

- **Exclusion from God's Kingdom:** 1 Corinthians 6:10 lists thieves, greedy, swindlers, etc., as those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, showing the spiritual seriousness of the sin.
- **Social Harm:** Hurts neighbors by depriving them of their property and hard-earned possessions.
- **Spiritual Dishonor:** Insults God by undermining His ownership and methods of distribution.
- **Personal Character:** Fosters a lack of trust in God and a tendency toward rationalization of sin.

Quiz: The Eighth Commandment – Do Not Steal

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How does Dr. Tomasino describe the severity of the Eighth Commandment ("You Shall Not Steal") in relation to other commandments like "Do Not Kill" or "Do Not Commit Adultery"?
2. What is a key difference in the penalties for theft between the Code of Hammurabi and the Old Testament law?
3. According to Old Testament law, what specific type of "theft" was considered a capital offense, and why was it treated so seriously?
4. Explain the Old Testament distinction between killing a thief caught breaking in at night versus killing one caught in the daytime. What principle does this highlight?
5. Beyond harming one's neighbor, what is a "less obvious principle" Dr. Tomasino emphasizes as to why stealing is wrong from a biblical perspective?
6. How does the Bible present work or labor in relation to God's method of distributing goods, both before and after the Fall?
7. Give two examples of how the Old Testament defines "oppressors" within the context of theft, beyond just common robbery.

8. According to Dr. Tomasino, why is pirating music or computer programs considered theft, even if some rationalize it by claiming the original cost is too high?
9. How does Dr. Tomasino argue that "sleeping on the job" or wasting time at work can be considered a form of theft?
10. Using the story of Percival and Matilda, explain how "stealing from God" (specifically in the context of tithes and offerings) is analogous to Matilda's actions.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Dr. Tomasino describes the Eighth Commandment as having a "diminishing sense of directness of injury" compared to killing or adultery. While still bad, stealing is generally not considered as severe as direct harm to life or undermining fundamental relationships.
2. The Code of Hammurabi often prescribed capital punishment for various forms of theft, especially from temples or the state. In contrast, the Old Testament usually punished most theft with fines and restitution, with capital punishment reserved for specific, more severe cases.
3. In the Old Testament, the theft of a human being (kidnapping), particularly for the purpose of selling them into slavery, was a capital offense. This was treated seriously because it deprived someone of their freedom and likely their life, upholding the principle that "people trump possessions."
4. Killing a thief caught breaking in at night resulted in no "blood guilt" because the homeowner's life and family were perceived to be in unknown danger. However, killing a thief in the daytime or when they could be apprehended and made to make restitution was considered murder, emphasizing that a life is more important than property and vengeance is disproportionate.
5. A "less obvious principle" emphasized is that stealing demonstrates a lack of trust in God's provision. It shows a distrust that God will provide for one's needs, leading the individual to bypass God's established methods for the distribution of goods.

6. The Bible presents work as God's ordained method for obtaining goods and meeting needs, even before the Fall in the Garden of Eden. After the Fall, work became harder, but it remained the primary means through which people were to sustain themselves and receive blessings.
7. Two examples of oppressors beyond common robbers include wealthy malefactors who use their power/position to deprive others of their rights and property (e.g., cheating widows and orphans), and employers who defraud or hold back the wages of their hired workers.
8. Pirating music or computer programs is considered theft because it bypasses God's methods of distributing goods through work and fair exchange. Even if people rationalize it due to high costs, it deprives creators, especially smaller ones, of their rightful earnings from their labor.
9. Dr. Tomasino argues that "sleeping on the job" or wasting significant time at work is a form of theft because employees are taking money from their employers without providing the agreed-upon work in return. This failure to produce value for the wages received is a misappropriation of resources.
10. Matilda's actions illustrate "stealing from God" because she enjoys the benefits of Percival's cottage (analogous to God's blessings) but repeatedly fails to uphold her agreed-upon financial obligation. She rationalizes her refusal and resents being reminded, mirroring how some might receive God's blessings but neglect their biblical duty to support His work through tithes and offerings.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the legal approaches to theft in the Code of Hammurabi, the Old Testament, and modern secular law (as implied by the Dallas, Texas example). Discuss how each system reflects differing values regarding property, life, and justice.
2. The lecture emphasizes the principle that "people trump possessions" in Old Testament law. Analyze how this principle is demonstrated through specific examples related to theft, and discuss its ethical implications for contemporary society regarding property rights versus human well-being.

3. Dr. Tomasino argues that stealing demonstrates a lack of trust in God's provision and bypasses God's established methods of distributing goods. Elaborate on these theological points, discussing the biblical concept of work as a means of provision and how this relates to various forms of theft, both explicit and subtle.
4. Beyond overt acts of robbery, Dr. Tomasino identifies several "subtle" or "less obvious" forms of theft, including computer crime/piracy, wasting time at work, and withholding tithes/offerings. Choose two of these subtle forms and argue how they align with or deviate from the core principles of the Eighth Commandment, providing specific reasoning for their categorization as theft.
5. Discuss the role of rationalization in committing acts of theft, as presented in the lecture. Provide examples of how individuals (including the minister in the Christian bookstore story) rationalize theft, and analyze why, from a biblical perspective, such rationalizations are considered problematic.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Blood Guilt:** A term in Old Testament law referring to the culpability for taking a human life, which could necessitate specific punishments or cleansing rituals. In the context of theft, it distinguishes between justifiable self-defense and murder.
- **Capital Offense:** A crime punishable by death. In the Code of Hammurabi, many forms of theft were capital offenses, whereas in the Old Testament, only kidnapping (stealing a human being) was typically considered one.
- **Code of Hammurabi:** An ancient Babylonian law code from Mesopotamia, notable for its strict and often capital penalties for various offenses, including theft.
- **Eighth Commandment:** "You Shall Not Steal" – one of the Ten Commandments, which prohibits the wrongful taking of another's property.
- **Oppressors:** Individuals or groups who use force, threat, or positions of power/wealth to deprive others of their rights, property, or wages. The Bible condemns oppressors as a form of theft and injustice.

- **People Trump Possessions:** A core principle in Old Testament law highlighted in the lecture, asserting that human life, freedom, and well-being are more valuable and take precedence over material property.
- **Property Rights:** The legal and moral entitlements individuals have to control, use, and dispose of their possessions. The lecture emphasizes that these rights are fundamental to a functioning society and are protected by the Eighth Commandment.
- **Rationalization:** The act of inventing a plausible, but false, reason for one's behavior or beliefs, often used to justify actions that are morally or ethically wrong (e.g., justifying theft).
- **Restitution:** The act of compensating someone for loss, damage, or injury. In Old Testament law, it was the primary form of penalty for most theft, requiring the thief to repay the victim, often at a multiple of the value stolen.
- **Sluggard:** A lazy person, unwilling to work. The book of Proverbs often condemns the sluggard, contrasting their craving for goods with their refusal to engage in the labor necessary to obtain them.
- **Stewardship:** The concept that humans are managers or caretakers of God's creation and resources, rather than ultimate owners. God is the ultimate owner of all things, and humans are responsible for how they manage what has been entrusted to them.
- **Theft:** The act of taking another person's property without permission or legal right. The lecture distinguishes between various forms, including robbery (with force), burglary (with secrecy/treachery), and subtle forms like intellectual property theft or workplace malingering.
- **Tithes and Offerings:** Financial contributions given to God, typically as a tenth of one's income (tithe) or additional voluntary gifts (offerings). In the book of Malachi, withholding these is described as "robbing God."
- **Ur-Nammu's Code:** An ancient Mesopotamian law code, predating Hammurabi's, noted for being less severe in its penalties for offenses like theft.

- **Work:** Productive activity, especially human effort to achieve a purpose or result. The lecture emphasizes work as God's ordained method for humans to obtain provisions and contribute to society, contrasting it with stealing.

4) FAQs:

How is "Do Not Steal" understood across different ancient law codes, and what distinguishes the Old Testament's approach?

Ancient law codes, such as Hammurabi's, treated theft with extreme severity, often prescribing capital punishment for offenses like stealing from the temple or state, or breaking into a house. Receiving stolen goods or even attempting to break in could result in death. In contrast, the Old Testament, while still upholding property rights, generally punished most theft with fines or restitution. For instance, if a stolen animal was found alive, the thief had to pay back double. If they couldn't pay, they might be sold into temporary bondage to work off their debt. The significant exception for a capital offense in the Old Testament was the theft of a human being, which was viewed as depriving someone of their freedom and potentially their life, often for the purpose of selling them into slavery.

What is the core principle that differentiates Old Testament law regarding theft from other ancient codes?

The fundamental principle that distinguishes Old Testament law on theft is that "people trump possessions" or "life is a more basic right than ownership." Unlike some ancient codes that imposed harsher penalties based on the social status of the victim or the sacredness of the stolen object (e.g., stealing from a temple), the Bible does not make such distinctions. It emphasizes that a human life is more valuable than property. This is evident in the law that permits killing a thief caught breaking in at night (when one's life or family might be in danger) but deems it murder if the thief is killed in broad daylight after the immediate threat is gone, as they could have been apprehended and made to make restitution.

Beyond direct appropriation, what are some less obvious forms of "stealing" discussed in the context of the Eighth Commandment?

The concept of "stealing" extends beyond direct appropriation of physical goods to include various subtle forms of misappropriation. These include:

- **Computer crime and digital piracy:** Copying or downloading copyrighted material like music, videos, or software without payment, rationalizing that the creators or companies are "too rich" or charge "too much." This often hurts smaller creators more than large corporations.
- **Sleeping on the job/wasting work hours:** Taking wages from an employer without providing commensurate work in return, effectively stealing time and money. This includes excessive slacking, not performing duties, or even being absent for extended periods while still collecting a paycheck.
- **Withholding wages/defrauding employees:** Employers not paying workers their due wages or taking advantage of their labor, as specified in Leviticus 19.
- **Oppression by the powerful:** This includes armed robbers, blackmailers, and wealthy malefactors who use their power or position to deprive others, especially vulnerable groups like widows and orphans, of their rights and property.
- **Lack of trust in God's provision:** Fundamentally, stealing is seen as bypassing God's established methods for creating and distributing goods, which are primarily through work and trust in His provision. It demonstrates a lack of faith that God will supply one's needs.
- **Stealing from God (withholding tithes and offerings):** The Bible, particularly in Malachi, considers withholding tithes and offerings as robbing God. This isn't just about financial obligation, but about acknowledging God's ultimate ownership of all things and our role as stewards.

Why is stealing considered wrong from a biblical perspective, beyond simply harming one's neighbor?

While harming one's neighbor by depriving them of their property is an obvious reason why stealing is wrong, a deeper biblical principle is involved: it demonstrates a lack of trust in God's provision and bypasses His established methods for the creation and distribution of goods. God is ultimately the owner of all things, and He has a right to determine how these things are to be distributed. When someone

steals, they are essentially short-circuiting God's intended system, which emphasizes work as the means to achieve blessings and meet needs. It also demonstrates a failure to rely on God's generosity and sufficiency.

How does the concept of "work" relate to the Eighth Commandment?

Work is presented as God's ordained method for humans to obtain their needs and participate in His blessings. From Genesis 2:15, where Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden "to work it and to keep it," work is shown to be a part of paradise, not a curse. Even after sin, though work became harder ("by the sweat of your brow"), it remained the legitimate means of provision. The Bible consistently condemns "sluggards" who refuse to work and promotes honest labor as the way to acquire goods. Therefore, stealing directly contradicts this divine order by attempting to gain resources without engaging in the work God established for their distribution.

What is the significance of "people trump possessions" in biblical law regarding theft?

The principle that "people trump possessions" is central to biblical law on theft, highlighting that human life and well-being are inherently more valuable than material goods. This is vividly illustrated by the distinction between killing a thief caught breaking in at night (when one's life or family might be at risk, thus justifying lethal force) and killing a thief in broad daylight after they have left the premises. In the latter case, the killer is considered a murderer because the thief's life is still more valuable than the stolen property, and apprehension and restitution were possible alternatives to lethal force. This principle contrasts sharply with some ancient laws that prioritized property over human life, especially in cases involving sacred property or social hierarchies.

How does the Bible distinguish between different kinds of theft?

The Bible, much like modern law, distinguishes between different kinds of theft, primarily based on the use of force or threat. It views those who use force or the threat of force (which we would call **robbery**) as far more serious criminals than those who use secrecy or treachery (which might include **burglary** or simple **theft**). This distinction again underscores the principle that "life trumps property"; the threat or use of force against a person is seen as a greater offense than merely taking property without such a threat. The term "oppressors" is often used in the Old

Testament to describe those who use force or position to take from others, including armed robbers, blackmailers, and the wealthy who exploit the vulnerable.

In what ways is "stealing from God" discussed, and what is its underlying principle?

"Stealing from God" is primarily discussed in the context of withholding tithes and offerings, as seen in the book of Malachi. The underlying principle is that God is the ultimate owner of all things in heaven and earth, and humans are merely stewards of His creation and resources. Therefore, God has the right to direct how these resources are to be used, including the practice of tithing to support His work and provide for the community. Withholding what is due to God is seen as an act of theft because it disregards His ultimate ownership and His established methods for the distribution and use of wealth. While not punished with capital penalties like some forms of theft, it signifies a deeper issue of a lack of trust in God and a misaligned relationship with Him, as the way one uses their money often reflects their spiritual state.