



“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15)

1. Introduction: a commandment more relevant than we think

When we hear the **Seventh Commandment** – “**You shall not steal**”, many people immediately think: “*This doesn’t apply to me, I’m not a thief.*” However, this view is **far too superficial** and dangerous for the spiritual life.

The Tradition of the Church teaches that this commandment **is not limited to violent or obvious theft**, but encompasses **every form of injustice against another person’s goods**, whether **material, professional, intellectual, economic, or social**. In a society where fraud is normalized, deception is disguised as “cleverness,” and exploitation is justified as a “business model,” this commandment **directly challenges our daily conscience**.

The Seventh Commandment protects:

- The **natural right to private property**
- **Justice in exchanges**
- **Honesty in work**
- **Social responsibility**
- The **universal destination of goods**, without falling into ideological distortions

2. Theological and moral foundation

Private property is not a human whim, but a **right recognized by natural law**, ordered toward personal, familial, and social good. To steal is not merely to “take something,” but to **break justice, harm one’s neighbor, and sin against charity**.

□ “*Let the thief no longer steal, but rather labor, doing honest work with his own hands*”
(Ephesians 4:28)

Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that **injustice regarding temporal goods is a grave sin when it seriously harms one’s neighbor**, especially when there is abuse of power, deliberate deception, or significant damage.



3. Sins against the Seventh Commandment

Extensive and meticulous list for examination of conscience

Below is a **detailed list of concrete sins**, many of them **common yet rarely confessed**, organized by areas of life.

A. Direct theft and misappropriation

- Stealing money, objects, or material goods.
 - Taking “small things” thinking they do not matter.
 - Taking material from the workplace (money, tools, products, office supplies).
 - Keeping lost items without attempting to return them.
 - Keeping money received by mistake.
 - Using borrowed goods as if they were one’s own.
 - Failing to return what was borrowed.
 - Illegally retaining goods belonging to others.
 - Stealing paid time (pretending to work, unjustified absences).
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B. Fraud, deception, and scams

- Lying to obtain financial benefit.
 - Defrauding individuals or companies.
 - Selling defective products while hiding their flaws.
 - Cheating in weight, quantity, or quality.
 - Unjustly inflating prices by taking advantage of another’s need.
 - Signing contracts with no intention of fulfilling them.
 - Exploiting legal loopholes to commit injustice.
 - Using insider or privileged information to enrich oneself unjustly.
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C. Sins related to work

As an employee:

- Working carelessly, lazily, or irresponsibly.
- Receiving a salary without properly fulfilling one's duties.
- Pretending to be sick in order to avoid work.
- Causing losses through laziness or serious negligence.
- Disobeying just rules established by the employer.
- Sabotaging one's own work or that of others.
- Regularly using work hours for personal matters.

As an employer or manager:

- Paying unjust or insufficient wages.
- Delaying salary payments without just cause.
- Exploiting workers.
- Imposing undignified working conditions.
- Unjust dismissals.
- Failing to respect rest periods, vacations, or basic rights.
- Treating workers as objects rather than as persons.

□ *"The wages of the laborers must not be withheld"* (cf. James 5:4)

D. Fiscal sins and offenses against the common good

- Evading just taxes.
- Falsifying tax declarations.
- Working "off the books."
- Receiving public aid without entitlement.
- Improper use of subsidies or social benefits.
- Defrauding social security systems.
- Justifying tax fraud as something "normal."
- Refusing to contribute to the common good when able to do so.



E. Damage to the property of others

- Deliberately damaging another person's property.
 - Failing to repair damage caused by one's own fault.
 - Acts of vandalism.
 - Negligent use of rented or borrowed goods.
 - Refusing to take responsibility for damage caused.
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F. Sins against justice in commerce and consumption

- Purchasing stolen goods knowingly.
 - Supporting clearly unjust businesses.
 - Consuming in a reckless and selfish manner.
 - Going into debt without real intention to repay.
 - Taking advantage of a seller's mistakes.
 - Abusive speculation.
 - Promoting or sustaining unjust economic systems when one has the power to prevent them.
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G. Sins against intellectual property

- Downloading pirated content.
 - Sharing copyrighted material illegally.
 - Copying others' work and presenting it as one's own.
 - Academic or professional plagiarism.
 - Illegal use of software.
 - Counterfeiting brands or products.
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H. Usury and financial sins

- Lending money with excessive interest.
 - Taking advantage of another's financial desperation.
 - Intentionally placing others in debt.
 - Financially manipulating vulnerable persons.
 - Gambling or investing irresponsibly, placing one's family at risk.
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I. Sins of omission

- Failing to return stolen goods when able to do so.
 - Failing to repair a known injustice.
 - Remaining silent in the face of grave injustice when one has a moral duty to act.
 - Failing to make restitution after a valid confession.
 - Ignoring the serious needs of one's neighbor despite having sufficient means.
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4. Restitution: the forgotten key of the Seventh Commandment

An essential and often neglected point:

☐ **Confessing the sin is not enough.**

☐ **It is morally obligatory to restore what was stolen or repair the damage**, whenever possible.

Without restitution, **there is no complete repentance**, and absolution itself may be compromised.

5. A final call to conversion

The Seventh Commandment does not seek to accuse, but to **free the heart from disordered attachment to material goods**. Christ does not condemn wealth, but He does condemn an **unjust heart**.



Living this commandment faithfully:

- Purifies the conscience
- Strengthens justice
- Humanizes the economy
- Bears Christian witness in a corrupted world

□ *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21)