

Deuteronomy 5:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shalt thou steal.

Analysis

The eighth commandment 'Neither shalt thou steal' protects private property and economic justice. Theft violates the neighbor's God-given right to possess and use property. This command assumes property ownership is legitimate, opposing both anarchistic stealing and totalitarian confiscation. The Hebrew 'ganav' encompasses all wrongful taking: theft, fraud, withholding wages, unjust business practices, and oppressive taxation. The Reformed tradition sees this as protecting economic liberty, honest commerce, and the dignity of ownership. It requires honest work (Ephesians 4:28) and generous sharing with the needy.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes addressed theft with restitution (sometimes multiple fold) or death depending on severity. Israel's law required restitution plus 20% penalty (Leviticus 6:5, Numbers 5:7), or multiple-fold for livestock theft (Exodus 22:1-4). Kidnapping—stealing persons—merited death (Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 24:7). Prophets condemned economic oppression, corrupt business practices, and exploitation of the poor (Amos 8:5-6, Micah 2:2, Malachi 3:5).

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this commandment establish the legitimacy of private property ownership against both individual theft and government confiscation?
2. In what subtle ways might Christians violate this command through dishonest business practices, tax evasion, or failing to pay fair wages?

Interlinear Text

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H3808 Neither shalt thou steal
H1589

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:15 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not steal.

Romans 13:9 (Parallel theme): For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.