

# THE SEVENTH THROUGH THE TENTH COMMANDMENTS

## BACKGROUND READING



The traditional wording for the Seventh Commandment is: “You shall not steal.” This Commandment has to do with the respect for other’s goods, and the just use of all goods. It calls us to practice the virtue of justice and love of neighbor. The Eighth Commandment is “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” This Commandment not only holds us responsible to speak truthfully in witnessing to another person’s actions or life, but it commands us to bear witness to truth itself. In the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, we are forbidden from desiring something impurely and desiring what belongs to another: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” and “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.”

### The Seventh Commandment

Theft is the taking of something against the reasonable will of its owner. Sins against the Seventh Commandment can creep into our day in less obvious ways than typical theft. After all, we often associate theft with crime and most of us do not consider ourselves criminals!

The Seventh Commandment means we are not to take what is due to others, so that work poorly done, or excessive expense, or waste are sins against the Seventh Commandment. So are more obvious offenses such as business fraud, unjust wages, dishonest prices, forgery, tax evasion, or willfully damaging another’s property. If we ever damage, take, or lose another’s property, we are obliged by the Seventh Commandment to make restitution for what has been damaged. The Seventh Commandment also forbids any dealings that for any reason leads to the “enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity” (CCC 2414). Using another’s property is not theft, however, if it is necessary to provide for essential needs such as food, shelter, or clothing. For an owner to withhold the use of his or her property within these circumstances would be unreasonable.

When God created the world, He entrusted all that He created to the common care of human persons. The earth and all its fruit belong to all people, and this is called

the universal destination of goods. One of the great challenges of this commandment is to see that the things of the earth are appropriated for the security and livelihood of all people. The right to private property is legitimate for the promotion of the common good of mankind. But this right does not make void the universal destination of goods. The *Catechism* explains, “In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself. The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family” (CCC 2404).

### **The Eighth Commandment**

In commanding us not to bear false witness against our neighbor, the Eighth Commandment speaks to us of living a life faithful to the truth: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25). The Eighth Commandment emphasizes the communal dimension of truth. Living in truth builds bonds of integrity and trust between families, friendships, and communities. An offense against the truth is one of the gravest offenses because Jesus identifies Himself with the Truth when He says “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” It destroys our relationship with others and denies the very being of Christ.

Particular offenses against the Eighth Commandment are false witness and perjury; rash judgment – we should assume the best about others unless we have reason to believe otherwise); detraction, which is

the disclosing another’s faults without valid reasons; calumny, which is harming someone else’s reputation through falsehood; adulation, which is encouraging another to sin by word or attitude; excessive boasting or bragging; and lying.

The right to truth is not unconditional, however. We are not bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it, and charity and respect should guide all revelations of the truth. Sometimes, it is most in keeping with the truth to remain silent. For example, the secrecy of the of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation cannot be violated for any reason.

### **The Ninth and Tenth Commandments**

They say that “comparison is the thief of joy.” We have all seen a child happy with his or her toy until they see one that is bigger and better. It is all too easy to covet or to desire the things that we do not have. But this often means that we are not grateful for what we do have. There is nothing wrong with desiring a better life for ourselves and our families. When our desires turn into envy, however, then the joy in what we have disappears. Not only do we have excessive desires for the things that are not rightfully ours, but we often desire evil on someone else.

The Ninth Commandment teaches that we must be faithful to our spouse, not only in act, but also in desire. Desire here entails a willful choice, not an uncontrolled impulse. The Tenth Commandment teaches that we should be grateful for the goods that we do have because they are gifts from God. If we desire what belongs to our neighbor, then we

are not at peace with the situation that God has provided for us.

We can make the choice to be dissatisfied with what we have and to wish to take that which we do not have. What we choose in our hearts and minds is also a sin because we are choosing ourselves over God. We have already committed the sins of greed, envy, and pride in our hearts, and these sins often translate into actions. Jesus said, “Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile” (Mark 7:15).

To prevent sins against the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, we should cultivate gratitude. Instead of comparing what we have to what others have, we should try to be content with what God has given us. We should be grateful for our spouses and our families and for our situation in life. When we see the world as a gift, our hearts can expand to rejoice in the gifts that others receive. When we are grateful, we put ourselves in proper relationship with God and creation. We acknowledge that all we have, and that all of creation, is a gift.