

## **Not Stealing, but Laboring and Giving:**

*Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)*

*Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

### **Introduction**

We continue our series this morning entitled who are you when no one is looking.

When I started the series I made the comment that every one of us has three people to deal with:

- The person they want other people to think they are
- The person they think they are
- The person they really are

We live in a society and that is fixated with external appearances and shallow relationship.

A society where the measure of a life is what another thinks about them, not who they truly are.

Now Paul, in the book of Ephesians, is dealing with a similar problem. He is talking to a group of people who have just become Christians. They are still in their world, and they don't know how to live any different.

Were things ever like that for you when you got saved?

Your appetites changed.

Your vocabulary changed.

Your passions and desires changed.

You just wanted to get up and change the world.

You wanted to read your bible, you desired to work hard and go the extra mile.

Then you got around religious folks.  
They told you not to be so excitable.  
Don't burn out.  
You have to pace yourself.  
Don't work so hard you will make the rest of us look bad.  
So on and so forth.

Well, here is Paul dealing with a similar group of people and he is trying to help them then as I am trying to help you now. He has this group of people who have been radically touched by Jesus Christ. Their lives have been changed forever. They have been radically born again.

But, they are confronted with a problem, an issue that all of us have to face, not everyone around them is a Christian. Not everyone around has had the same divine experience. So, they now are caught between two worlds, as it were.

The world of the old man, the world of who they were, and the world of the new man, the world of who they want to be and should be.

They are caught.  
The old world, the old habits, the old lifestyle is pulling at them.

Yet they know in their heart of hearts they need to be someone different and live life somehow different. They just don't have a picture of who they should be and how they should act; they don't know what it really means to be a Christian.

Paul is here attempting to help these people.  
He is here, very practically, going through different areas of their life.

*The first thing* we noticed is that he told us it is a decision. It is our decision:

We have to put off the old man and put on the new man.  
It is something that we actively have to do.  
To become a Christian is to respond to the drawing of the Holy Ghost.  
To grow as a Christian is a responsibility that we must bear.

*The second thing* he told us is that we must stop living unauthentic lives:

We must stop lying to ourselves and lying to our neighbors. We must renew our minds and become authentic in our relationships and in our person and this will change the way we speak.

All of these things are being dealt with by starting with the most common issue, and working on down to issues that are sometimes a problem for us.

Then, as we looked last time, Paul directs us to deal with the issue of anger.

We talked about there being a difference between righteous anger and self-serving, indulgent, human, and fleshly wrath.  
Now Paul moves on and talks about what he believes is the next issue most commonly faced by Christians.

## Common misconception:

*Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)*

***Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.***

The world, and often religious folk, make it out that Christianity is only for perfect people.

That is simply neither the case experientially or scripturally.

The Apostle Paul often starts with a negative and then moves onto a positive.

He often tells us what we should not do, then goes on and instructs us on what we should do.

He never leaves us hanging, just telling us what not to do, he often starts with a ... *'don't do this, get rid of this and replace it with this'*.

So far Paul has told his church

- 1) Take personal responsibility for your walk.
- 2) Stop having unauthentic lives.
- 3) Don't walk around in a rag.
- 4) And now he is saying...don't steal.

Think about this:

Paul is obviously talking to a group of people he believes amongst whom are those who are fake, angry, lying, and thieving people!!

***Let the thief no longer steal***

He is not talking to an imaginary group.

He is talking to a particular group of people that he knows VERY well.

And here in lies the GLORY of the Gospel.

The gospel is hope for anyone.

The gospel is peace for everyone.

The gospel is not limited to a social demographic or a cultural divide.

The gospel is the power of God to all who believe  
It is while we were sinners that the gospel power was applied to us,  
not while we were perfect.  
That is the wonder of our gospel.  
That it can take any life and change any life.

Often people read a passage like this and they forget the fact that it  
was written to a church.

They think that it can't apply to them, or to their church, or to the  
people they sit across the aisle from, but that is where we are wrong  
friend.

All of the trouble that was happening in Ephesus, all of the sexual  
perversion that was alive in the church at Corinth, it all happened  
under Paul's leadership and under the leadership of the Apostles.

We read verses like:

*2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)*

*(17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The  
old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

And we think to ourselves, "Once I am born again all my issues go  
away, all my problems are solved, all my bad behavior will  
disappear".

We know experientially and logically that, that is just not the case.  
There are people in our church who stumble around and face issues  
like this in their daily life.

Now, there is a progression that Paul moves through here. He is dealing with things in the way that he sees that people most battle with them.

- First of all they try and make it God's fault they don't change.
- Second they have a *fallen* tendency (as apposed to a *natural* tendency) to live unauthentic lives.
- Third, their response to each other is often anger, fleshly wrath.

And now we come to this fourth area –theft.

So Paul says, this stealing must stop, this is a problem so many of you have.

Not only do you have a problem with stealing, but you are not generous.

You are not only robbing others, you are withholding yourself from them.

He is basically talking about an issue of lust and love.

Lust is satisfying self at the expense of others because lust desires to get.

Love is satisfying others at the expense of self because love desires to give.

You see, stealing is a manifestation of lust and laziness.

Definition: To steal means to take away from by stealth.

It means to sneak away from another that which is rightfully theirs.

You want something that is not yours and you are not prepared to work for it or pay for it, that is stealing.

That is what Paul is saying here.

He is starting with the negative of stealing and saying *don't be like this*, and then working the church through to the positives and saying *Not only DON'T be like this, but BE like this*.

## How do we steal?

Paul is saying, I believe that the standard for us as Christian is and should be higher than for those that don't know the Lord and this gospel

This good news should affect and touch every aspect of our lives.

Stealing does not always apply to things in the material realm. Stealing really means taking possession of and using as your own something that does not belong to you, appropriating something that is not yours, to serve your own ends and your own gratification.

So it applies to many things besides actual material things.

We can steal money; yes, but we can steal time also; we can steal almost anything, we can steal thoughts, we can steal ideas and take credit for them.

Some of you will sit there and say, "Well I don't steal and I don't take".

Really?

Well, who pays you wages at work?

At work, haven't you entered into an agreement to exchange labor for reward, you are giving time and talent for treasure, sure you have.

I was standing in a restaurant wanting to place an order the other day, and this kid behind the counter decided that he wanted to steal money from his boss and steal time from me. He wanted to text message his friend.

That is theft.

A simple question, who is paying for your time while you are at your job?

Do you sit there making personal phone calls, texting people, or updating your Face Book status with *..My boss is a loser, my job sucks?*

How can you possibly think that is an ethical exchange for labor?

Photocopying things for church, and saying, it is all alright...I paid my taxes; your workplace might have a liberal attitude towards this, but my experience is that most people abuse a privilege, they don't respect it.

Paul is saying that as Christians we should hold ourselves to a higher standard than those that are not Christians.

Why would he say such a thing?

*1 Timothy 6:1 (ESV)*

*(1) Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.*

Because, more will be expected of you.

The eyes of an unsaved world are upon you and they want to push you and see if this teaching, this doctrine, that you say you care about and you say is import to you, they want to find out if it is true.

That is why we must work with an attitude of doing things unto the Lord.

Well that's not fair, that is going to the extreme you might think. Ok.

*Colossians 3:22-24 ESV*

*(22) Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.*

*(23) Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men*

*(24) knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

So Paul is saying that slaves should serve with a passion not begrudgingly.

That slaves should work as free men.

They should work as people getting compensated for their labor.

The Christians slaves should work with a sense that they are serving their heavenly Father, not their earthly masters. That they should come and give to their bosses, and give to their leaders.

They should not begrudge their station, position, or opportunity. They should not look around and say, “*Well that is ok...they are getting paid for...*”

No, Paul says- you’re bigger than that.

### **Let him labor:**

So Paul moves on from tell us what we should not be doing, to now telling us what we should be doing.

*Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)*

*(28) Let the thief no longer steal, **but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.***

Friend, there is neither such a thing as spiritual unemployment or spiritual retirement in the Kingdom of God.

We all have a role to play, we must all be contributors.

Western Christians don’t like to hear that.

We live in an age of entitlement.

Where everyone loves the thought of being served, and no one wants to be the servant.

It is prevalent in family life, in church life, in business, and in government.

Paul is saying that is not the way to live.

He is saying not only as Christians should your goal be NOT to steal, it should be TO labor.

## **Adams calling:**

God gave Adam a vision, dominion in the garden and his family a job, to work beside him. Together they were called to carve out something of significance and worth for all eternity.

There is something about the value of an honest day's work that satisfies that God part with in us.

The call of God knows no bounds in terms of talent or age.

He asks us all to contribute in some way to that which he sees as his own, his church.

Work was not a part of the curse.

Work was something that God created before the fall.

Work was something that he gave to Adam that defined his existence.

I don't believe that you can be lazy and a fully consecrated Christian.

Now, I am not talking of the odd day were you just decide that lying in bed till noon is a brilliant use of your time.

I am not talking about going on holidays with a bag of cereal and some cheese wiz and never leaving the hotel room for a week.

That is called bliss!!

No, I am talking about a life that has no purpose.

A life that has no reason.

A work ethic that is about what I can get out of a job, not what I can bring to a company.

*My boss owes me, my church owes me, my husband owes me, my wife owes me, because I was born an American.*

I believe that employers should be lining up at the doors of CLC TX, because they know that here there is something different about these people.

These people say what they will do and do what they say.

You only have to ask them once.

They turn up 10 minutes early.

They are prepared.

They have worked with their own hands to come ready to a meeting. And when they get to the meeting, regardless of what is happening in their life, they are ON and they are ready to work.

### **Doing *honest work*:**

But then Paul goes further-

Not only should you not steal.  
Not only should you labor diligently.  
But you should be doing something that you're proud of, something that is honest.

*Ephesians 4:28(ESV)*

*(28) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, **doing honest work** with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

Honest work....it means:

Working at that which is pleasant.  
Which is excellent.  
Which is distinguished.  
Upright.  
Honorable.

It doesn't matter the profession, be it dishwasher, bar tender, CEO or preacher.

You have to be able to go to bed at night and say to yourself, "the will of God was accomplished on the earth today through my hands".

I did the best I could with what I had.

But there is some work that is not honest.  
There are some professions that Christians should not be involved in.

You have heard me tell of the man in Whitefish Montana, who told me that it was ok for him to be involved with a web based company that distributed pornography because it helped pay his mortgage. I told him he was wrong. That he should get another job or be prepared to lose his house, not his soul.  
They are some jobs that Christians should not do.

Then there are some professions that Christians can be involved in but you have to ensure that the way you practice it, *with you own hands*, is different than the way that a non-believer practices it.

The legal profession can be like that.  
The medical profession, sales, management and even the ministry.

All of these JOBS, if you want to call them that, can be done in an honest or a dishonest way.  
They can also be done where no effort is exerted, yet money is extorted.

There are lawyers who believe it is their job and calling, to make your life easier.  
There are some that believe that it is your job to make them richer.  
There are some so called Christian doctors who somehow believe that they are justified in charging \$400 for a 7 minute interview.  
And there are some doctors who give their life for their family practices.

There are some preachers who are like that too...

I know a man on staff at a church where the board decided that the pastor's wage should double for three months while no one else got a salary.  
I know another minister who mortgaged his home and spent all his savings to pursue the call of God.

One does not know the shame he is bringing on the body of Christ, the other just hopes one day he can do good in the body of Christ.

There are some sales people who believe that they should sell you something even if you can't afford it.

Then there are others who will not up sell you, because your credit rating just won't handle it.

Honest work.

Work that you can come home every day and say, "I did my family, my God and my pastor proud today, I made a difference".

### **With our own hands:**

*Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)*

*(28) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work **with his own hands**, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

Two thoughts:

Activity equals productivity.

And labor is a good remedy against poverty.

If you want to be preparing for the future, you need to be working on it today.

What are you doing today that will guarantee the future of your family tomorrow?

I believe that Christians should be comfortable with the idea and indeed, if they are called to it, striving to run their own business.

That is where most of the money is, and greater freedom and opportunity for wealth creation lies.

God gives us an ability to GET wealth.

Wealth does not come our way.

We have to GET it.

Success does not fall in your lap.

You have to go out-  
Hunt it down  
Corner it  
Beat it with a stick  
Bring it home  
Cut it and clean it.

It is work before you start it  
And work when you catch it.  
And work to prepare it and work to eat it

Only rebellious people outside of the will of God get manna and quail,  
those in the perfect will of God,

HEAR ME CHURCH,  
THOSE IN THE PERFECT WILL OF GOD,

They get bee stings and cow poo.

If you are praying for the Promised Land, if you are praying for a land  
of milk and honey, milking starts before dawn and you have to wear  
body armor to get bees.

## SOMETHING TO SHARE

*Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)*

*(28) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, **so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.***

People, get a vision and belong to a vision bigger than yourself.

Paul is steeping these early Christians through the reason you must make certain changes to your life.

First, don't steal, it is just not the Christian thing to do.

Then he takes it up a level.

You know you should just not steal, but you need to do yourself a favor- a work hard with you own hands, learn the joy of laboring and benefiting from the labor that you invest.

Then, once you understand that, learn the satisfaction of seeing something grow and being responsible for seeing something through.

Enjoy that.

But then he doesn't stop there.

There is a great reason why you should stop stealing.

There is a greater reason for why you should work hard and prosper.

And that reason is you need to get a vision bigger than yourself.

The most selfish thing a Christian can say is, "*I only need enough money to get by and I will be happy*".

Listen to the prayer that Jesus prayed.

In both Matthew 6 and Luke 11:

*Luke 11:2-4 (ESV)*

*(2) And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.*

*(3) Give us each day our daily bread,*

*(4) and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."*

The prayer Jesus taught was that I should have bread for today and bread for tomorrow.

*Give us each day...enough bread for what we will need now and what we will need tomorrow*

I should have enough in my cupboard so that if someone comes to my house, I can give and not go without.

I need to be making enough money so I have something to share.  
I need not be selfish with what I have but be willing to share and give.

And this brings us full circle.

Paul started by addressing the issue of lust and ends by addressing the issue of love.

Remember....Lust is satisfying self at the expense of others because lust desires to get.

Don't steal.

Don't take what is not yours, it is lustful.

Where as, love satisfies others at the expense of self because love desires to give.

You are now, no longer, just not stealing, you are now living for a purpose bigger than yourself, and your world view has changed.

You are working to give, not working to get.

You will go the extra mile to make an extra buck to be prepared to give it if needed.

What can you sell to give?

Can you take an extra shift to give?

Can you stay a little longer after church to help out?

Can you help someone at work even though it is not your responsibility?

You see, there comes a point where we no longer give out of necessity, we give out of our passion.

You don't see giving as something you have to do; it is something you want to do.

You are living beyond yourself; you are living for a kingdom purpose in a kingdom, for a kingdom result.

You are a new creation.

The old selfish you has gone.

The new you-

The new creation has come.

You have something to share.

Friend you must pray.

You must strive.

You must prosper so that when there is a need you can meet it.

When there is an empty belly we can fill it.

When there are churches to start, we can start them.

When there are unwed mothers, we can house them.

Babies that face abortion, we can do something...you need more money...because we are all called to give more money.

*Ephesians 4:28 ESV*

*(28) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, **so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.***

This week ends our Call to Arms.

Where we have asked each of you to consider what you believe you can give over and above your tithe, to the saving of souls and the establishment of the kingdom.

City Care

High school outreaches

Church Planting

Business outreach

Debt Reduction

Just to name a few.