

**Welcome:** Good morning... for those who may be new or visiting; my name is Chad and I'm one of the pastor/elders here at Reality Ventura.

Last Sunday Billy taught on **verses 26-27** of **Ephesians Chapter 4**... **Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.** And today we will continue in **verse 28** of **Ephesians Chapter 4**.

For the sake of context, I will be reading from our text starting in **verse 21** from the **English Standard Version** (ESV), **<sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. <sup>25</sup> Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup> 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.** Ephesians 4:21-28 (ESV)

**Open in prayer:** *"Would you join me in prayer..."*

**Sermon Title: From Stealing to Sharing**

If you have been here the past two Sunday's... you may have seen a *pattern* unraveling since **verse 25** when the Apostle Paul transitioned with **"Therefore"...** **Therefore, in light of taking off the old self and putting on the new self...** we have seen this *pattern* that moves like a golden thread with everything he has been saying up to this point... and it will continue through **verse 32**.

It's important by way of **'setting the table'** that we understand that the Apostle Paul is laying a foundation for a *new pattern of living* found in **verses 25-32**. And the first thing he does is this: he makes specific the general fact of changing from **an old lifestyle to a new one**. And then Paul list **"five categories"** (Or, patterns) in which *change* takes place in the life of a believer.

We see a new pattern of living in which Paul gives **commands** reflecting several contrast between the **old life** and the **new**. Based on their **newness of life**, believers are to *change* from:

- Lying to speaking the truth (Vs. 25)
- Unrighteous anger to righteous anger (Vs. 26-27)
- Stealing to sharing (Vs. 28)
- Unwholesome words to edifying words (Vs. 29-30)
- Natural vices to supernatural virtues (Vs. 31-32)

When God saves a person out of darkness there is first a fundamental *change* to the *identity* of that person... that's first. We studied this in the first 3 Chapters of Ephesians (**Kingdom Kids**). The first thing that happens that makes a Christian... is a fundamental *change* to that person's *disposition*, their *affections*, their *nature*, and their *identity*.... **that is a Christian!**

When God saves a person... **and He changes them from the inside out!**

This is what you see when you *study* and *read* the New Testament and what it means to be a **new creation**... we who are God's people, who are a part of His Kingdom... will be different than the rest of the world. We will think differently... we will talk differently... we will act differently... we will have different motives... and we will worship differently.

In other words, true children of the Kingdom are very easily *distinguished* from the world... at least in the *pattern* of distinction that is outlined before us here in Ephesians.

There is to be a difference. We're not to be like the world as it says, **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."** 1 John 2:15 (ESV)

When God *recreates* a person in Jesus Christ... there's something new... there's something different.... That new creation is, indeed, **a new creation**.

Lets remember... new creatures act like new creatures. God is not progressively making new creations out of believers...believers are those whom He has already made **new creations** as it say's, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."** 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

At the same time we are told you that if you are *not* living that way... if your life is not *distinctly* different from the world; there is a real possibility that you are *not* a Christian at all... *no matter what you claim... no matter what you imagine... no matter how religious you are.*

Unless there is a *distinction* in your *living*... there is a good possibility that there is no *distinction* in your *nature* either.

Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:4 (ESV)

And Paul is *reinforcing* this *truth* here in this section of Ephesians. Paul is saying, in **Chapters 1-3**, "*Look, this is who you are,*" (as **Kingdom Kids**)... and in **Chapters 4-6**, "*this is how you act.*" (as a **Kingdom Family**); And you can never separate the two.

There is always the *standard* in terms of **position**... and then there always is the *activity* in terms of **behavior**... and they go together.

You cannot say, "*Well, I am a Christian, because once I received Christ*" and there be no *distinction* in your living.... That's not New Testament Christianity. And that's exactly what Paul is saying here. If you are a *new creature*... (**Chapters 1-3**)... *you will live like it* (**Chapters 4-6**).

The only reliable evidence of a person's being "saved" is not a past experience of receiving Christ, but a present life that reflects Christ.

Now... in light of these truths... ***How then shall we teach a people not to steal?***

Let us follow Paul's example here in **Ephesians 4**.

***How does he do it?*** He teaches *three* chapters of deep, God-centered doctrine to start with. Then here in our text this morning... Paul builds a theological image (picture) for all obedience in **verses 22-24**.

Then he gives *illustrations* of *practical* acts of obedience in **verse 25** (and following). In **verse 25** he says, "*Don't lie; speak truth.*" In **verses 26-27** he says, "*Don't hold an angry grudge.*" In **verse 28** he says, "*Don't steal; work and give.*" And so on...

What we need to remember when we read and teach these commandments is that they must be seen in relation to the original image (**picture**) as seen in **verses 22–24**; which says this: *obeying the commands of Jesus is like taking off an old self and putting on a new self. The old self is corrupt because of bad desires that come from deceit. The new self is created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness that come from truth.*

So becoming a true Christian means that a miracle happens—something like the first creation of man happens all over again (hence being **“Born Again”**). Evangelical obedience is NOT just turning over a new leaf by force of will power in order to please a new deity. Evangelical obedience is the creation of God. It is the fruit of the Spirit... *not the work of the flesh.*

What is the **key** to this new evangelical obedience? **Verse 23** says, *“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”* A deep inner renewal must take place, before there can be true evangelical obedience. If we try to teach obedience to Jesus without this inner renewal... all we will get is pharisaism (legalism).

And where does this renewed mind come from? **It comes from God!**

According to **verse 24** the new self is created! As it says in **Ephesians 2:10**, *“We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.”* The renewed mind is the creation of God... **not man.**

**But how does God renew the spirit of the mind?** He does it by overcoming the **deceit** of **verse 22** and by applying the truth mentioned in **verse 24**. This is what it means to produce evangelical obedience... And evangelical obedience is free and joy-filled obedience that comes from a **transformed mind** that sees the goodness and beauty of God's ways... *and wants to be holy as He is holy.*

And the evangelical doctrine (**truth**) that God uses to produce this fruit... is the truth that God loves sinners and Christ died for sinners... and the Holy Spirit regenerates sinners... *and it is all of grace and received by faith.*

And if one should ask, *“How then should I not lie?”* the evangelical answer is, **“By FAITH!”** Or: *“How shall I be free from my angry grudges?”* **“By FAITH!”** Or: *“How shall I not steal?”* **“By FAITH!”** – By **FAITH** in the promises (**truths**) of God!

Evangelical obedience says, *“I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live **BY FAITH** in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me”* Galatians 2:20 (RSV)

The point of all this is that when we come to **verse 28**, we must not forget **verses 22–24**. Without **verses 22–24**... all we will get out of **verse 28** is *legalistic capitalism*.

That is not what we want. So let's look at **verse 28** and take with us the *image (picture)* of **verses 22–24**... and see what we find for our lives in this *new pattern of living* that we have been called too.

So now... *in light of taking off the old self and putting on the new self*... we now come to the **third change** in the Christians life... **from stealing to sharing**.

To begin, notice that **verse 28** really has **three** commands.

### **Three commands:**

1. "Let the thief no longer steal."
2. "But rather let him labor, working with his own hands what is good."
3. "So that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

There is a progression here from an *inferior* to *superior* way of life.

- First, **you can steal in order to have**.
- Second, **you can work in order to have**.
- Third, **you can work in order to give**.

The first **two ways** of life describe an *illegal* and a *legal* way of satisfying the drive of covetousness and *greed*. You can be driven by *greed* to **steal** and you can be driven by *greed* to **work**. One is *illegal*; the other is *legal*. **Both are sinful**.

That is why Paul doesn't stop there. **Working in order to have** is perhaps an American ideal—if *you earned it you should have it*. But it is **NOT** a Christian ideal.

The most *radical* thing about this text is that we are *commanded* to do all our secular work with a view to *meeting the needs of others*. You can live to HAVE, either *legally* or *illegally*. Or you can become a Christian... **and live to give**.

Let's take the **three commands** as they come... and then close with this *revolutionizing* thought that all the money you earn at your secular job is meant in some way by God to enable you to *share* with others in need. Just as the Abrahamic Covenant say's... "**That we are blessed to be a blessing!**" (Gen. 12)

So first, our text (**verse 28**) simply repeats the *eightth* commandment: **"Thou shalt not steal!"** —**"Let the thief no longer steal!"** Now in view of **verses 22–24** what can we say about stealing and the Christian? **Three things:**

## 1. Stealing Is Part of the Old Self

First, **stealing** is part of the **old self** that we are to *strip off* (**verse 22**). Stealing is part of the *corruption* that comes from *deceitful* desires. Stealing comes from being *deceived* about what is *truly* desirable.

Satan came to Jesus in the wilderness and *tempted* him to turn stones into bread... and to *short-circuit* the way of the cross. **"Don't go the way of self-denial; use the powers at your disposal to get what you really want in the easiest way, not the painful way."**

And so Satan comes to us and *tempts* us to **steal**—to **steal** from our employees with *unjust wages*... Or from our employers with *shoddy work* (cutting corners) and *extended breaks* (laziness)... Or from the government on our *tax returns*... Or from the store by *shoplifting*. **Side note:** – *Did you know American consumers steal from retailers more than \$13 billion annually?* (Richest nation steals \$13 Bill)

Satan tempts us to **steal** and *short-circuit* the way of justice and hard work. And he **lies** and says that the *fleeting pleasure of possession* is better than a hard day's work... and a clear conscience... and a love for other people. And those who are deceived... **STEAL.**

Jesus says, **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft . . ."** Matthew 15:19 (ESV) **Where does stealing come from?** It comes from the heart—a heart that is corrupt with desires born out of deceit.

That is the **first** thing to say about **stealing** and the Christian. It is part of the **old corrupt nature**... and it should be *stripped off* and thrown away.

## 2. Stealing Can Be Forgiven

Second, **stealing** can be **forgiven**. As **verse 28** says, **"Let the thief [literally: him who steals] no longer steal."** Here is a person who has been a **thief**... a person who used to **steal** all the time—a person who *ripped off* a hundred purses from cars... a person who has taken a few nice *towels* and *bath robes* every time she checks out of a hotel... a self-employed person who has never reported *honorariums* or *trade agreements* on his tax returns.



And Paul says there is hope for this **thief**. *He can be forgiven*. He can be changed and stop stealing... and have a new future in righteousness and holiness. **And if he thinks it is too late... what shall we say to him?**

We shall remind him of **Luke 23:43** where the **life-long thief** in the hour of his death cried out, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power." And Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

**So great is the power of the cross to forgive sinners!!!**

That is the **second** thing we can say about **stealing**. *It can be forgiven*. It is not too late for any who is willing to repent and turn to Christ for cleansing... and for power to steal no more.

### **3. Stealing Must Be Overcome by Faith**

Third, **stealing** must be overcome by **faith**. Any other way of overcoming stealing may be a short-term benefit to society and keep a man out of jail. *But it won't keep him out of hell...* and therefore, on the scale of eternity; is not very much help... and not very deep love.

If the **thief's** obedience is to be evangelical obedience—the internal obedience of the "**saved**" and not the external obedience of the "**lost**"... then the spirit of his mind has to be renewed by the application of evangelical doctrine (**truth**)... in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Verse 24** says that the **new self** that no longer **steals** is the creation of God in righteousness and holiness... and that the instrument of his creation is the **truth**. As it says in **John 8:32**, "**You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free!**"

*What truth does God use to free the thief from the compulsion to steal?* There are dozens of answers in Scripture. For example, **Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you."** So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be fear; what can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5-6 (ESV)

What this teaches is that the craving for things which drive us to **steal**... is owing to unbelief in the promises of God. The Lord who owns all the cattle on a thousand hills... who has the wisdom to design the DNA and the Milky Way... who rules the world down to the feeding of little birds... and who did not spare

his own Son—that 'Lord of lords' and 'King of kings' has promised His people, "***I will never leave you nor forsake you!***"

I ask you.... ***Can you believe this and yet steal just to add a little to your security or your pleasure?*** Our greatest security and pleasure comes from the truth of knowing "***In HIS presence is fullness of joy, and at HIS right hand are pleasures for evermore***" Psalm 16:11 (RSV)

That is the **third** thing we can say about **stealing**: *it must be overcome BY FAITH*. That is the **first** command of our text, "***Don't steal!... Live by faith!... Believe in the promises of God!***"

I want to move-on to the **third** command... but let me make a brief comment about the **second** in passing. The **second** command of **verse 28** is, "***... but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands what is good.***"

### **Two simple observations:**

One is that God has ordained work... **not stealing**... as the way of getting what we need. **Work is not a curse**. Adam was put in the garden to tend it before the fall. Boredom and frustration and futility in work—these are the curse of our fallen age. But work itself is a good gift of God. **How could it be otherwise since God is the greatest worker of all... and we are created in his image?**

The other observation from this **second** command in **verse 28**... is that the work we do for a living should be the doing of something **good**. The ESV is not quite accurate here. Literally it says, "***Let him [i.e., the former thief] labor, doing honest work with his own hands the good.***" (Eph. 4: 28)

God is not *indifferent* to what you do for a living... *You belong to him first*. He is your **main boss** and you will give an account to him of how you spent your working life. ***So do an honest days work... as unto the Lord!!!***

The text says, instead of **stealing**... **work**; but it doesn't just say **work**... as though any and all **work** is acceptable for the Christian. It says, "***Perform the good.***" So test your vocation! *Is it the performing of what is good?*

But now as we close by looking at the **third** command in the text... notice that a *shift of focus* takes place. At first Paul seems to be focused on what we do—***don't steal, work!*** But in this last part of the verse his focus turns to the  **motive**  for **working**... and not **stealing**.



He says, the goal and purpose that God has for his people is not reached when they simply quit **stealing**. And the goal and purpose that God has for his people is not reached when they labor hard with their hands... even doing good in order to possess the money they earn.

But he says finally... that the goal of God for His people, in all their gainful employment... is reached when they work in order to have; **so that they can give to those in need**. Again... remember we are "**Blessed to be a blessing!**"

This is utterly revolutionary. **Do you see what it does?** It takes the whole of your life... including your secular job, and turns it into a work of grace. Paul wants you to think of your secular job as means... to display God's grace.

No more stealing in the service of illegal greed... No more working in the service of legal greed. But now everything is in the service of grace—**not greed**. Don't steal to have... Don't work to have... But work to have in order to give.

**Why?** Because this is what it means to walk by faith. The very essence of faith is the delight of the soul in the experience and display of **God's grace**. And so faith is the power (**by grace**)... to be content with what we have. And faith is also the power (**by grace**)... to be DISCONTENT with what others DON'T have.

And so faith doesn't have to **steal** or **hoard** in order to be happy. But it does have to **give** and **share** in order to be happy as Jesus said, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**" (Acts 20:35)

The inflow of God's **grace** satisfies the heart of faith... and the overflow of God's **grace** satisfies the needs of others. And faith is utterly addicted to these experiences... and displays of the grace of God.

And so we return to where we began... where Paul builds a theological image (**picture**) for all evangelical obedience seen in **verses 22–24**. What are the purposes of God in your life?... What is the work of God in your life?... As **verse 24** says, "Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God." (Eph. 4:24)

**There it is!** We are created by God to be the **likeness and the image of God** in the world. When people see your life and study why you work... **do they see a display of the grace of God?**

**They will...** if you don't steal in order to have... and don't work in order to have... but work in order to have... **so that you can give.**

Put on the **new nature**... and make your whole life a *display* of the *power of grace*. ***Don't live to get... live to give!*** Amen.

**Close in prayer...**

Right now we have time to respond to the Lord in worship... communion... and prayer. **Carpets, Communion Elements, Prayer Team.**