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## **Gospel Informed Labor**

### **Ephesians 4:28**

**PowerPoint Presentation: None**

**Keywords: Stealing, Theft, Honesty, Employment, Work, Labor, Generous, Needs**

**SermonAudio blurb:**

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. We are commanded by our Lord to not conduct ourselves in the same manner as those who do not love nor believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord.
  - 1. More than that, our actions and inactions are to flow from a different wellspring, a different foundation, or to say it one other way, from a different reality.
  - 2. This is why Paul talked of us having laid aside the lie and to speak truth to one another.
  - 3. We are not to buy into the values and methods of this age. Methods that shrug at lies and ungodly anger or stealing. Rather we are to portray a new life with new values.
- B. This fact is so simple but it has a way of creating frustration as well as revealing painful truths to us.
  - 1. The frustration comes in those who made a vague commitment to Jesus Christ at some point but never really understood what the call to follow Him meant.
    - a. Though there was a mental agreement there was no real heart change. What the bible would call a new heart—which only comes through the work of the Holy Spirit.
    - b. What happens then is that a person tries to live in this new way but finds two things to be consistently true:
      - (1) First, they discover that there is not real desire to do so.
      - (2) Second, no matter how much they try, they really don't change. They may exchange one god for a different one but there is no real love for the Lord.

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- (3) So they exhaust themselves trying different methods to live and change in accordance to the bible, but to no avail.
  2. The aspect of revealing painful truths comes in the form of giving the first point serious thought.
    - a. There comes a point for many as they are exposed to the fulness of the Scripture that they may not truly be a Christian.
    - b. This is something I have had to do as a pastor on more than one occasion and it is seldom received well.
    - c. But it is something that must be honestly considered when a person professes faith and hope in Jesus Christ but gives every appearance to not following or obeying His commands.
  3. Therefore, as we go through these various commands and directions for those who belong to Jesus allow them to do a work in your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to open up your eyes to what is your true hope.
- C. Read vs 28.
  1. We have learned that when we came to Christ we laid aside the lies of this age and secondly that though there is a time to be angry, it is not to be done sinfully and it is to occur only when we can resolve that anger.
  2. Today we look at the massive realm of labor, employment and work.
  3. How does believing the gospel change how we view work and money?
- D. Paul tells us that instead of theft as being the way to get ahead or simply to live, we are to instead work hard for the purpose of helping those in genuine need. In other words, we are to work so that we can give.

## **II. We are to work so that we can give (28).**

- A. Here we have the familiar "put of" and "put on" imagery at work.
  1. The put off is to no longer steal.
  2. The put on is to labor/work so that you can give to those in need.
  3. Do not miss the second part of the "put on" or you will fall short. It is not enough to stop stealing, or to simply begin to work.
    - a. It is only half way.
    - b. Here we begin to see the way that the gospel begins to separate those who are just hard workers to those who live for a different king and a different age

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- B. Theft of any kind is not consistent with the claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ (28a).
  - 1. Literally "the stealing one no longer steals."
  - 2. A question of what kind of stealing is in view is often raised but that is not important. It is a broad enough term to refer to any type of theft. And it is there that things become challenging for all who hear.
  - 3. Various ways we can steal:
    - a. Children from parents.
    - b. Employees from employers.
      - (1) giving extra to friends and family.
      - (2) skimming the till.
      - (3) Eating what is not their's to eat.
      - (4) Taking of equipment without permission.
      - (5) Not working when you are on the clock.
    - c. Employers from employees.
      - (1) Not properly paying what is owed.
      - (2) Expecting work for free.
      - (3) Taking credit for what is not your work.
    - d. In society, from shoplifting to refusal to pay taxes that are owed.
    - e. You can steal praise that should be for another.
  - 4. The source of theft: The heart.
    - a. So often the thief rationalizes his actions and makes the reason for the theft as something outside himself. But the bible rejects this.
    - b. Jesus makes it abundantly clear: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Matthew 15:19).
    - c. James, in the earliest book written in the New Testament gives us two points that coincide with our Lord's words: James 1:13-15; 4:1-3 and he defines the real problem in vs 4.
  - 5. Inconsistent with following Christ.

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- a. The driving motive is usually a love of money that manifests itself in various ways.
  - (1) It can be borne out of envy, wanting what you don't have. Or jealousy, wanting to prevent someone from having what you possess.
  - (2) Comes from a vengeful spirit. Often heard people say they stole from a store or a company because they felt cheated by them. "My boss cheated me so I took what was mine!"
  - (3) Comes from a heart of discontentment.
  - (4) Comes from a heart of pride. You don't want to do something humbling so instead you revert to thievery to achieve your goals.
- b. It simply denies the gospel we claim to believe.
  - (1) Where Jesus did not regard equality with God the Father something to be grasped.
  - (2) Where Jesus refused to rob the glory from His Father when Satan tempted Him to short-circuit what the Father called Him to be and do.
  - (3) Where we see in the gospel the model of laying aside self and our rights to take on the weakness and failings of others.
  - (4) Where we see the good of others over ourselves.
  - (5) When calling people to come, believe in and follow Jesus we are not speaking in the abstract. We are speaking in how we think AND live. We are calling them to obey all that He commands.
  - (6) And when we fail to do that we are not being faithful to the gospel. When we diminish the claims that the gospel puts on those who say they believe it we do no one a favor.
6. Stealing in itself is contrary to the gospel. Being known as a thief is utterly contrary to the idea of being a Christian.
  - a. So we tell a person to stop stealing if they are going to call themselves a Christian? Yes and no.
  - b. It is not enough to simply stop stealing. Many will not steal for many different reasons:

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- (1) Fear of getting caught.
  - (2) Pride because they don't want to be "that" person.
  - (3) Self-righteous, seeing themselves as better than a common thief.
7. For a Christian, living in a holy rebellion against this age and its multitude of lies, it is insufficient to simply not steal.
- C. As children of the Most High we are called to value hard work (28b).
1. Instead of theft we are to be a people who are known for hard work.
    - a. "Labor" is an interesting word because it is not simply that we are to get a job. It is that we are to work to the point of weariness.
    - b. The term actually means "to be tired, grow weary."
  2. Paul is not speaking about just getting a job, any job and vaguely working; rather, he is saying we need to be a people who are known for hard work, faithful work, and honest work.
    - a. This tells me that there is nothing wrong when you come home from a day of work and you are just tired beyond words. That is a sign you have done well.
    - b. In addition it is not merely limiting itself to those who have a job that pays money. It includes those who serve in other capacities, the most obvious is a mother who works hard in the care of the home and the children.
  3. This also indicates that stealing is something we can and must repent of.
    - a. You should not just give up and throw yourself into a life of sin if you have found yourself in this sin of thievery. You need to repent of it.
    - b. But in the gospel there is also forgiveness.
    - c. 1 Corinthians 6:5-12.
  4. A basic theology of work:
    - a. God works.
      - (1) The bible is replete with references of the works of God.
        - (a) The bible begins with the work of God in the creation of all that exists.

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- (b) We see the bible speaking of God sustaining this creation.
- (2) God sent Jesus to do His works.
  - (a) In John 9 Jesus says that He must do the works of His Father.
  - (b) In John 5 he says that His Father is working and so is He.
- (3) God created us to work.
  - (a) Genesis 2:15 God made mankind to cultivate and to care for creation.
  - (b) The garden of Eden was not merely an endless vacation but it was the center for humanity to begin to work.
  - (c) This also gives dignity to work. There is nothing to be ashamed of if you work. And work is not something to be avoided.
  - (d) It should cause one to consider what retirement is supposed to look like. Do we merely work so that as soon as possible we can stop working?
- (4) When sin entered into creation through Adam's rebellion work became "toil."
  - (a) There is a word change from 2:15 to 3:17-19. What was desirable and joyful now became hard and burdensome.
  - (b) A Christian must always remember this. There is true worship and true goodness is work. And when it is hard and unrewarding it is designed to remember that this age is broken, fallen and will not remain forever.
  - (c) We look to the day when all things become new and when work shall again be as the Lord designed.
- (5) To reject work or to resist work is contrary to God's design and never to be applauded. This person is described in the book of Proverbs as a sluggard.

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- (a) He is known by his love of sleep — "How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 'A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest '—And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, And your need like an armed man." (Proverbs 6:9-11)
  - (b) He wastes his life—"As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. (Proverbs 26:14-15)
  - (c) His life is painful, worse yet it makes life painful for those who depend upon him— "The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns, But the path of the upright is a highway." (Proverbs 15:19)
  - (d) He is usually very proud—"The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer." (Proverbs 26:16)
- (6) Christians are expected to work and not be in any need before this world (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).
- (a) Note the three-fold command in vs 11.
  - (b) Note the purpose in vs 12.
- (7) No sympathy is to be given to a professing Christian who will not provide for himself (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).
- (a) Note the "for" in vs 10.
  - (b) vs 11 defines what is meant by "not work" in vs 10. Undisciplined and it is connected back to vs 7 with Paul's model for them.
  - (c) Also we learn that not working helps create an environment of busybodiness. (For those learning Greek note the play on the words, "work" and "busybodiness."
5. There is a temptation to then see all who are not working in this light but that would be a grievous error. In our passage Paul makes it clear what we are to be doing through our work is meeting genuine needs of others.

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- D. As redeemed people who do not belong to this age but to the one to come, we are to view our work as a means of meeting needs rather than filling up our desires (28c).
1. It is not proper for any Christian to steal.
  2. It is not sufficient for any Christian to simply labor, even if they work hard.
  3. For the Christian the call is to work with a purpose.
    - a. We are to work in such a manner as to have something to share.
    - b. Here we get to the heart of what Christians should be known for, a generous, loving spirit.
    - c. This is very contrary to how we often view the purpose for working in America. We labor so that we might expand what we own and enjoy.
    - d. And while it is not inherently wrong to enjoy the fruit of labor, it cannot be merely for that purpose.
  4. I want you to notice the term "need" at the end of the verse for it is important to note.
    - a. It describes something that we don't see often in our country, genuine need.
    - b. In our time of entitlement this is often misunderstood.
      - (1) Example, to qualify for WIC, you must make 44,123 per year or less with four in the household.
      - (2) If you make 47,712 or less per year with four in the household you qualify also for the Quest card, which is what used to be known as food stamps.
      - (3) So if we use the government to define what is a need then we operate on a very different standard.
    - c. "Need" here speaks not to desire but to what is actually lacking.
      - (1) You lack food.
      - (2) You lack clothing.
      - (3) You lack housing.
      - (4) In other words, it is a real need that the person simply is unable to fill on their own.



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(5) This is not speaking of a person who doesn't feel like working two or three jobs to fill the need.

d. Example at GCC for Deacon's Fund.

### III. Conclusion.

- A. The powers of this age will whisper to us that we are victims. That we need more. That others don't deserve what they have and that we deserve our part.
- B. As Christians we should be a people known for hard, faithful and diligent work. We should be people who are tired at the end of the day, tired from honest work.
- C. As Christians we should be a people who actively seek to fill up what is lacking in the lives of fellow believers while allowing for no laziness and foolishness to exist in our midst. This requires discernment and courage.
- D. As Christians we should be a people eager to show grace and mercy to those outside the Church as we seek to help them in their times of need. Where out of sheer grace we become a blessing to them.
- E. And in all of this we work and give and share in the name of the Lord so that we might display the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

IV. We are to speak so as to build up (29-30).

V. We are to express kind-hearted forgiveness (31-32).

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### Community Group Questions

- **What were the challenges for you in this sermon? Why?**
- **Think through what we often see as "needs" in our nation versus what is really a need. Is it a need if you are about to lose your home? Why or why not? What if you can't make the car payments?**
- **Each CG has a care ministry person. How does this sermon affect what are actual needs that the care ministry person should bring before the group to fill? Do you have any sense of direction as to what your group might agree to do or not to do? Try to work this out as a group in light of the sermon. Think about providing meals or helping with groceries or even house repairs. This should be both challenging and enlightening as you discuss it out.**