

## The Church, God's Plan for This Age: Labor As An Expression of Your New Identity in Christ

Ephesians 4:28

September 27, 2020

We learned last week that Christians express their new identity in Christ by being truth-tellers, who do not give in to uncontrolled anger in their interactions with one another. In verse 28 Paul doubles down on another aspect of the integrity that our new identity demands.

1. Stop Stealing: "Let him that stole, steal no more" – theft destroys the unity and Christlikeness of the body of Christ.
  - a. Stealing violates the principles of personal property rights found in Scripture.
    - i. Psalm 24:24 "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein."
    - ii. We are stewards of what God has created and entrusted to us (Genesis 1:26-28).
    - iii. Exodus 20:15 "Thou shalt not steal"
    - iv. Exodus 20:17 "Thou shalt not covet"
  - b. Stealing identifies us with the old self, who is made after the image of the devil, the great usurper.
    - i. The devil sought to take the very throne of God (Isaiah 14:13-14).
    - ii. Believers who steal do so out of a sense of entitlement.
    - iii. Believers who steal forget that they deserve God's judgment, and not His mercy.
    - iv. Believers who steal refuse to understand all that they have in Christ.
  - c. How do Christians Steal?
    - i. Christians steal when they refuse recognize God's ownership with the tithes & offerings – "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" Micah 3:8).
    - ii. Christians steal when they cheat on their taxes – "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).
    - iii. Christians steal when they violate the personal property rights of other individuals or institutions.
2. Replace Theft with Profitable Labor: "But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good" – the new man, created in the image of God, reflects God most accurately when employed in industry.
  - a. The antidote to theft is hard work.
    - i. "Labour" has the idea of laboring to the point of weariness or exhaustion.
    - ii. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).
    - iii. Work is not a curse; it's an expression of being made in God's image (Genesis 1).
    - iv. Work is about glorifying God – "do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).
    - v. Work is a critical piece of discovering how God made you and how you fit in society and the church.
  - b. The antidote to theft is discovering your gifts and then employing those gifts in producing goods and services for the benefit of society.
    - i. Work is about becoming more Christlike by serving the needs of others (Philippians 2:4-8).
    - ii. As creators, we create goods and services in which both the producer and the consumer are enriched.
    - iii. "The major reason for setting a goal is for what it makes of you to accomplish it." – Jim Rhon
  - c. Application:
    - i. Hard work is first about becoming virtuous.
    - ii. Hard work is one of the blessings of life because it matures us, whereas theft traps us in a downward spiral of self-centered immaturity and entitlement.
3. The Purpose of Our Labor: "That he may have to give to him that needeth" – the greatest motivation for hard work is generosity.
  - a. The greatest blessings in this life are found in becoming, producing, and serving rather than in taking – "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the works of the Lord Jesus, how he said, **It is more blessed to give than to receive**" (Acts 20:35).
  - b. Our labor puts us in a place of responsibility to minister – "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8).
    - i. Responsibility to minister to our own needs – "if any provide not for his own..."

- ii. Responsibility to minister to our family's needs – "specially for those of his own house..."
- iii. Responsibility to minister to our church family's needs (1 Timothy 5:3-16).

Conclusion:

1. Are you guilty of stealing from God, institutions, or individuals?
2. Have you developed a sense of entitlement where you should be focusing on gratitude?
3. Have you robbed yourself and others by viewing work as a curse rather than one of God's greatest blessings?
4. Are you actively seeking to discover how God has gifted you?
5. If you know your gifts, how are you stewarding them to care for yourself, your family, and your church.

4. Replace Stealing with Hard Work (28).

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  - ii. Stealing identifies us with the old self, who is made after the image of the devil, the great usurper.
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    - 4. Believers who steal refuse to understand all that they have in Christ.
- b. "But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good"
  - i. The new man, created in the image of God, is most like God when employed in industry.
  - ii. "Labour" has the idea of laboring to the point of weariness or exhaustion.
  - iii. The antidote to theft is hard work.
  - iv. The antidote to theft is discovering your gifts and then employing those gifts in producing goods and services for the benefit of society.
- c. "That he may have to give to him that needeth" – the greatest motivation for hard work is generosity.
  - i. The greatest blessings in this life are found in becoming rather than in taking.
  - ii. Acts 20:35 "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the works of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."
- d.

5. Replace Filthy Talk with Edifying Talk (29-30).