

**A Series on Ephesians**  
**Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Change**  
“From Stealing to Giving”  
**(Ephesians 4:28)**  
**July 4, 2010**  
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**I. Introduction**

Good morning! Welcome to New City! Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!

We've been studying through Ephesians. We are in a middle of a series called Gospel Driven Change.

Let's read Ephesians 4:28:

<sup>28</sup> He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

We are going to look at (1) a movement in the life of a Christian: from stealing to working to sharing, a movement from life of doing injustice to a life of giving grace; and (2) where do we get the power to change like that.

**II. Stealing**

There are all sorts of ways we steal. Of course, we can steal stuff, shoplifting, theft, robbery, embezzlement. Or we can steal by dealing drugs. When you sell poison for money, you are stealing money. I've heard one of you tell me that when you were in the middle of your drug addiction, the decision you made every day was: is it going to be a felony or a misdemeanor? (Praise God for where He has brought us).

There are other ways to steal: cheating against the government on our taxes, on our application for SSI disability, using food stamp for something other than food.

There are cheating at our work with our timesheets. When we don't do what we are supposed to do at work, we are cheating the employer. When we don't pay fair wages, we are cheating our employees.

We can steal cable TV, pirate software, movies, music, and other intellectual property. Sometimes people think there are no victims to these kinds of stealing; not

true. We are stealing from the artists and the companies that created the intellectual property.

We can cheat in schools. Copying your friend's homework or copying your friend's answer in the test.

We also steal God's stuff. Everything we have is God's. We don't use them the way God told us use them. We embezzle God's money. I'll talk a little later about what God says about money.

Why do we steal?

At the heart of stealing is a desire to have something we want at the expense of someone else. It's a desire to have without the effort. And that desire is ultimately selfish. It's all about myself. It's about my comfort, my needs, my wants, my desires. We steal because we are selfish or we are addicted to selfish pleasures.

We also steal because we have been worshipping an idol in our lives. We have made something other than God the Lord of our lives. Our idols can be money and everything that it represents (power, comfort, acknowledgement, approval). Our idols can even be career or school success. Those are good things, but if we make them ultimate thing, the thing from which we get our identity and approval, we are tempted to take short cuts to get it—because our identity depends on it. We are tempted to cheat on tests. We are tempted to cheat on our timesheets. When I practiced law, we had to submit our billing statements every day. We billed in a 10<sup>th</sup> of an hour. We had to detail it in our timesheets. We were evaluated based on how many hours we worked, how efficiently we worked, etc. I wanted to succeed. There was so much temptation to manipulate the timesheets. I think if the more we make career success our idol, the more we will succumb to the temptation to cheat.

Or we steal because we don't trust God's provision for our lives. I believe that God provides us with what we need. He is there no matter what. I've recently heard something that a Vietnamese pastor who was pastoring an underground church said. Someone asked him if he was scare that he would be arrested. He said, if they arrest me and kill me, I'll get to see Jesus; if they torture me, I'll get to experience the suffering of Jesus; if they keep me in jail, I'll have a place to do ministry; if they release me, I'll have

a testimony. He said he is not scared. It is having faith that God will be there for us no matter what.

### **III. Working**

Instead of stealing, the God calls us to work, doing something useful with our hands. Work is doing something useful for others. We often have a negative understanding of work. We have to do it but won't it be sweet if we hit the jackpot and not have to work anymore? We often think: how can I work as little as possible and get as much as possible? But, Paul says we must work. In fact, the word he uses for work is hard labour, the kind of labor that tires you out at the end of the day and you get a good night sleep because you are tired out.

Sometimes, people look at the Genesis passage and say that work is cursed. And thus have a negative understand of work in our lives. The argument is that after the Fall, God cursed work --that when we labor and toil in the land and it will produce thorns and thistles. But, it is important to understand that Adam and Eve worked before the Fall as well. They were given the work of taking care of God's creation. Our sins cursed the productivity of our work, but it didn't curse work itself. Work is something that we are ALL called to do, to make ourselves useful to others. The bible dignifies work. Our goal is not to be so rich that we don't have to work. You don't retire from work, you just change the type of work you do. You change the tire—retire. You make yourself useful to others in a different way. I love the way Bill William takes that to heart. He is one of the oldest guys here but he goes to Mexico regularly to help paint and build houses for the needy.

Another mistake we make about work is that we think dualistically about work. We divide our world between the secular and the sacred. Our work life falls into the secular and our church life falls into the sacred. That's not biblical! Everything is sacred. We are called to live every moment of our lives for God. That includes our work life. It's not just about creating opportunity to share the gospel with people at work. It is the work itself: doing something useful for others, society, for kids, for economy, for culture through arts, for news, for construction. All of these things are useful for others. We are called to work.

Work is sacred. What you do does not have to be “Christian” to be sacred. What you do to add value to society is an important part of our calling as Christians. I don’t believe everyone is called to give up their profession and go into full-time ministry. I decided to go from a lawyer to a pastor because I believed God called me into this ministry. It’s not that I believe that being a lawyer is not sacred and being a pastor is sacred. I have to admit that I may have made it less sacred by the way I practiced but the profession itself is honorable because for the most part, it is a useful profession.

I think when you are trying to figure out which job to take or which career to go into, I think one of the things you should take into consideration is how useful the job or the career is to the society in general. I think the greater the job, the greater the capacity to reduce unnecessary suffering in this world. If your job is bringing useless suffering to people, you need think through whether this is something you should be doing.

Sometimes, you are called to go into a very difficult arena where everyone is cheating or lying or lazy, and do the job with integrity, truth, and diligence. We don’t do it just to be a testimony as a Christian, we do it because we are called to work as to the Lord. I think we should be discerning how we can use our work to bring greater glory to God.

I think we need to honor those who bring beauty through art, media, and culture. I think we need to honor business people who bring products that help people. I think we need honor the moms who take care of their kids—that’s really hard work! Often times, I come to work to rest because taking care of kids is hard work! Let’s honor the teachers, construction workers, non-profit workers, doctors and lawyers, etc.

I know for many of you who are unemployed, you want to work, but you just can’t find a job. It’s a very difficult time. I think your call now is to be diligent and looking for a job. Sometimes, we have to change our focus or be willing to change our profession and seek further training. Sometimes, we need to get creative. Keep knocking on doors and I believe God will open a door. Don’t give up. Even during the job search, get up in the morning, take a shower, get out of the house and make yourself useful to others. Maybe it is to your friends. Maybe it is volunteering somewhere. Be faithful and diligent even in your unemployment.

It is important that your work does not define your identity, but as a child of God (the identity that the gospel gives you), you are called to make yourself useful to others.

Another benefit of work is that you get paid. You get money. That's a good thing. It is not an unchristian thing to evaluate a job by how much they pay you. I don't think that should be the only criterion, but it's okay to want to make a lot of money from a job. It's okay to want to be successful in your career. It's okay, as long as you don't make the job, the career, the money something that gives you life and ultimate identity. These are good things, but when you make them your source of life, instead of Jesus, they will become your idols and eat you up.

## **V. Sharing**

Today's verse said to work "so that we may have something to share with those in need." Isn't it amazing that it starts out with people who have been stealing and they are changed to people who give to those in need? Christianity is not about the ethics of justice (which would be don't steal anymore but work for living, period), but it is the ethics of grace (which is why it leads to sharing with those in need). I've emphasized over and over again that God is calling us to live in the ethics of grace, not just fairness. That's why he told us to forgive (remember, forgive means give grace literally in Greek).

Here're a few things that the gospel teaches about money.

First, it says everything is God's. Jesus taught us many stories in which God is the owner and we are the tenant (in the parable to the tenants who abused the landowner), we are the manager (in the parable of the shrewd manager), servants who are given talents (in the parable of the talents). In all of these teachings and more, Jesus taught us that everything we have is God's. We are merely managers, stewards, of God's things. The time that we have is God's. The talents and skills and educations. All of these things are God's. We are called to be good managers of them. We are called to be trustee of God's stuff. We are not called to use it for ourselves. We are called to use it in accordance to his will.

And God has told us how He wants us to use His money:

(1) For the work of the church and the kingdom of God. Jesus, for example (in Luke 21:3), publically honored the widow who gave a couple of pennies out of her

poverty for the work of the house of God. The biblical guide for this is called the tithe, meaning we give a tenth of our income to the work of ministry. I think tithe is a guideline. For some of you, God is calling you to give more than a tenth. I don't think you should take the tithe legalistically, however. If you have thought about whether you should pay a tenth of gross or net, you are thinking legalistically. This is a guideline, not law. I believe that the laws regarding tithe has been superseded by the gospel ethics. I believe that tithe is based on the ethics of justice; but God is calling us to now to live by the ethics of grace, giving God more than what the law demanded. Remember, living by the ethics of grace does not mean you ignore fairness laws. Just because we live by the ethics that calls us to love even our enemies does not mean we are not under the law which says, don't murder or love your neighbors. Of course, we should do that. The ethics of grace ups our commitment to God. I think if we just look at the OT, we get a few wrong ideas: that I keep 90% and I give God 10%. According to Jesus, everything is God's and we need to use all of His money according to His wishes. We also get this idea that if we give money to God, God promises to bless us materially. That also is in keeping with the OT understanding that 90% is mine and 10% is God's. That's not what Jesus taught. Jesus is the greater revelation of the will of God.

(2) He also told us to use His money to help the poor, especially those who can't help themselves like widows and orphans. That's all over the OT and NT. We are called to share with people. If we see people in need, particularly in our church family, we are called to dig into our pockets and help.

Now, I know that sometimes this can be abused. What do we do with panhandlers. I think you have to use your judgment and discernment, asking God to give you wisdom but I think we are called to give responsibly. We need to give in a way that really helps people, instead of perpetuating their addiction, for example. You know as well as I do that when you are addicted, you will do anything to get more. So, I typically don't think it is a good idea to give money to panhandlers. I think it is a better idea to take the time to talk to them, take them to where they need to go, buy them something. There is a guy who used to come to our church, but he relapsed and is on the streets. I see him regularly. He always asks me for money. I always say no, but I say if you need something, I will get it for you. Often times, he just walks away if I offer to get it for

him. I think it is also more responsible to give to the mission who are doing a great job serving them with basic needs like food and shelter. I am not sure how much it helps to give cash (except to sooth your conscience). This is tough love, but I believe this is the gospel way. We are not called to just give out of guilt. We called to do something for them.

It doesn't matter if you are poor yourself. I find the poor more generous to the poor. I don't think it is the amount of money, I think it is the proportional. When Jesus applauded the widow who have a couple of pennies over the rich who gave a lot because Jesus said she gave everything she had. It was not how much, but how much in relation to how much you have. God is calling you to give proportionally.

Also, (3) God calls you to use your money to support your family. In Timothy 5:8, Paul says: **“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”** There are a few passages like this. You are called to provide for your spouse, kids, parents. I think this means you have to take child support order seriously. Even if you don't have a court order, you have to do everything possible to support your child. If you parents are in need, you need to support them. Maybe you can't do everything, but you need to do something. That's the biblical teaching. It is never about whether they deserve it or not. It is always about doing something more than they deserve. That's the gospel way.

You notice that shift. Before you were a bad steward. You thought your stuff was yours and other people's stuff was yours if you can get your hands on them. But, now the gospel has taught you to see all of yours stuff as God's and using His things to share with those in need, whether or not they deserve it. That is the movement from a life of injustice to justice to grace.

## **V. Where do we get the power to live like this?**

The gospel gives us the power. It gives us the desire of our heart. It gives us a new life, new righteousness, new vitality. It gave us ultimate pleasure in God. It filled our needs.

God came down in the person of Jesus to die for us on the cross in order to share the riches of His glory with us. He suffered to give us life and glory. He did it even

thought we didn't deserve it. His grace moves us to be graceful people. The gospel drives the change.

The gospel also gives us the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There is power for living through the Spirit. When you engage in this relationship with God through the Spirit, there is power because you know how good it is.